5-14-2010

Closet Space: Investigating Gay Identity through Advertising in Gay Media

Jonathan A. Hanna

University of South Florida

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd

Part of the American Studies Commons

Scholar Commons Citation

http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/3667

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.
Closet Space: Investigating Gay Identity through Advertising in Gay Media

by

Jonathan A. Hanna

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Humanities and Cultural Studies College of Arts and Sciences University of South Florida

Major Professor: Daniel Belgrad, Ph.D.
Elizabeth Bell, Ph.D.
Robert Snyder, Ph.D.

Date of Approval: May 14, 2010

Keywords: Homosexuality, Hegemony, Men, Victimhood, Race, Assimilation

Copyright © 2010, Jonathan A. Hanna
Table of Contents

List of Figures.................................................................ii
Abstract...............................................................................iii
Chapter 1: Introduction.......................................................1
Chapter 2: Gay Male Health and the Parable of Victimhood.............14
Chapter 3: Gay Men of Color and the Parable of Exoticism...............32
Chapter 4: Integration, Gay Men, and the Parable of Assimilation.......50
Conclusion............................................................................71
References Cited.....................................................................73
Bibliography..........................................................................75
About the Author.................................................................End Page
List of Figures

Figure 1: The Advocate, 1990………………………………………… ………… …………… … …………17
Figure 2: The Advocate, 1992………………………………………………… ………… …………… ……18
Figure 3: The Advocate, 1992……………………………………………………… ………… ……… ……19
Figure 4: The Advocate, 1995…………………………………………………………… ………… … ……20
Figure 5: The Advocate, 1998……………………………………………………………… … ………… …21
Figure 6: The Advocate, 1990………………………………………………………… ………… …… ……34
Figure 7: The Advocate, 1991…………………………………… ………… ……………………… ……35
Figure 8A: The Advocate, 1990…………………………………………………………… ………… ……36
Figure 8B: The Advocate, 1990……………………………………………………… ………… …… ……37
Figure 9: The Advocate, 1991……………………………………………………………… ………… …..38
Figure 10: The Advocate, 1995………………………………………………………… ………… … ……39
Figure 11: The Advocate, 1990…………………………………………… ………… ……………… ……53
Figure 12: The Advocate, 1991………………………………………………… ………… ………… ……54
Figure 13: The Advocate, 1995……………………………………………………… ………… …… ……55
Figure 14: The Advocate, 1998…………………………………………………………… … ………… …56
Figure 15: The Advocate, 1996…………………………………………………………… … ………… …57
Figure 16: The Advocate, 1998…………………………………………………………… … ………… …58
Figure 17: The Advocate, 1995……………………………………………………… ………… …… ……59
Figure 18: The Advocate, 1999…………………………………………………………… … ………… …60
Closet Space: Investigating Gay Identity through Advertising in Gay Media

Jonathan A. Hanna

Abstract

The objective of this research was to examine advertising in gay media publications, namely, The Advocate, in order to assess how advertising corresponds with gay identity formation. This study differed from previous inquiries in that the application of hegemony theory formed the basis of the project and was used as a tool to explicate the preponderance of certain images in gay media advertising and what they signify for gay men. Likewise, a phenomenological method of analysis was applied to the advertisements in order to render them more accessible as aesthetic and literary mediums. Classifying the advertisements according to their notional basis resulted in the partitioning of the ads into groups or “parables” of advertising, a method of classification which mimics historical categories recognized in American history and culture. The sum of the project emphasizes the hegemonic structures that characterize gay male images within a broader GLBT sociocultural framework.
Chapter 1

The emergence of a commercial market geared towards gays and lesbians appears to correlate with the rise in cultural visibility and political mobilization of the American gay community, collectively. Evidence of this burgeoning presence in gay marketing can be traced back to early gay fledgling publications geared towards the congregation and consolidation of a homophile network and homosexual sensibility. These early print media, beginning in the 1950s with publications such as the Los Angeles-based *One* in 1953, successfully established a sense of community through gay sexual exclusivity, that is, the treatment of gay men as disfranchised and ostracized sexual minorities within a heterosexual, heterosexist societal framework. These early publications also marked the first usage of advertising in gay print media, a trend that would continue commensurate with the increase in visibility of the gay community via cultural, political, and legal outlets.

The deployment of advertising and marketing in gay media publications for gay consumption is rife with implications and corollaries for sexual minorities. Recognizing and evaluating identity-based consumption is an important component in assessing the trajectory of minority communities within a larger, broader sociological and economic context that positions gays and lesbians in a particularly value-laden position as consumers operating in a capitalistic arrangement. The consumer activity of gays and
lesbians marks the confluence of business's interaction with these sexual minorities, with the result that sexual identities are manufactured, challenged, dismantled, and/or praised according to the causal interplay between identity and expenditure. Scrutinizing this interplay permits the understanding of why gays consume what they do, how marketing changes and positions itself in response to gays and lesbians, and how factors related to political consciousness and awareness, mobilization, socialization, and sociocultural power are contested and filtered through interaction with capitalism and consumption patterns.

In pursuit of such objectives, this study seeks to assess gay publications according to the presence of advertisements and the messages that these advertisements convey in contemporary gay media, namely, *The Advocate*, dating from the beginning of the 1990s to the end of the decade. While by no means exhaustive, the study will seek to establish a framework for understanding the fusion of commercial interests and minority participation in those interests, whether willfully or indeliberately. To that end, essential inquiries center on the repercussions of gay participation in capitalism: How do gay consumers establish and reify their own sexual identities via consumerism? Is there a correlation between assimilation into the heterosexist mainstream and consumerism, or resistance to it? Is gay consumerism segregated along lines of race, gender, and/or class? If marketing and advertising geared toward gays has changed over the course of history, how, and why? What constitutes a gay product?

This potentially novel research does not, of course, exist and subsist within its own ideological bubble. Scholars have pursued similar questions concerning the linkage between gay marketing and advertising, sociopolitical status, and identity formation. As several works exemplify, these issues, and the competing notions of precisely what it
means to be a gay consumer in a heterosexist, heteronormative world - both within and outside corporate culture - have been, and will continue to be, contested by scholars.

The gay and lesbian press is extremely significant precisely because the gay and lesbian market was negotiated and engineered largely through the issues and discourse that early publications created. According to Rodger Streitmatter, while publications such as One magazine initially eschewed advertising as it “is not and [had] no wish to be an erotic magazine... the editors began to bend this rule when the inside back cover carried a full-page ad. It promoted men’s satin undershorts studded with rhinestones and harem-style pajamas made of sheer nylon, both modeled by a handsome and physically well-developed man.”¹ According to the picture insert, the ad featured a white man, with a calm but masculine, confident posture. With the first advertisement, then, it seems that images of gay men are being manufactured by advertisers that comport, understandably, with the readership of these early gay publications, namely white men with mainstream appeal. Streitmatter goes on to state that, “[Gay] publications struggled to weigh their need for financial support against the complications involved in opening their pages to advertising.”² These complications involved mixing a serious, news-oriented tone with provocative images and consumerist enterprise. In this arrangement, the emergent, dominant group, orchestrated and executed by David B. Goodstein with The Advocate, was responsible for the establishment of gay cultural power within capitalism.

The relationship between news and advertising eventually reached a point of definitive merging with David B. Goodstein’s revamping of The Advocate, which


² Ibid., 50.
emerged as the leading gay publication in the 1970s. “With Goodstein’s generous
[financial] support, it probed the myriad dimensions of an emerging gay middle
class...he drew a clear profile of the reader he was targeting: ‘You are employed and a
useful, responsible citizen. You have an attractive body, nice clothes and an inviting
home.’ The “Advocate man” lived the good life – working out, spending several nights a
week at the bars, enriching his gay sensibility by reading literature and enjoying art.”³
Alexandra Chasin notes that, “The Advocate was the first so-called lifestyle magazine,
the first national glossy to strike this editorial attitude, [and] the first to garner
advertisements from mainstream corporate producers.”⁴

It is important to emphasize that scrutiny of The Advocate forms the basis of the
thesis project because of its longevity and its wide circulation, and also because it “has
consistently failed to achieve gender parity in its readership. The numbers have never
even been close; for most of its run, the readership of the Advocate has been at least 90
percent male.”⁵ What’s more, its readership has been, historically, mostly white,
affluent, and professional. This deduction is plausible when the historical development of
the publication is considered. Given its history as the premier gay-oriented publication,
and given this study’s focus on gay men, specifically, The Advocate serves as a prime
source for exploring the interactive process between advertising, consumption, and gay
identity that developed primarily during the 1990s. To position The Advocate as the
foremost gay publication, however, necessitates the exclusion of other prominent and
significant gay periodicals from this project. Notable gay-oriented publications such as

³ Ibid., 183.

⁴ Alexandra Chasin, Selling Out: The Gay and Lesbian Movement Goes to Market (New

⁵ Ibid.
Out, Genre, and other more regional publications that have emerged through the decades out of major industrial centers, are not insignificant as they pertain to this study; however, their inclusion would, of course, require a much broader focus than what this project aims to accomplish. In concentrating upon The Advocate, the project thus humbly leaves open and encourages the possibility of augmenting such research with a wider array of publications to approach a more nuanced and less restricted assessment of gay advertising in gay media.

The Advocate reflected the commodification of newly constructed and espoused gay male ethos. The Advocate further exemplified the alignment of gay men and capitalism, such that the fusion between being a gay consumer and maintaining a status quo of acceptable homosexuality – that is, an image of respectable “gayness” within the gay community itself – was engendered. It is the maintenance of this status quo – this sole image of upper-middle class comfort and financial stability, however contrived – which has permitted advertising and marketing directed at gays to flourish, and which has concomitantly begot a diverse range of critiques aimed at demystifying and understanding the nature of that marketing and advertisement, as well as the gay community’s response to it through expenditure.

