

MEDIA EDUCATION
FOUNDATION
STUDY GUIDE

FURTHER OFF THE

STRAIGHT & NARROW:

NEW GAY VISIBILITY ON TELEVISION 1998-2006

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NOTE TO TEACHERS

This study guide is designed to help you and your students engage and manage the information presented in this video. Given that it can be difficult to teach visual content—and difficult for students to recall detailed information from videos after viewing them—the intention here is to give you a tool to help your students slow down and deepen their thinking about the specific issues this video addresses. With this in mind, we’ve structured the guide so that you have the option of focusing in depth on one section of the video at a time. We’ve also set it up to help you stay close to the video’s main line of argument as it unfolds. The structure of the guide therefore mirrors the structure of the video, moving through each of the video’s sections with a series of key summary points, questions, and assignments specific to that section.

Pre-viewing Discussion Questions are designed to inspire preliminary discussion about the issues the video addresses prior to viewing.

Key Points provide a concise and comprehensive summary of each section of the video. They are designed to make it easier for you and your students to recall the details of the video during class discussions, and as a reference point for students as they work on assignments.

Discussion Questions provide a series of questions designed to help you review and clarify material for your students; to encourage students to reflect critically on this material during class discussions; and to prompt and guide their written reactions to the video before and after these discussions. These questions can therefore be used in different ways: as guideposts for class discussion, as a framework for smaller group discussion and presentations, or as self-standing, in-class writing assignments (i.e. as prompts for “free-writing” or in-class reaction papers in which students are asked to write spontaneously and informally while the video is fresh in their mind).

Assignments for each section encourage students to engage the video in more depth—by conducting research, working on individual and group projects, putting together presentations, and composing formal essays. These assignments are designed to challenge students to show command of the material presented in the video, to think critically and independently about this material from a number of different perspectives, and to develop and defend their own point of view on the issues at stake.

OVERVIEW

Representations of gay, lesbian, and transgendered people were rare during the first few decades of U.S. television. When gay people did appear on television the portrayals tended to reinforce negative stereotypes. This pattern began to change in the mid-1990s. Beginning with the controversial coming out episode of *Ellen* in 1997, and continuing with the success of *Will and Grace* from 1998 to 2006, the late 1990s and early 2000s saw a significant increase in both the number of gay characters appearing in popular television shows and the range and diversity of these images. Further *Off the Straight and Narrow* continues the examination of GLBT representation on television begun in the documentary *Off the Straight and Narrow*, which focused on television's images of gays from the early years to the mid-1990s.

Further *Off the Straight and Narrow* delves into network dramas, comedies, and reality shows, as well as premium cable programming. Noting both positive trends and lingering stereotypes, the documentary deals with the multi-faceted images of gays that television now offers while also attending to the economic factors behind television's changing portrayals of GLBT people. Ultimately, the film concludes that the trend toward more frequent and more diverse representations of gay people on television has been a positive development for both gay and straight audiences. However, it also cautions that the potential for further progress is limited by the profiteering that has been the driving force behind these developments.

INTRODUCTION

Key Points

- Throughout most of television's history portrayals of gay people were rare. However, since the mid-1990s there has been a dramatic increase in gay representations on U.S. television.
- In a media culture, representation on television is crucial to a group's sense of identity and legitimacy. Young gay people can now see evidence on their television screens that they are not alone.
- This is important because popular culture in general, and television in particular, is such an important part of American life. In the U.S., and other media saturated cultures, when a group of people are absent from television portrayals it is as if they don't exist.
- Even misleading or stereotypical representations are thus crucial, just due to their very existence.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think accounts for the rise in gay characters on television since the mid-1990s? Why do you think there were so few portrayals of gay people prior to this?
2. Do you agree with the statement that if you are not on television you don't exist? Why or why not? Can you think of any other examples that support or refute this statement?
3. Are stereotypical representations better than no representation at all? Why or why not?
4. Do you agree that it is important for young gay people to be able to see gay characters on television? Why might this be important?