Alexandra Chasin’s Selling Out: The Gay and Lesbian Movement Goes to Market addresses the confluence of political mobilization, assimilation, and socioeconomic status in gay society by filtering these ideas through the proliferation of advertising and marketing directed specifically at the gay community – what can be termed “niche marketing.”6 Chasin argues that gays’ divorcement from mainstream society, and their status as moral and sexual deviants, creates a pregnant imperative for their

6 Ibid., 102.
manipulation through consumer products and images. “Exclusion from mainstream
culture is cast in political terms, but the solution for it is offered in the
market...characteristically, consumer culture offers redress for the disenfranchisement of
those who have traditionally been cast as “other” on the basis of their identities.”

What is interesting is that Chasin constructs this relationship between gay
consumer and corporate (heterosexual) America as primarily unilateral, in favor of
business. The degree to which the gay community can be manipulated to work for or
against a certain propagated image is itself a product of the need to inevitably
commercialize one’s identity in relation to others. Gay consumerism thus renders gay
lives superficial within the context of sociopolitical movement and interaction. Therefore,
the consumption patterns of gays not only points to their interactive consciousness with
the heterosexual world, but also to their envelopment within their own stratified
sociosexual communities.

Being a gay consumer comes at a price of exclusion. Profit generates the
principle upon which the gay and lesbian identity is shaped for gay consumers.
Advertisers and marketers embracing a stereotypical, narrow subset of the population
have a greater likelihood of increasing their own revenue by pushing a specific image, or
ideal. This American gay ideal is conflated with whiteness, and consequently, gays’
interaction with society as consumers is predicated along racial and ethnic lines, as such
images “reflect, or reinforce, an ideology in which white and American mean the same
thing and stand, together, in a relation of domination to people of color and non-
Americans.”8 The concepts, images, and perspectives displayed in magazines and other
media, and referenced with respect to gay cultural sensibilities, are all products of that

7 Ibid., 39.
8 Ibid., 125.
ideology. However, this study will demonstrate that that ideology is not a phenomenon inflicted upon the gay masses; rather, it is an historical development rooted in the history of the gay rights movement in America, that has as its cornerstone the idea of Gramsci’s consent.

*Business, Not Politics*, authored by Katherine Sender, is less critical of the gay community and the ramifications of their approaches to consumption than Chasin, instead focusing the attention primarily upon the fiscal motives of the businesses themselves and how they establish greater divides within the GLBT “community.” She argues that “marketers are invested in producing and maintaining gay difference. The real dangers of marketers’ constructions of gayness lie in how they produce this difference, limiting what is imaginable as a recognizably gay citizen: usually white, male, affluent, discreetly sexual, apolitical, gay subjects.”

To this end, she focuses on how gays and lesbians in corporate America are able to use their status as sexual minorities to facilitate positive, albeit exclusive, images. The potential role and impact of the professional gay marketer is highlighted when she states that “gay marketers dignified their sexuality by making an asset of their gay subcultural capital, and politicized their marginality by vouching for the gains offered by increased gay and lesbian visibility and claimed (to a greater or lesser extent) an activist identity.”

However, in doing so, these gay marketers also help to confine the range of acceptable displays of gay lives and sexuality, which echoes Chasin’s criticisms regarding diversity issues.

Thus, while Chasin focuses particularly on the interaction between consumerism, capitalism, and gay identity, Sender is more interested in the way gay identity is

---


10 *Ibid.*, 76.
challenged and/or affirmed when gays are participants in the capitalist structure, which itself is decidedly heteronormative and heterosexist. “By adopting heterosexual, professional-class norms of respectability, affluent gay and lesbians can construct a habitus somewhat protected from the more vilified associations with (particularly male) homosexuality. The taste culture that gay marketing helps to produce allows privileged gays to unhitch along lines of sexual solidarity, and express class solidarity with heterosexual professionals instead.”

These works establish a narrative of gay consumerism – and its resultant influence on gay culture – that takes into account the convergence of gay media publications with outside investors and offers analysis based upon the ramifications of those alliances.

T.J. Jackson Lears’ seminal work deducing Antonio Gramsci’s writings, entitled *The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities*, serves as the basis for this theoretical undertaking, particularly the concept of “spontaneous consent, [a consent] given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is ‘historically’ caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.”

The emphasis upon the formation of hegemonic “historical blocs,” defined by Lears as “a group’s own particular world view, possessing both cultural and economic solidarity, that promotes analysis of social formation that cut across categories of ownership and nonownership and that are bound


by religious or other ideological ties as well as those of economic interest;” illustrates how ruling groups maintain their domination. What’s more, political, legal, and cultural aspirations that arise from participation in a capitalist system, and the resultant identities that they secure, are a very important component in the Gramscian model of cultural hegemony. Gramsci understands that “to achieve cultural hegemony, the leaders of a historical bloc must develop a world view that appeals to a wide range of other groups within the society, and they must be able to claim with at least some plausibility that their particular interests are those of society at large.” The historical bloc can therefore function as a way for the gay community to mimic the dominating powerful images of the heterosexual world, revealing a parallel between the two communities and the images they espouse.

Complementing Gramsci’s work regarding hegemony, the thesis will explore and apply Wolfgang Iser’s ideas concerning phenomenology in *The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach*. Iser’s ideas pertaining to the individual, organic experience of readers being summoned by advertising appears to correspond nicely with Gramsci’s ideas concerning hegemony. Iser notes that “whatever we have read sinks into our memory and is foreshortened. It may later be evoked again and set against a different background with the result that the reader is enabled to develop hitherto unforeseeable connections. The memory evoked, however, can never reassume its original shape, for

---


15 An essential component to the application of hegemony theory, as it pertains to concepts of domination, is the distinction between “open” and “closed” hegemonic cultures. According to Gramsci, subordinate group resistance in closed hegemonic societies is not a possibility, as the ideological and linguistic tools necessary for that resistance are not available. Subordinate groups in open societies, on the contrary, have the opportunity to resist by forming “counterhegemonic alternatives.” For the purposes of this study relating to gay media, an open hegemonic culture seems the most appropriate assumption.

this would mean that memory and perception were identical, which is manifestly not so."\textsuperscript{17} This pronouncement addresses the confluence of readership (consumption) and memory (identity). Memory, of course, plays a tremendous role in how identities are defined - it follows and underpins our initial perceptions and permits one to reflect on images they've encountered. This interaction between perception and memory directly connects to advertising and its effect on the consciousness of individuals, particularly as it concerns the shaping of identity. As Iser asserts, “The literary text activates our own facilities, enabling us to recreate the world it presents. The product of this creative activity is what we might call the virtual dimension of the text, which endows it with its reality. This virtual dimension is not the text itself, nor is it the imagination of the reader: it is the coming together of text and imagination.”\textsuperscript{18}

Iser’s treatment of the reading process therefore entails an appropriation of the reader’s mind and consciousness, and it thus provides a template for how consent may function under the Gramscian model of cultural hegemony. The reading process demands reflection, and so when an advertising text summons the reader to attention, an interplay is summoned and carried out. Iser underscores this in saying that “as we read, we oscillate to a greater or lesser degree between the building and the breaking of illusions. In a process of trial and error, we organize and reorganize the various data offered us by the text. They are the given factors, the fixed point on which we base our ‘interpretation,’ trying to fit them together in the way we think the author meant them to be fitted.”\textsuperscript{19} This relationship between the reader/viewer and the text in question thus


\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Ibid.}, 215.

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid.}, 222.
contributes to the former’s identity being shaped and inevitably restructured according to the images presented. This textual reading, coupled with Lears’ take on Gramsci’s cultural hegemony, provides the foundation for exploring gay advertising’s effects and implications, respectively.

Finally, historian Roland Marchand’s popular work, Advertising the American Dream, argues that historical categories of advertising are known as the “great parables.” This archetype of historical analysis provides a useful and efficient tool for grouping advertising according to ideological standards and goals that have been inculcated into the advertising and marketing strategy. Marchand reveals through the construction of four parables – First Impression, Democracy of Goods, Civilization Redeemed, and the Captivated Child – a way in which to group culturally significant, predominating themes that have materialized in advertising efforts. As Marchand notes, these parables “did not directly invite interpretation on more than one level or challenge the audience to accept a new moral logic, yet they did, in spite of their narrow, practical intent, incorporate some wider dimension of meaning…they reinforced (and even encouraged conversions to) a modern, secular ‘logic of living.’” Therefore, the parables serve to illuminate the constructions in advertising and provide a way of perceiving the advertising toward gays such that a phenomenological analysis can be rendered.

Taking the thesis aim into consideration, it appeared convincing that a more appropriate analysis of gay advertising could be rendered by rejection of Marchand’s historical examples, in favor of parables more intrinsic to gay media. Thus, using Marchand’s parables as a precedent of analysis, this project sought to construct original

---


21 Ibid., 208.
parables that focused on the predominant advertisement themes featured in *The Advocate*. The parables chosen, and their orientation toward Gramscian theories of cultural hegemony, reflect a chief concern with unearthing the representational boundaries of gay identity that came to be expressed in the publication. Each parable is an attempt to understand gay identity by addressing its representation through the confluence of commerce and media. As the parables demonstrate, they are often inevitably, and at times, it seems, strategically, intertwined.

The second chapter, concerning the “parable of victimhood,” explores the way in which gay advertising reflected ideological exchanges among gay sexuality, health, and commerce. It seeks to establish an explanation, summed in hegemony theory, about how and why changes that transpired in gay representation of anxiety and sexual health underwent a metamorphosis by connecting them to the social and cultural context that they developed in. Its ultimate aim is to provide a lens into the interwoven areas of advertising tragedy and gay identity, and to provide critical explanations of the implications of that advertising.

The third chapter explores the “parable of exoticism.” In this chapter, the thesis seeks to understand racial depictions in *The Advocate* based upon the sexual restraints imposed upon gay men of color. Since much scholarship on gay media has concerned depictions of gay minorities, and since this scholarship if often one-sided and characterized by very broad, polemic generalizations, this chapter hopes to understand the depictions of men of color in a more nuanced way. It is a justified parable due to the frequency with which the erotic advertisements of men of color appear in *The Advocate*.

Lastly, the fourth chapter investigates the “parable of assimilation.” As the title denotes, this parable discusses the trajectory of advertising as it relates to the
sociocultural ramifications of advertising mainstream, “heterosexual” products to gay consumers in a gay publication. It situates this pseudo-gay advertising within an analytical construct that takes into account both the product being marketed and the way in which the product is advertised to the gay male readership of *The Advocate*.
Chapter 2

What can Roland Marchand’s model of parables present to readers of *The Advocate* vis-à-vis the intersection of health, sexuality, and consumerism? How do the effects of espoused, representational gay culture, as depicted through the wide, predominant circulation of the publication, underscore an alignment of consumerism with rehabilitative services? What are the Gramscian implications for this kind of imagery, and how has it changed through the decade of the 1990s? Such queries grant a potentially tell-tale documentation of sociosexual issues and their evolution within gay media.

*The Advocate* took an unprecedented turn in the 1980s that signaled a response to the exponentially burgeoning epidemic known as the AIDS crisis. Hitherto, corporate advertisements geared towards the gay market were gaining more visibility in mainstream, heterosexual media outlets and beginning to flourish in gay-oriented publications. As Sender chronicles,

> The more open cultivation of the gay market would prove short-lived, however: the AIDS epidemic put gay-themed appeals back into the ‘deep freeze,’ [as] the years 1984 to 1989 were marked by the rapid withdrawal of many advertisers from gay media as they realized the extent of the health crisis. Publishers at the *Advocate* responded by filling the gap left by national advertisers with profitable classified and phone sex advertising, bringing back into the magazine those “questionable” ads that had only recently been moved to the pull-out section.22

M.V. Lee Badgett further explains that, “Sexual commodities had not disappeared entirely, but they had shifted toward those involving safer sex (such as phone sex), and less obvious sexual content, such as tours organized around erotic interests.”

Such an alteration in advertising space points to the departure from a developing cultural embrace of gay male sexuality, however incremental and based in a corporate profit motive. Advertising during this particular era was seemingly more a projection of the cultural tenor of America vis-à-vis gays as economically visible and viable members of the capitalistic establishment, which sought to accommodate them, rather than a manifestation of a genuine acceptance. Thus, to embrace the gay community through advertising was not necessarily synonymous with a positive embrace of their sexual orientation or the identity that corresponded with it. Indeed, in 1987 a new category of ads appeared in the gay press, those marketing AIDS-related services and products. “Although early AIDS-related ads were funded by charities and public health services, they prefigured a plethora of advertising that appeared in the late 1980s and 1990s to market drugs, health supplements, counseling, and financial programs to people with HIV and AIDS. The meaning of the ‘gay market’ was to take a tragic – but nevertheless still profitable – turn.”

It is within this context that gay advertising in The Advocate can be examined and interpreted. The appearance of ads that intersected and conjoined the boundaries of pride, sexuality, despair, victimhood, and rehabilitation were products of a marketing paradigm that took advantage of tragic (gay) consumer identity. These issues were manifest in the publication and point to the way which in identities can be manipulated.

---


and reified as a reflection of advertisement’s leverage in taking advantage of the sociopolitical situations that certain groups of people collectively experience. The presence of such advertisements thus buttresses what can be christened the “AIDS economy, a stage of economic history that is obviously not over yet. At least partly as a result of the AIDS epidemic, gay people and the gay market had become visible to the rest of America, including corporate America, in an unprecedented way.”\textsuperscript{25} The following ads, which appear and are rampant in the periodical from the early 1990s to the late 1990s, underscore an evolution in gay advertising that interacts with the sexual health crisis:

\textsuperscript{25} M.V. Lee Badgett, \textit{Money, Myths, and Change}, 113.
MAKE THE RIGHT MOVES

When chemical dependency makes you uncertain of your next move

Pride Institute is here to help. We are the nation's only chemical dependency treatment center exclusively for the lesbian, gay, and bisexual community. At Pride, you will find a healing, affirming environment. Our professional staff will encourage and support you as you make the right moves.

CALL: PRIDE INSTITUTE
1-800-547-7433
24 Hours A Day

Figure 1. The Advocate, 1990
Figure 2. *The Advocate*, 1992
“During the parade, I feel such pride. What happens when I’m alone?”

You can feel connected more than one day a year—you can march with pride every day of your life. It’s better than alcohol or other drugs. At TOGETHER, a recovery program specifically for Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual individuals, TOGETHER is gay-affirming, with an experienced staff familiar with the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual community. It offers a safe, supportive environment in a beautiful facility on Manhattan’s upper east side. At TOGETHER, you can get the comprehensive psychological and social services you may need to make positive changes in your life.

The next time you feel you’re alone, consider this: millions of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual individuals struggle with chemical dependence. Let’s get back our pride. TOGETHER.

TOGETHER TO FIND OUT MORE CALL 1-800-374-0374
A PROGRAM OF THE REGENT HOSPITAL

Figure 3. The Advocate, 1992
Figure 4. The Advocate, 1995
Figure 5. *The Advocate*, 1998
The advertisements from the early 90s contrast starkly with those from the mid and late 90s, a phenomenon that reflects a widely differing perception of approaches to sexual health and sexual pride, which, as the development of the ads underscore, are not necessarily synonymous. What the ads from the mid and late 90s immediately depict is a frank, masculine sensuality – indeed, the men appear healthy and half-naked – that establishes the dominant milieu for the reception of the ad itself. The visual depiction of something sensually stimulating accounts for the gay reader’s interest in the advertisement. As the ad’s placement in a gay publication for gay men emphasizes its relevance to their lives, it forms a direct connection to their state, and they are thus appropriated by its content. Iser’s phenomenological method teaches us that,

The manner in which the reader experiences the text will reflect his own disposition, and in this respect the literary text acts as a kind of mirror; but at the same time, the reality which this process helps to create is one that will be different from his own (since, normally, we tend to be bored by texts that present us with things we already know perfectly well ourselves). Thus we have the apparently paradoxical situation in which the reader is forced to reveal aspects of himself in order to experience a reality which is different from his own. The impact this reality makes on him will depend largely on the extent to which he himself actively provides the unwritten part of the text.26

One can extrapolate from Iser’s phenomenological basis that the images presented in these later advertisements point to the reader’s own identification with what is being presented. The gay male reader is called to identify with and embrace the image of provocative sexuality, along with its prescriptive message concerning the treatment of debilitating health issues that may have arisen from that sexuality. Whether or not the ad’s communication of sexuality, paired with a promise of convalescence from the pitfalls and perils of drug use, depression, and HIV/AIDS, resonates with the majority of

readers perusing *The Advocate*, it nonetheless offers the predominant view of how the glorification of the male figure’s sensuality corroborates and projects an erotic enthusiasm for the excesses of life. This erotic, enthusiastic portrayal of depression and dire health circumstances accounts for the *difference* that Iser refers to, when taking into account the dissimilarity between the early 90s advertisements and those from the mid/late 90s. Consumers of these newer ads, having been bombarded previously with images of moroseness and bewilderment in the early 90s advertisements, are now being summoned to construct a new reality and perspective with regard to their health predicaments. This is because the illustrations do not contrast with or contradict notions of gay sexual pride, freedom, and control, whereas the early 90s ads did. In lieu of the communication of contrasting or contradictory sentiments, the images are contextually defiant in their sexuality and appear to sexually glorify the state of victimhood, so the gay viewer is compelled to absorb and internalize the ad, shaping and customizing their own sense of sexual selfhood in relation to the situational atmosphere that the ad establishes. If, as Iser states, the text serves as a mirror to the individual engaging with it, the mid to late 90s ads instigate a change in the construction of the gay self pertaining to the handling of illness and addiction.

This change is quite manifest in the scrutiny of analogous ads at the beginning of the decade, those being the advertisements from the early 90s. While the marketing of the gay tragic self depicted at the middle and end of the decade highlights the gay male body and its sexual existence as powerful and capable, the early 90s ads depict the opposite. A sense of anonymity and obscurity characterizes these advertisements, connoting a sense of shame vis-à-vis the gay male sensibility. In the first ad, a chess board surrounded by tablets, empty, turned-over bottles, and chess pieces that
resemble syringes fills the space. In the second ad, a faucet dispenses a plethora of pills, and in the third ad, a man is depicted slouched over and miserable, smoking, drinking alcohol, and questioning his loneliness after the assumed revelry of a gay pride parade. Notably absent from these ads is the appearance of virile nakedness, a signpost of health and well-being that typified the later ads previously discussed. Indeed, the sole human cameo appears hunched over in despair and downtrodden. Yet, collectively, every one of the advertisements appears to convey the same message of assistance and care for those stricken with misfortune. The AIDS stigma associated with gays and homosexual activity that emerged during the 1980s and carried over into the early 1990s was palpably reflected in the advertising of mainstream gay publications such as The Advocate, which arguably explains the divergent representations of victimization manifested in the health advertisements of the decade. “On the one hand AIDS [in the 1980s] was interpreted in the context of a pathological model of homosexuality, and on the other in relation to visions of pre-modern medical catastrophe. Such framing repeats and reinforces the mass-media presentation of the epidemic as a ‘gay plague’, together with the implication that it is some kind of judgment.”27 The advertising of the early 90s hence reflected this heterosexist sociocultural framing of AIDS. Encountering these early ads phenomenologically also renders these ads laden with meaning, as gay readers that heretofore possessed pride and nonchalance about the expression of their sexuality would now feel threatened by the trappings of their own mortality caused by venereal affictions (e.g., HIV/AIDS). The new reality generated is one of concern and caution, rather than ecstasy and hedonism.