Assignments

1. In groups of four or five make a list of your favorite television programs. In your groups consider the following questions: How many of the programs that you listed include gay characters? How are those characters represented?
2. Read "Where We Are on TV," a study by the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD). This report is online at <http://www.glaad.org/eye/ontv/06-07/overview.php>. According to this study, in the 2006-2007 television season gay

characters represented less than 2% of all broadcast network primetime roles. The report notes:

Out of a total 679 series regular lead or supporting characters, GLAAD counts only nine (9) gay or lesbian characters — 1.3% — appearing on eight (8) different scripted network programs. There are an additional five (5) semi-regular recurring characters announced for this year. There are currently no bisexual or transgender representations on the broadcast networks.

After reading the report, take part in a class discussion on what the conclusions suggest about claims that television has embraced alternative lifestyles.

3. As a follow-up to the previous exercise, research the difference between broadcast and premium cable television. Write a short report that responds to the following questions: How is broadcast television funded? How is premium cable television funded? How might funding differences affect programming content? Using examples from the current television season, consider specifically the question of how broadcast and premium cable television networks differ in terms of both the frequency and nature of gay characterizations.

GOING MAINSTREAM: NETWORK NARRATIVES

Key Points

- Until the mid-1990s, audiences almost never saw gay lead characters on network television. Minor gay characters did appear from time to time, but usually only as short-lived plot devices slated to be eliminated as soon as their usefulness to a particular storyline was finished.
- When Ellen Degeneres came out in 1997, both in her personal life and as a popular television situation comedy character, this opened the door for more gay representations on network television.
- The Ellen Show was cancelled shortly after her revelation, but a subsequent comedy featuring lead gay characters, *Will and Grace*, was easier for mainstream audiences to embrace and ended up being a popular, long-running success.
- *Will and Grace* may be more acceptable to mainstream audiences because the primary relationship on the show is between a man and a woman. Viewers can also derive pleasure from the antics of the character Jack, who embodies a long history of media stereotypes of the flamboyant gay man. Meanwhile, mainstream viewers may not get that the ostensibly straight character Karen is also framed as queer through her campy

style and sexually non-conformist attitudes. Together, these four characters fit into a long tradition of family-oriented sitcoms—albeit, in this case, a queer family.

- What may be most significant about *Will and Grace* is just the simple fact of its existence as a successful network program featuring gay lead characters. Beyond this it did little to push the boundaries of acceptability and instead played it safe—avoiding depictions of gay sex or a larger gay community.
- The sitcoms *Ellen* and *Will and Grace* paved the way for the networks to begin introducing gay characters into their dramatic programming.
- Dramas often featured stories about gay people struggling with their sexuality, as *Dawson's Creek* did with a classic coming out saga. These sorts of narratives depict the process of coming out as one that is filled with angst and despair.
- Yet, while gay viewers in earlier decades were forced to look for a gay subtext in programs like *Star Trek*, *Batman*, *Xena*, *Cagney and Lacey*, and many more, now network television offers explicitly gay characters that gay audience members can identify with. Some programs, like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, have developed gay characters not just as auxiliary plot devices but as integral to the overall narrative.
- Other programs, like *The O.C.*, however, have used gay characters only for particular story arcs to draw more viewers during the “sweeps weeks” when program ratings are crucial. Programs looking to enhance their ratings through controversy have introduced gay characters, usually attractive young women experimenting with lesbianism, as a way to titillate the audience. In these sorts of storylines, queerness is presented as a phase, or a fashion statement and a mark of “hipness.”
- The key element in these shows is often the lesbian kiss. It is rare, however, to see gay men kiss on television. The representation of two (or more) women kissing is a standard element in straight pornography designed to arouse male viewers.
- Kissing on television is a metaphor for sex—we are meant to assume what comes after the kiss. Thus, a gay kiss can generate controversy that is sure to boost ratings.
- Gay characters tend to be embraced on television only if they conform to a narrow set of middle class standards. For example, hard working, upwardly mobile, and family oriented gay characters tend to be framed as acceptable, while others who do not fit these criteria are ridiculed and/or reviled.
- Gays have thus become a regular feature of network television, but this is a particular sort of conditional visibility and acceptability.
- One exception to this pattern is found in reality television programs, which display a more diverse array of gay images.