Iser’s concept of phenomenology has more profound implications for gay advertising and the changeable “parable of victimhood” contained in *The Advocate*. This highly evident parable not only comports with the individual interaction between text and reader/viewer emphasized and characterized by phenomenology. Interestingly, the new parable of victimhood that emerged in the mid-to-late 90s can also arguably be linked with Marchand’s own renowned parable in an historical advertising context. As Roland articulates,

> The parable of Civilization Redeemed usually varies from version to version only in the extent of its elaboration and in the particular form taken by Nature’s curse. In proclaiming the victories over threats to health and beauty that the products of civilization now made possible, these parables of Civilization Redeemed never sought to denigrate Nature...the point of the parable was that Civilization, which had brought down the curse of Nature upon itself, had still proved capable of discovering products that would enable Nature’s original and beneficent intentions to triumph. The parable of Civilization Redeemed taught that the advance of civilization, temporary afflictions notwithstanding, need never exact any real losses. Civilization had become its own redeemer.

The inferences of this mid-to-late 90s parable are manifold as they relate to Marchand’s concepts. The images displayed during this period reflect the appropriation of historical archetypes that have been recognized as intrinsic to the advertising world. In the particular context of *The Advocate* and its conspicuous projection of the parable of victimhood, “nature’s curse” can be construed to indicate the threat of terminal and ominous sexual disease, namely HIV/AIDS. Redemption from this affliction and all that it entails is made possible through medical advancements, reparative counseling, and mutual respect. The successful corollary of this redemptive process is a return to dominant sexuality and masculinity through health and physical prowess. Thus, the ads from latter 90s that depict half-naked men not only eroticize illness and despair through

---

distortion and render it pornographic, but also point to the product’s promise of relief for
the unfortunate sufferer through the visualization of physical health.

The portrayal of victimhood in advertising through virile affirmation of sexuality
highlights a sociocultural alignment with cultural mores that position men – regardless of
sexual orientation – as dominant (sexual) figures in society. *The Advocate* is thus
reflecting, through this parable of victimhood, a resonance with society’s expectations
for men, which is divergent from the ads of the early 90s. Connecting these
advertisements to men in a sociological sense, as Martin P. Levine argues,

> The norms of masculinity may impede the effectiveness of AIDS antibody testing. These rules compel men to shun stereotypical “feminine” concerns about health... “real” men do not worry about the dangers associated with smoking drinking, and stress – why should they worry about the risks associated with intravenous drug use and sex? These norms of masculinity also impede the effectiveness of counseling. During counseling, men are warned against spreading the virus. Such warnings, however, contradict the dictates of manliness. “Real” men score, and their sexuality is organized phallocentrically, so counseling, which would encourage men to deemphasize the penis and emphasize sexual responsibility, may fall on deaf ears.29

The mid and late 90s advertisements therefore depict men in a supremely dominant
position that highlights their bodies as vehicles of control and accentuates their sexual
power, concurrently suggesting that treatment of their futile and afflicted state is not
synonymous with emasculation and relegation to the confines of “femininity” through
abstinence and attention to mental and physical health.

Gramsci’s ideas prove useful, if not essential, in discussing the trajectory of gay
advertising as it relates to the parable of victimhood. The analysis relies upon
positioning *The Advocate* as a central medium through which a Gramscian model of

---

hegemony can be realized. In this particular context, *The Advocate* serves as a purveyor of the sociosexual dichotomies upon which a Gramscian analysis can be performed.

*The Advocate*, rather than being a constant, independent variable in the Gramscian framework, appears to respond to cultural developments and project them on to the reader via its courting of advertising, rather than actually establishing itself as an archetype of gay identity maintenance. That is to say, there appears to be no single, definitive stance upon which the publication, through advertising, seeks to address the parable of victimhood. Its advertising instead denotes an interplay between competing and shifting notions of gay consciousness that are in constant flux. Yet, *The Advocate*, as America’s oldest and (at the time) most widely circulated gay publication, is complicit in this intermixing and evolution of gay social developments, and its role as the premier gay periodical is especially important in crafting a hegemonic scrutiny of changes occurring within the gay community vis-à-vis heterosexual society. This is not to suggest that either the homosexual or heterosexual “community” is stalwartly monolithic in their orientation toward ideas concerning the lives of gays in relation to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, but rather to concentrate on the dominant values and views being expressed by both groups, insofar as they provide insight into schemes of advertising.

For the purposes of this chapter, hegemony is intrinsic to understanding the alteration of images contained in the parable of victimhood. According to T.J. Jackson Lears,

*The overall picture that Gramsci provides is not a static, closed system of ruling-class domination. Rather, it is a society in constant process, where the creation of counterhegemonies remains a live option. Gramsci’s vision of society involves not a mechanical model of base and superstructure but a complex interaction of relatively autonomous spheres (public and private;*
political, cultural, and economic) within a totality of attitudes and practices.30

The Advocate and its parable of victimhood provides a window into the occurrence of this constant process vis-à-vis its courting and projection of en masse sentiments derived from heterosexual society, as exemplified through the advertising. The quantum emergence of the HIV/AIDS crisis and its association, at least initially, with same-sex activity was cast in hyperbolic terms by the heterosexual world, as it was distinctly referred to as the “gay plague” and/or “gay cancer,” connoting not only shame, but exclusive shame. The ramifications of this exclusivity were evinced in gay sensibilities regarding sexual conduct. As Streitmatter asserts,

Just as the virus destroyed the entire immune system of its victims, the disease invaded every dimension of gay life...It was those dimensions that would define the major themes of the gay press that struggled – sometimes successfully, often not – to cope with the disease.31 The most dramatic theme was the degree to which the epidemic challenged the ethical standards of gay sexual behavior...activists had fought long and hard for gay rights [and] relinquishing the right to have sex on demand seemed almost as deadly as AIDS itself.32

Such freedom in the expression of gay sexuality, which had, for better or worse, become a hallmark of gay emancipation from the confines of heterosexist sexual conventions, was clearly challenged by the development and proliferation of AIDS in gay men. This reality was portrayed in the early 90s health advertisements in The Advocate. Thus, The Advocate ideologically appropriated the collective demonization of gay sex, and gay existence, through the early advertisements and their dejected, desperate


32 Ibid.
depictions. Additionally, the fact that non-gay advertising had generally distanced itself from gay publications in the wake of the AIDS epidemic underscores a further sense of isolation and abandonment. This ideological appropriation can be articulated through the Gramscian notion of spontaneous consent that is bequeathed to the heterosexual masses and reflected in gay advertising. The consent materializes in terms of the vision of gays as subjugated and mentally and emotionally unstable, and is complemented by the domination of heterosexist conservatism that held gays responsible for their own predicament regarding the advent of AIDS.

Interestingly, The Advocate later defined the gay struggle with anxiety, disease, and depression through different symbolism that significantly departed from the previous hegemonically reified images. This alteration can be traced in the advertisements that appeared in the mid and late 90s, which sought to address the same health issues as those that characterized the early 90s. As previously noted, these images sought to endorse the expression of male sexuality without reservations or a sense of disgrace or compunction, even as they promoted the supposed tragedy of the gay consumer and suggested remedial action. The Advocate, through these advertisements, appears to have made a departure from the typecasting of the dominant conservative hegemony, instead relishing male sexuality with unabashedly sexual imagery that underscores sexual triumph even in the face of adversity. Because of this newfound confidence in the assertion of male sensuality even in the state of despair, the parable of victimhood underwent an important metamorphosis that essentially saw The Advocate reclaiming a sexual pride that was more or less highlighted prior to the arrival of the 1980s and its AIDS crisis. It should be stressed that this metamorphosis did not reflect heterosexual society’s total acceptance and endorsement
of homosexuality, but it seems to correspond with a gradual shift in gay visibility in the heterosexual mainstream. For instance, as scholar Suzanna Danuta assesses,

It took the tragedy of the [1980s] AIDS epidemic to produce any quantifiably meaningful representations of gays and lesbians in television. Unfortunately, all too often, those early AIDS dramas portrayed either promiscuous, “deviant” gays who were threats to society, or, gays made acceptable to heterosexual society through becoming the object of intense pity and sympathy.33

This media representation parallels with the advertising themes present in the early gay ads. Likewise, the transition in the gay advertisements presented in *The Advocate* from the mid to late 90s can be linked with the gay programming of that era. These programs represented a platform “that is liberal and ‘accepting’ of lesbians and gays, and suggests that, in the 90s, gays were rich, influential, and for the first time they saw a future that’s different from their past.”34

Once again, *The Advocate* hence reflects this new sociocultural orientation through the parable of victimhood. These cyclical transformations that occur within gay advertising can be interpreted more aptly in Gramscian terms. “For Gramsci mental life is more than a pale reflection of more basic developments in material life. The link between the two realms is not linear causality but circular interaction within an organic whole.”35 *The Advocate* and its rebranding of the parable of victimhood through the latter 90s advertising demonstrates this organic interaction with the heterosexual mainstream.

---


34 Ibid., 75, 76.

In stressing the importance of heterosexual society’s interaction with gay identity, as exemplified through *The Advocate* and its associated advertising of the parable of victimhood, this project does not aim to imply that the publication is completely dependent on the hegemonic influence of heterosexual society’s perceptions and mores in dictating the state of gay advertising. Rather, it is simply to highlight the intricate relationship between dominate, coercive powers in a given societal arrangement. Ascribing Gramscian domination to heteronormativity and heterosexism does not divorce *The Advocate* from its role in hegemonic domination of gay sensibilities; rather, *The Advocate*, as one of the most widely disseminated and influential gay periodicals, has the power to affirm the beliefs and perspectives of heterosexism, or reject them. The most plausible resolution seems to be that *The Advocate* reflected the AIDS health crisis, and the broader crisis of gay male health, through its advertisements during the 1990s and their attendant implications for gay identity, rather than seeking to challenge or distort those images. Such a resolution is verified by Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, which “acknowledges the social and economic constraints on the less powerful, then aims to see the ways that culture collaborates with those constraints.”36

Chapter 3

Scrutiny of *The Advocate* and its advertising highlights certain themes that appear to predominate in the publication. The way in which these themes interact with and corroborate Gramscian notions of hegemony reflect the degree to which text can serve as both an indicator and purveyor of established cultural otherness. The otherness that corresponds with *The Advocate* and its appeal to consumers is rooted in an exclusive treatment of race in advertising, and the sexual distinctiveness that engenders and envelops it.

Issues of racial representation within advertising have long been the subject of scrutiny by critics, a phenomenon which is not without merit. Gay-themed advertising within the dominant gay press is no exception. Indeed, indictments have been leveled at the gay community, namely, the gay press, for facilitating disparities in the depiction of race and its concomitant association with sociosexual identity within the context of gay visibility. As Chasin contends,

Racial politics and the low level of concern about racism among many lesbians, gay men, and other queers is derived, at least in part, from the tight reins held by gay print media that have restricted the free flow of ideas on the subject of racism in the gay male community, proving...that ignorance isn't innocent, it's organized. This assertion is only strengthened if advertising is considered along with the featured contents of the gay print media.\(^{37}\) In addition to promoting community, the gay and lesbian press has promoted divisions...among producers of gay-themed publications, white people have dominated; perhaps their identity explains the tendency to neglect race as a primary marker of difference among gay men and lesbians. In any case, white

---

writers and publishers appear able to ignore race – racial identity, the effects of racism, and racial difference – more easily than people of color can.38

Thus, according to certain critics, “white control of the gay and lesbian press is illustrated in the featured contents of the press, which in turn contributes to racial division in the readership...[producing] an ideology of white dominance.”39 Taking into account such arguments, the goal of this chapter is to analyze the advertisements in the gay press, namely, *The Advocate*, and the way in which people of color are depicted. While the basis for the previous accusations against the gay and lesbian press are not necessarily unfounded, they appear to reflect a prejudicial demonization of white gays that doesn’t account for the interaction between identity and consumerism. It is convenient and plausible to chalk up racial restrictions in the gay press to a simple act of enduring, monolithic white domination, but such a stance implies a necessary deliberation that actively endorses and encourages the subjugation of gay people of color. Rather than concentrating on placing culpability upon a large segment of the gay population, the present aim is to encounter the advertisements with an eye to how racial and sexual identity is constructed and manifested.

The emphasis, here, is on contextualizing the appearance of these ads with respect to their appearance within the dominant, widely-circulated periodical and understanding what these advertisements connote to a primarily white, male-based readership. Much has previously been articulated on the exclusivity portrayed in gay advertising and how it contrasts with the diverse reality that constitutes the collective gay community. The present analysis hopes to argue for and achieve a more objective, holistic lens pertaining to the advertisement of race. Pursuant to this goal, a few


inquiries have been formulated: How do these ads establish racial identities (in contrast to white men)? Why do these ads remain persistent throughout the 1990s? It is in an attempt to answer such queries that the following advertisements have been introduced:

**Figure 6. The Advocate, 1990**
Figure 7. The Advocate, 1991
Figure 8A. *The Advocate*, 1990
Select your Next Mate

MY DREAM  SHARE THE MAGIC

One Call Brings You All The Action!

1. Set your own private voice mailbox
2. Leave a message other callers can listen to in your mailbox
3. Leave a message in your mailbox
4. Listen to messages other callers have left on our message center
5. Listen to messages other callers have left on our message center.

MATCH MATE
1-800-820-8017

CROSSING CULTURES and BORDERS
featuring Asian and Latin erotica

PASSPORT: An intimate monthly personal contact magazine for checking personal ads, sending
ironic notes and promoting public MAGAZINES.

Figure 8B. The Advocate, 1990
Figure 9. *The Advocate*, 1991
A blue jeans model named Paco just moved in across the hall.

Life is Good.

Figure 10. The Advocate, 1995
The advertisements convey several themes pertaining to the implications of race and sexuality, which cannot be divorced from the context of *The Advocate* and its predominantly white male readership. The first advertisement features a (presumably) young East Asian male, gazing at the reader from over his shoulder while lying on his torso. The accompanying headline of the ad underscores a connection to exoticism, suggesting that the reader engage in “crossing cultures and borders” while highlighting that the erotica featured consists of Asian and Latin men. The descriptive text below the picture promises that “foreign magazines in the native language provide exciting insight into another country’s gay culture.” A series of illustrative titles follow: *Neon* and *Midway*, from Thailand, *Barazoku* from Japan, and *Macho Tips* from Mexico.

Encountering this advertisement, as well as the others, phenomenologically, allows one to understand the interactive process taking place between the viewer and what the former is portraying. “For as we read, we oscillate to a greater or lesser degree between the building and the breaking of illusions. In a process of trial and error, we organize and reorganize the various data offered us by the text...these are the given factors, the fixed point on which we base our ‘interpretation,’ trying to fit them together in the way we think the author meant them to be fitted.”\(^{40}\) This kind of progression in deducing the advertisements represents a type of summoning for the viewer, and thus the illusion is permitted to be constructed by the reader. In this particular instance, the kind of illusion engineered by the advertising is a type of sociocultural segregation that is predicated along sexual lines. Sexual desire in this context is decided and amplified by the degree to which it differs from the reader’s own sexual life. The data of the text constitutes the objective and implication of the advertisement itself – to see the image

---

and the concomitant language through a lens of the reader's own exclusivity. The image and the language, being the fixed points of the text, are left to be contested or aligned in an interactive agency with the author's own perspective, therefore reifying the reader's own conception of their sexual (and racial) selves. Iser notes this predicament by asserting,

To perceive, a beholder must create his own experience. And his creation must include relations comparable to those which the original producer underwent. They are not the same in any literal sense. But with the perceiver, as with the artist, there must be an ordering of the elements of the whole that is in form, although not in details, the same as the process of organization the creator of the work consciously experienced.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this phenomenological rendering of the racial advertisement. The question of exoticism – what can henceforth be called a “parable of exoticism” – and its depiction in the ads, inviting readers to traverse national boundaries and cultures, is, in essence, inviting them to sexually experience the foreign, racialized sexual other. It appears equated with and synonymous with a sexual tourism, or a sexual buffet, complete with categorical language (e.g., Macho Tips for the Latin American segment) that stereotypes and restricts. Indeed, it can be equated with other forms of advertising that are specifically geared toward the pursuit of gay male travel and leisure. This is because “gay male travel texts about the non-Western world indulge in the discursive legacy of European colonization by appropriating the binary logic of an allegedly primitive, preindustrial Elsewhere that includes conventions of eroticizing skin color, youth, and gender.” Given the Advocate readership, it is not necessarily

41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., 223.
surprising that the ads featured here appear in a primarily white publication using such rhetoric to sell the experience of exoticism to predominantly white, American men. “Gay society in North America, organized and commercial, is framed around the white male...he is its customer and its product. Blacks, Asians, and Latin Americans are the oysters in this meat market. At best [they] are a quaint specialty for exotic tastes.”

Thus, within this commercial framework, white gays are free to decide how their sexual tastes can be marketed and expressed for the greatest amount of profit. Objectification of perceived cultural and, by extension, sexual differences is not necessarily synonymous with racism, per se, but rather an articulation of structured desire designed for profitable consumption. Such a commercial relationship assists in explaining how and why race is sexually typified – in playing upon perceived perceptions of otherness, sexual (and profitable) interest is generated. The contention is made more tenable and plausible when one considers that members within their own ethnic or racial group are not marketed with the same exotically sexual characteristics and connotations as those outside of it, a point that shall be returned to later in this chapter. For now, it is sufficient to posit that the racial depiction in the advertisement, and those that follow it, is shared by both the author of the advertisement and the reader to whom the ad is aimed.

The second advertisement contains many of the same notional themes that the first ad imparts. There is present the same typecasting of otherness that characterized the previous advertisement, save the fact that this ad tenders the sexual appeal of black men. *The Advocate* offers a “special” issue from the editors of *Advocate Men*, the pornographic subsidiary of the main publication, fittingly and reassuringly entitled

---

“allblack.” The implication is that black men are not a necessary or desirable feature in *Advocate Men*, which reinforces an exotic marginality for the black body in this context: it must be relegated to a certain sexual taste or propensity – either acquired or natural – distinct from the white male body, which, it can be assumed, has a universal sexual appeal for the readership of *The Advocate*. A corresponding “allwhite” issue from *Advocate Men* would thus prove an unnecessary and counterintuitive offering.

The text further plays upon the stereotypical associations between black men and masculinity, ensuring that black men are marketed in such a way that they are fulfilling a sexual role-playing fantasy for the readership of *The Advocate*. Scholar Dwight A McBride professes that, “Here in the form of typical images of black men in the mediated context of black gay porn, the viewer can enjoy fantasies about his sexual relationship to blackness without having to account for the possibly troublesome dimensions of the brand of thinking about race that he must necessarily bring to these images for them to work their magic, so to speak.”45 The advertisement continues to market black men by presenting the consumer with other details of the special issue, such as erotic fiction that “showcases” black men and is ostensibly tailored to their lives, as well as a comprehensive resource guide that designates “places of interest, publications, groups and more” to locate gay black men. These features continue to market black men as peripheral sexual objects that necessitate exploration, treating them as entities separate from the gay advertising whole, rather than including them within dominant gay advertising and publications.

The parable of exoticism continues to be reinforced upon examination of the third advertisement, which is windowed and contains four ads. Two ads, positioned at

the bottom of the window “pane,” feature minority advertisements - one for black men, the other, for East Asian males. They are clearly depicted as pornographic in their orientation, amplifying the racial characteristics of the men, and therefore can be classified as ads for sexual commerce. However, the advertisement above these two sex ads, more clearly depicted in the repeated addition, portrays a young white man and is marketed as a dating service, with “select your next mate” written above the picture of the man. Here, the implication is that white men are desirable as romantic partners, whereas men of color are tantamount to an exotic sexual experience, a liaison intrinsically devoid of romantic inclinations or possibilities. This collection of ads and their juxtaposition therefore provides a valuable exposé of the way in which intimacy and attraction are racially reified for consumers of the *The Advocate*.

To return now to a previous point, and its palpable connection to the next advertisement in the parable of exoticism, the marketing of race in *The Advocate* appears to be grounds for much of the sexual fulfillment, and thus sexual profit, with regard to the conspicuous inclusion of gay men of color in the magazine. This is not to suggest, however, that gay white men, who comprise the majority of the readership for *The Advocate*, are discounted. Indeed, the vast majority of the sexual and pornographic advertisements feature white men. However, these ads contrast with those of gay men of color in two notable ways. Firstly, white men are given the privilege of having clear and specific distinctions to their sexual identity and role; that is, they are frequently given a diverse range of options in which they express their sexuality to the consumer. For example, they may be “bikers,” “daddies,” “twinks,” “cowboys,” “working-class,” etc., without compromising their whiteness. In truth, such titles appear to be predicated on a white identity and are sociosexually closed to gay men of color, who must play the
stereotypical role assigned to them. A second important contrast, perhaps tying into the first, is access to the American identity. The fourth advertisement depicts a young white man, with text touting his nationality (lineage) as “All-American!” and “U.S. Male!” The language is as restrictive (for gay men of color) as it is inclusive for the primarily white readership of *The Advocate*. In this particular case, the American identity is conflated with whiteness and set in a kind of indirect opposition to the gay men of color typecast in their respective role in the advertisements. After establishing the otherness of the gay men of color in the advertising, gay ads such as this reinforce the conflation between America and white men, irrespective of their homosexuality, which challenges and contradicts the association in a customary sense.

The last advertisement is manifold in its insinuations for the parable of exoticism, and appropriately marries the previously discussed ad with the next chapter of the thesis by providing a segway between both, which will presently be expounded. Firstly, it underscores many of the same themes that have been addressed previously. It features a presumably Latino jeans model, “Paco,” being observed through a peephole by another individual from across the corridor of an apartment complex. In this particular instance, the other individual (namely, the readership) is the viewer who is observing Paco in a voyeuristic way, and so the context of the ad is immediately rendered pornographic. However, this advertisement is not one that aims to offer sex, but instead is a marketing attempt made by the Miller Brewing Company to the gay male audience of *The Advocate*. Interestingly, it utilizes a gay man of color to illustrate the communication of sexuality, thus repeating and reinforcing the link between racial and sexual typifications.
Secondly, the ad serves as a testament to the courting of the gay consumer in the hopes of establishing a rapport between the product brand and the former. Using the Miller Brewing Company as a prime example of (heterosexual) corporate interest in gay business highlights the tenuous interplay between capitalism and sexual minority groups. Lisa Peñaloza argues that,

Redirecting a marketing campaign used to target heterosexuals to gay/lesbian media can be a cost-effective strategy, as firms can rely on the placement of their advertisements to communicate their desire to do business with gays and lesbians. This is not just a message of intention to do business, however, but also marks some solidarity with gay/lesbian communities.46

It is this dynamic that, as the thesis will argue in the next chapter, figures prominently in the seemingly continuous entry of gays into the conventional heterosexist world. For the present moment, the ad amplifies the parable of exoticism by exemplifying the racial parallels between not only gay advertising in *The Advocate*, but also the heterosexual counterparts’ corporate participation in establishing a template for marketing to gay men: what both appear to have in common is that they exploit the white male gaze (and, in this case, the erotic implications of that gaze in race-based sexuality) in offering their products and services in *The Advocate*.

To turn, finally, to Antonio Gramsci’s hegemony theory means to address the parable of exoticism with a critical eye to both its causality and its ramifications. The advertisements depicted in this study of exoticism evince characteristics of what Gramsci terms the spontaneous philosophy, and emphasize an interaction between the politics of race and the consumerism which, within the context of *The Advocate* and its advertising, governs it. According to Lears,

---

The philosophy is contained in: 1. language itself, which is a totality of determined notions and concepts and not just of words grammatically devoid of content; 2. “common sense” [conventional wisdom] and “good sense” [empirical knowledge]; 3. Popular religion and, therefore, also in the entire system of beliefs, superstitions, opinions, ways of seeing things and of acting, which are collectively bundled together under the name of “folklore.” It embodies all sorts of sentiments and prejudices that have private, subjective meanings apart from the public realm of power relations, yet it can never be divorced entirely from that realm.47

_The Advocate_ has functioned historically as the chief purveyor of gay news and advertisements to gay consumers, and it is therefore positioned to articulate the parameters of the spontaneous philosophy. This is because the spontaneous philosophy functions in tandem with an overarching ideology, to which the readership of _The Advocate_ subscribes. The ideology is predicated on a system of racial exclusion that positions gay white men as emblematic of homosexuality itself, a consequence of historicism. The language of the advertisements, which seek to partition gay men of color into recognized, restricted categories of sexual expression and allure, thereby distinguishing them from the monolithic construction of gay maleness, reinforces the historical construction of homosexuality as a Western and, in this case, American white phenomenon.

The advertisements portraying men of color as othered – that is, outside the historically uniform construction of homosexuality – through language therefore reifies the gay male sensibility based upon historical linkages, rather than a systematized racism or prejudice, the latter of which would be an improper designation. Both common sense and good sense serve to bolster the historical implications of gay identity by stressing the contributions of the monolithic gay mass – white men – in establishing a

---

distinctive, identifiable face for homosexuality. Folklore (popular religion), in this context, is itself a component of conventional wisdom because it relies on unquestioned, assumed variables in (gay) historical retrospection. The 20th century American gay rights movement, and all that it encompasses, is the chief component in this constructed image of monolithic gay identity because it is white men who had, and to a large extent continue to maintain, political and economic power vis-à-vis the progression and visibility of gay sociocultural advancement. The spontaneous philosophy consequently justifies the exotic treatment of gay men of color in the publication’s advertisements. Likewise, it also fittingly associates white men with a domestic, familiar connotation – they are depicted as the safe, natural, desirable, and intimately and romantically secure American counterpart to the men of color. Lears additionally contends that,

To resort to the concept of cultural hegemony is to take a banal question – “who has power?” – and deepen it at both ends. The “who” includes… journalists, literati, “experts” of all sorts, as well as advertising executives, entertainment promoters… – all of whom are involved (albeit often unwittingly) in shaping the values and attitudes of a society. The “power” includes cultural as well as economic and political power – the power to help define the boundaries of common-sense “reality.”48

One can see, then, that the parable of exoticism is not based upon a deliberate demotion of gay men of color in relation to white men, but encompasses historical and economic variables that manifest in contentious sexual imagery. The Advocate succeeds in producing and reproducing an historical link between gay social progress and socioeconomic privilege that chiefly acknowledges the reality of gayness through a narrow but nonetheless prominent and obvious lens. It accomplishes this feat by marrying both the “who” and the “power” together through a process of continual politicization of homosexuality, performed primarily by gay white men. The parable of

48 Ibid., 572.
exoticism is thus reflective of a broader, more intrinsic narrative of gay societal advancement and opportunity in heterosexual society.

“In Gramsci’s scheme a given group or class, as it develops in the economic sphere, finds some values more congenial than others, more resonant with its own everyday experience. Selectively refashioning the available spontaneous philosophy, a group may develop its own particular world view – an ideology that cements it into what Gramsci called a “historical bloc” possessing both cultural and economic solidarity.” 49

The historical bloc generated by The Advocate and its exclusive readership exemplifies this process of solidarity and expresses it, at least partially, through the way in which men of color are conveyed in contrast to white men. Ergo, to critique the depiction of men of color using limited chastisements of inherent racism and racial stereotyping is to draw attention away from the complex historical and economic processes that permit the racial exclusivity to develop in the first place. This is not to actively dismiss the advertisements and their inferences for gay men of color. Indeed, such discussions relating to the portrayals of gay men of color have been thoroughly and appropriately executed by a plethora of critics. Rather, it is to proffer a more diversely constructed, less putative account of The Advocate and its relationship to advertisements and its readership. Aside from the racial stipulations associated with the historical bloc, the next chapter will apply this theoretical phenomenon within hegemony theory to discussions on gay consumerism, political mobilization, and integration as depicted through the world of gay advertising.

49 Ibid., 571.
Chapter 4

This section of the thesis aims to complete the liaison formed together with the advertising themes explored in the previous chapters, thus constructing a concise narrative of *The Advocate* and its reflection of gay sensibilities through dominant parables. What can be gathered from the publication and the commercialization of its enterprise? How has advertising contributed to the standards with which gays are addressed by the mainstream heterosexual world? How does the predominate advertising align itself with sociopolitical progress, and what does it mean for the readership and, thus, gays as a collective entity?

Much has been contended as it pertains to the way in which advertising functions to sculpt and guide gay income, and thus, gay identity. Gay income, consumption, and identity are interwoven in a capitalist arrangement that has at its crux the possibility of social and cultural mobility within a heterosexist construct. This phenomenon, which is not exclusive to LGBT as a minority group, can be situated in an historical economic context. To briefly summarize the principal contentions of historian John D'Emilio,

As the wage labor spread and production became socialized, it became possible to release sexuality from the [heterosexual] “imperative” to procreate. In divesting the household of its economic independence and fostering the separation of sexuality from procreation, capitalism has created conditions that allow some men and women to organize a personal life around their erotic/emotional attraction to their own sex.. It has made possible the formation of urban communities of lesbians and gay men and, more recently, of a politics based on sexual identity.50

---

More intrinsic to the present work, and to deduce from capitalism’s historic relationship with homosexuality, it has also made possible the formation of an identifiable and sustainable gay market, which, it will be shown, possesses convoluted ties to issues of integration and exclusion vis-à-vis the messages embedded in gay advertising. Buying into identity formation and political activism through expenditure has come to be a hallmark of gay progressivism, and, it seems, almost uniformly embraced by gay culture in America. “By this reasoning, modern modes of production and consumption enabled both gay identity and the beginning of what might be called gay community...gay identity and community, then, are functions of the rise of advanced capitalism and the industrialization of advertising, and they are therefore subject to the promise of Americanization through consumption.”

Yet, this embrace of expenditure underscores a marked stratification in class and comportment among sexual minorities, if only in addressing how gay advertising works to commodify (and thus reify) gay male sensibilities. As scholar Rosemary Hennessy asserts, “the new degree of homosexual visibility in the United States needs to be considered critically in relation to capital’s insidious and relentless expansion...not only is much recent gay visibility aimed at producing new and potentially lucrative markets, but, as in most marketing strategies, money, not liberation, is the bottom line.” Thus, corporate interest in the gay market and its corresponding visibility is largely tied to the profit motive, which, given the pursuit and orientation of business, is not particularly surprising. What is significant, and therefore necessitates further examination, is the

---


impact this gay visibility has on the lives of gay men who encounter and process it. As gay images become mainstreamed through advertising, to what degree does it create political and socioeconomic divisions? Hennessey concludes that, “the increasing circulation of gay images in consumer culture has the effect of consolidating an imaginary, class-specific gay subjectivity for both straight and gay audiences. This process is not limited to the spheres of knowledge promoted by popular culture and retail advertising but infiltrates the production of subjectivities in academic and activist work.”

Keeping in mind the consolidation and pervasive perpetuation of gay subjectivities, the advertisements contained within The Advocate can be introduced and analytically pursued. The focus is upon detailing these subjectivities and how they manifest in the publication, and the goal is to critically examine them with regard to their social and political implications. What political messages do these ads contain for sexual minorities? What specific groups are being addressed, and by whom? The following advertisements will serve to answer such questions:

---

53 Ibid.
Figure 11. *The Advocate*, 1990
Figure 12. *The Advocate*, 1991
Figure 13. *The Advocate*, 1995
Figure 14. The Advocate, 1998
Figure 15. *The Advocate*, 1996
Figure 16. The Advocate, 1998
Figure 18. *The Advocate*, 1999
The ads featured here all connote an interaction with gay consumption that plays upon an element of suggestion. Taking into account the decade of the nineties in its entirety, the advertisements communicate a narrative of consumption that imports a product as the basis for connecting to gay dollars, but does so in such a way that it aligns itself with political and social sensibilities by customizing the product to comport with what is perceived to be the most profitable (and plausible) gay image. Extrapolating Iser’s theories to apply to the images, some conclusions are especially appropriate, particularly those concerning the dualistic nature of the reading process, as he notes,

In reading, there are two levels – the alien ‘me’ and the real, virtual ‘me’ – which are never completely cut off from each other... indeed, we can only make someone else’s thoughts into an absorbing theme for ourselves, provided the virtual background of our own personality can adapt to it. Every text we read draws a different boundary within our personality, so that the virtual background (the real ‘me’) will take on a different form, according [to] the theme of the text concerned.54

It is this virtual background of our own personality with which the advertising interacts and carries out its function, which is based in suggestion. In this context, what is being advocated is the abandonment of distinctions between economic and political orientations, both of which tend to segregate individuals, particularly along lines of class and, often, race. The virtual background of our own minds therefore provides the foundation for the kind of exchange which the corporate advertising in The Advocate desires to unfold, and the primarily gay white male readership of the publication is being hailed in a constructive but simultaneously limiting and exploitative experience of product and, de facto, selfhood endorsement. Within this backdrop, the advertising can

be approached and assessed more in depth according to the “parable of assimilation,” which will form the cornerstone of this segment of the thesis.

The parable of assimilation can initially come to be addressed through the idea of creating product linkages between ideology and commerce. In the first advertisement from 1990, the Molson Coors Brewing Company appears to be engaging in a sociopolitically non-committal way with gay consumers by featuring an ad for its beverage in *The Advocate*. Its early appearance in the magazine therefore appears relatively divorced from any kind of stalwartly pro-gay rhetoric or imagery, as it only aims to foster a relationship among gay consumers by encouraging them to “get on the winning streak.” However, a metamorphosis appears to occur in advertisements a year later that reify a connection to gay (white) men and their sexuality, suggesting, using the prop of a half-naked white male, that it is the “right beer now.” It would not be a stretch to say that Coors appears to be playing upon the supposed sexual conventions of gay men that position their sexuality as something akin to detachedly and lasciviously choosing a sexual partner for the present moment, without any further considerations of the future. Living in the Coors moment is thus synonymous with living in the gratifying sexual moment, and becomes a commercial imprimatur for homosexual conduct. In this context, the beer beverage operates as a call, or phenomenological hail, to the readership of *The Advocate* that their sexual tastes are justified, and that Coors (symbolically) willingly accommodates their tastes. The message is blasé in its supportive function and non-threatening in its implications.

Advertisements such as those for Coors, as depicted here, established the groundwork for more sociopolitical content to develop in later marketing efforts to gays in *The Advocate*. Ads such as those for Skyy Vodka, with its revelatory double-entendre
of “Just Out” and its appeal to the construction of sociosexual labels, which characterize
the lives of gays in a heteronormative framework, and Budweiser, with its analogous
inscription, “Just Coming Out,” and its prescriptive instruction to “be yourself” while
imbibing a Bud Light beer, signal to gay readership the association, however contrived it
may be, between corporate participation and visibility in sexual minority affairs, and
both sexual identity and the cultural and political activism that accompanies it. Such
advertising platforms signal to Advocate readers that “exclusion from mainstream
culture is cast in political terms, but the solution for it is offered in the
market...marketing asked people to view their own entrance into the marketplace as a
corrective for past social alienation.”55 Thus, the parable of assimilation is flagrant in
terms of the way advertising in The Advocate is deployed to appropriate gay loyalty and
expenditure under the guise of authentic, profound corporate solidarity with gay lives
and issues. It also warrants repeating that the link between this strategy of corporate
alignment with gay lives, as executed through The Advocate, is almost uniformly cast in
white male terms, a trend that is repeated throughout the parable of assimilation and
holds interesting connotations for pro-assimilation imagery and rhetoric.

This emphasis upon the corporate alignment of gay male whiteness and
assimilation in The Advocate is repeated as the other advertisements are scrutinized. We
can take, for example, the advertisements for Miller Lite by the Miller Brewing Company.
The first of these advertisements show a collection of presumably gay white men in a
tropical setting on vacation, with the text stating, “Your flight’s overbooked and you’re in
no hurry to get home,” connoting a sense of leisure and privilege for the men featured.
The advertisement therefore appears to be capitalizing off of the assumption that gay

white men are a profitable sector due to their higher disposable incomes, an assumption that is not without merit. Badgett addresses the implicit value of this assumption in stating,

Put high incomes together with the assumption that gay people have few economic worries or dependents, and the DINK myth – double income no kids – emerges to further entice marketers. An even narrower focus on gay white men would [therefore] constitute an efficient strategy [as] advertisers appear to recognize that only by targeting the white gay male part of the overall “gay market” can the promise of a high-income group be fulfilled...coupled white gay men best fit the picture of the dream market.  

Additionally, according to scholar Dan Baker, “one of the most important findings of the 1993 Yankelovich Partners survey was that, while average individual gay incomes were comparable to the national average, white gay men were two to three times more likely than the average [straight] white male to have household incomes of over $100,000 a year.” This bolstered perception by advertisers of white gay male income accounts for the preponderance of white men appearing in advertisements in *The Advocate*. The racial and economic correlation also demonstrates how white gay men are more readily able to gain entry into the ostensible assimilation process, that is, actually “assimilate” through consumption, as opposed to their gay counterparts of color. The first advertisement featured by the Miller Brewing Company accordingly underscores an image of leisurely white affluence that corresponds with the predominantly white gay male readership of *The Advocate*.

The second Miller Lite ad further communicates a kind of pro-gay white exclusivity through the use of “pride” symbolism, and the partial alteration of words with

56 M.V. Lee Badgett, *Money, Myths, and Change*, 121.

rainbow colors, as in “community.” It ultimately urges the *Advocate* readership to buy into that sense of (gay) pride and community through the purchase of the alcoholic beverage. This phenomenon epitomizes a trend in advertising in gay media that “helps to estrange gay and lesbian consumers from the radical import of sexual liberationist rhetoric, a trend that involves the appropriation of once radical language in advertisements coming from both mainstream and gay producers.”58 The reality of this appropriation evinces the way in which language can be used to court gay ideals, and thus profit from their attraction, but also how it can be used to manipulate and distort the original interpretation and symbolism of such rhetoric to suit commercial ends. In this context, language, and therefore its correlation to gay identity, becomes depoliticized and akin to a clichéd platitude, which assists in amalgamating the homosexual identity into the corporate conventions of mainstream, heteronormative American society.

The next ad, which features a male model posing for high-end fashion house Versace, has the designer label’s name printed across the page, with the word “Couture” written below it. Such an ad further serves to corroborate a connection between white gay men and high income due to Versace’s association with affluence and exclusivity and their participation in *The Advocate*. This ad merely reflects one example of the marketing and advertising of high taste, which seeks to hail and entice the gay male readership of *The Advocate* as it inhibits their sexual sensibilities for the sake of integration. Sender highlights this occurrence in stressing that,

The use of taste to contain queer sex reveals the class specificity of this containment: tastes are hierarchical and bear much relation to social privilege. By “knowing which tastes to cultivate” in their readers, marketers and publishers have both facilitated and

limited a visible gay sexuality with gay publications... and have deployed “taste” in the pursuit of a sexually discreet, respectable, public gay culture. This image of gay culture served both marketers’ business needs by encouraging mainstream advertisers to appeal to gay consumers, and some gay activists’ political aims to offer the most “acceptable” face of gayness in the pursuit of GLBT civil rights.59

Thus, the end product of this marketing of taste is assimilation for gay men into prescribed heteronormative conventions, and even then, it is a selective assimilation that courts gay white bourgeois sensibilities at the expense of others, as depicted through *The Advocate*. In this scheme, gay sexuality - a sexuality that is inherently radical vis-à-vis the heterosexual majority - is depoliticized by its filtration through the preponderance of “tasteful” advertising.

The last advertisement appears to objectify this element of “tasteful” advertising in the parable of assimilation by customizing gay capital toward conventionally material aims. A presumed couple moving a piece of furniture up a stairwell is a classic, if somewhat trite representation of bourgeois domesticity. Yet, in the Mitchell Gold ad space, the image of two shirtless and well-muscled men queers the domestically heteronormative context of the advertisement by suggesting that these men are settling into a home state. The text of the ad instructs gay men to “change now...change forever” by buying into the image’s depiction. While for heterosexual readers, this distortion of domesticity would most likely convey a jarring discrepancy or deviance, for the predominantly gay male readership of *The Advocate*, the image offers something in the way of access to the cultural symbolism of home life, which has been reserved for and preserved in an historically heterosexist framework, at least as it pertains to American society. Thus, the tastefulness of the advertisement, and its appeal to readers

of *The Advocate*, is predicated on a dissociation between gay men and their stereotypical association with promiscuity and anonymous sexual exploits, which provides an avenue for assimilation. The parable of assimilation is thus reified by the connection between the home and gay sensibilities, a liaison that historically has never existed. “Ideologically, capitalism drives people into heterosexual families and keeps them there (or tries to). Each generation comes of age having internalized heterosexual intimacy as the model for human relationship.”60 Indeed, the homosexual identity has staunchly been portrayed as antithetical to American notions of domesticity, and therefore has comport ed with something externally threatening and ideologically defiant to the ideal (heterosexual) home ethos.

The Gramscian implications for the parable of assimilation are manifold. However, it is useful and important, first, to frame the phenomenon of class, sexuality, and assimilation together in a framework of commodity culture. As Hennessey contends,

> The escalating domination of the ideological – the proliferation of information technologies, media images, codes – in post-industrial cultures has helped to reconfigure bourgeois modes of perceptions in first-world populations, producing subjects who are more differentiated and less likely to experience capitalism collectively through production relations and more likely to experience it through relations of consumption.61

Thus, the way in which people relate to each other, including, of course, gay men, is determined largely by the influence of consumption, as it assists in framing the parameters of discourse pertaining to the interaction of individuals. Instead of producing relations through capitalism, modern industrial societies are programmed to achieve interaction and, in effect, human distinction through expenditure.


61 Rosemary Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*, 139.
The Advocate serves to reinforce these relations by positioning gay identity as an impressionable sponge upon which advertisements can be deployed. “By promoting images of a seamlessly middle-class gay consumer or by inviting [its readership] to see queer identities only in terms of style, textuality, or performative play [it] helps to produce imaginary gay/queer subjects that keep invisible the divisions of wealth and labor.”62 The pervasiveness of such images in The Advocate, executed through advertising, carry hegemonic corollaries for the parable of assimilation. Spontaneous consent is essentially given to the dominant, abiding heteronormative paradigm within which gay men (and all sexual minorities) cultivate their identities. As noted, the consent is “‘historically’ caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.”63 It is also deeply based in an affection for the dominant group, which underscores the latter’s legitimacy. The Advocate accordingly permits and encourages this affection for assimilation due to its welcoming of corporate participation in its pages, and the allowance of images that conform to assimilationist leanings.

In working within this construct of domination, gay men can be arranged into a Gramscian scheme that positions them as an oppressed, relatively powerless group. In this scheme, they have, according to Gramsci,

Two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed. [They] produce a situation in which the contradictory state of consciousness does not permit of any action, any decision

62 Ibid., 140.

or any choice, and produces a condition of moral and political passivity.  

For the purposes of gay men, as a sexual minority, the contradictory consciousness is facilitated by publications such as *The Advocate* that reproduce the legitimacy of dominant groups through advertisements and, therefore, corporate sponsorship. The inherent radicalness of homosexuality within the late 20th century American heterosexual context positions gays as needing to form communities, services, media – in essence, a distinctly homosexual visibility – in response to the lack of exposure and acknowledgement from their heterosexual counterparts. *The Advocate* was once such means, at least ostensibly, to acquire a homosexual privilege in a heterosexual world. However, the parable of assimilation that has been documented in *The Advocate* underscores a convergence between the sociosexual radicalness of homosexuality and the conventions of mainstream straight society via representations in advertising. If one consciousness therefore ties gay men to the straight world and its conventions (due to homosexual identity inevitably emerging within a heterosexual culture), while the other ties him to other gay men and the common plight often experienced by gay men in terms of sexual identity, then the advertising in *The Advocate* creates a scenario in which its gay male readership is unwillingly assimilated into the heterosexual world, with their sexuality deradicalized, resulting in acquiescence to heterosexual norms.

---


65 It should be noted that such terms as “visibility” are not, in this context, conflated with a culturally and socially egalitarian visibility. There are varying materializations of visibility that are both exclusive to groups within the larger GLBT framework, and therefore function on a smaller sociocultural scale, and others that predominate and serve a collective role as mediums for sexual minorities. In any case, visibilities represent only the proverbial “tip” of a much broader, more intricate “iceberg” of societal relationships and constructs.
This parable of assimilation, therefore, becomes synonymous with an historical bloc. *The Advocate*, in terms of advertising, does not entertain counterpoints to assimilation, because doing so would be counterproductive commerce both for *The Advocate* and the business in question. As a consequence, only those values of the dominant group are entertained and held up as an example for the gay readership. The solidarity that was thus exhibited in relation to the parable of exoticism is also apparent in the parable of assimilation. However, in the latter case, its basis of solidarity is situated within commodity culture and the stipulations that it creates according to class values that resonate with integration into the heterosexual mainstream.
Conclusion

It is apparent that advertising in *The Advocate* - that is, gay advertising - exists within a hegemonic sociocultural framework. As documented in the first chapter, the extant scholarship - that this project both aligns itself with and addresses - that concentrated on the intersection of business, advertising, and cultural and ideological formations in gay media subsisted in a relatively narrow paradigm of research that did not wholly focus upon nor adequately pursue the application of hegemony theory and phenomenology to the gay advertising, and, what’s more, insufficiently addressed the advertising in an historical context. The attempt to construct parables of analysis and apply theory to those constructs formed the basis of this project and provided an effective way to approach the advertising categorically.

The “parable of victimhood,” featured in the second chapter, proved an appropriate characterization and grouping of the ads that comprised it. It sought to establish an examination of the AIDS crisis that plagued the gay community and the way in which the concomitant advertising during the 1990s reflected an alignment with the heteronormative ethos of that crisis. Within this relationship, the hegemonic influence of heterosexism contributed to the advertising effects, with *The Advocate* serving as a literary conduit for the expression of the latter. *The Advocate* thus affirmed the views of heterosexual society by reflecting changes in the social and cultural paradigms that characterized gay mental and physical health during the decade, as depicted through the transition in advertising. This reality showed a marked collaboration with the hegemonic domination of heteronormativity, a significant component of Gramsci’s cultural hegemony.
The “parable of exoticism,” explored in the second chapter, demonstrated the way in which the influence of racially segregated and eroticized advertising portrayals in *The Advocate* of gay men of color reified their sociosexual identities to gay consumers through hegemony. This is because the conflation of homosexuality with whiteness fosters a hegemonic influence that the publication, and its readership, subscribes to. The corollary of that hegemonic, historically and economically reinforced gay whiteness is the sexual otherness – exoticism – placed upon gay men of color with respect to their gay white counterparts.

Lastly, the third chapter explored the “parable of assimilation” and established an association between corporate advertising and integration within gay media advertising. It was discovered that these advertising images of assimilation were largely predicated on creating an exclusive privilege for gay white men to enter the heteronormative bourgeois mainstream in American society, and capitalized off of the radicalness of gay identity by stripping it of its sociopolitical potency. As a result, the parable of assimilation in *The Advocate* is exemplary of a hegemonic (gay) historical bloc that chiefly excludes from advertising visibility those individuals and groups that do not comport with the dominant socioeconomic values expressed by the bloc, that is, the endorsement of heteronormative standards.
A) Primary Sources


B) Secondary Sources


Levine, Martin P. *Gay Macho: The Life and Death of the Homosexual Clone*. New York:


Bibliography

B) Secondary Sources


Pellegrini, Ann. “Commodity Capitalism and Transformations in Gay Identity.” *Queer


Jonathan A. Hanna was born and raised in Los Angeles, California. He earned a B.A. in International Studies from the University of West Florida. He is a member of Pi Sigma Alpha, the National Political Science Honor Society.