Discussion Questions

1. What is your reaction to Larry Gross's statement that Will and Jack are not "very" gay? What do you think he means by that? Do you agree? How would the program have been different if they were "very" gay? Why do you think the writers and producers chose to depict them as they did? (Keeping in mind that everything that appears on television is a deliberate choice.)
2. In the same vein, what do you think of Lisa Henderson's argument that Karen is a queer character? Why do you think she believes that? Do you agree? Do you have to be gay to be queer?
3. What do you think Larry Gross means when he talks about programs with a gay sub-text as opposed to programs with a gay text? Can you think of examples that illustrate his point?
4. Why do you think programmers use gay plots to draw viewers' attention? What do you think of this practice? Is this exploitation? Why or why not? How do you feel about seeing two women kiss on television? How do you feel about seeing two men kiss on television? What do you think accounts for any differences in your own and other students' reactions to these last two questions?
5. Do you agree with the statement that gay characters need to embody middle class standards to be accepted on television? Can you think of any examples that support or contradict that argument? Is this need to subscribe to middle class values in order to be accepted on television true of other groups as well? Can you offer some examples of this?

Assignments

1. Watch the Oprah Winfrey interview with Ellen Degeneres about the coming out episode of Ellen: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nq34p5gr0N0&mode=related&search>. Then read "Ellen DeGeneres 10 Years After Coming Out" by Kathy Belge, about advertiser and audience reactions to the episode: <http://lesbianlife.about.com/od/lesbianactors/a/EllenTenYear.htm>. Take part in a class discussion about reactions to the program and the subsequent controversy.
2. Do some research and then write a short essay on the term "queer" and how it has come to be used in the gay community. Start by reading "The Evolution of 'Queer'" at <http://www.cnn.com/2003/US/11/05/offbeat.queer.evolution.ap/>.
3. Read "US Right Attacks SpongeBob Video" (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4190699.stm>) and "Gay Tinky Winky Bad for Children" (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/276677.stm>) about accusations that

children's television characters like Tinky Winky of The Teletubbies and SpongeBob Squarepants are used to promote a gay agenda. Write a short essay and take part in a class discussion about whether these are examples of taking the notion of a gay subtext too far.

4. Read "VMA's Madonna-Britney-Christina Kiss: Progress or Publicity Stunt" by Sarah Warn (<http://www.afterellen.com/archive/ellen/TV/vmakiss.html>) and write an essay on audience reactions to female kisses.

MIGHTY REAL: GAYS AND LESBIANS IN NON-FICTION TV

Key Points

- Early in television history "real" portrayals of gay people were restricted to infrequent talk shows and news reports which focused on debates over the morality of homosexuality.
- In the early 1990s gay men and women began appearing frequently on tabloid television talk shows like The Rikki Lake Show and The Jerry Springer Show. In these programs, homosexuality appeared normal in that dysfunctional gay relationships were treated just like all of the other dysfunctional relationships featured in these shows.
- Later, in the 1990s, programs like Survivor and The Real World made gay people a regular part of their casts. On The Real World, for example, the presence of one or two gay characters in every season was expected, and, in fact, came to be one of the elements that marked the show as "real."
- On these programs there was still some evidence of stereotyping but also somewhat more realistic portrayals of gay men and women. The first winner of Survivor, Richard Hatch, for example, was a gay man, but his gayness was incidental to his role in the show.
- Other reality television programs deliberately used gay men and women to create conflict and drama among the cast, as in an episode of Wife Swap that pitted a conservative Christian family against a lesbian couple. These programs did bring important societal conflicts to light but they did so in an exploitative, superficial, and sensationalist manner.
- One reality program that treated gay men with respect was Queer Eye for the Straight Guy, which gave credit to gay men for their long history of work in the style trades. While critics were skeptical about its blatant promotion of brand-name products and consumerist lifestyles, it did depict gay men as an important part of the culture, useful and needed by straight men. In fact, on Queer Eye, gay men outnumbered straight men (a rarity on television), they were depicted in a communal setting rather than isolated on

the margins, and straight men were positioned as the problem that needed to be fixed rather than vice-versa.

- Joshua Gamson argues that later reality television programs seemed to represent the “gaying of the straight person,” exposing straight people to gay life so that they might learn that gay and straight people are not entirely different from one another.
- However, there was also a contradiction on display in these programs. While they tended to represent gay men as traditionally masculine and lesbian women as traditionally feminine, they also needed to include visible signs of queerness in order to suggest that it is always possible to figure out whether someone is gay or straight.
- Gamson suggests that these tendencies are symptomatic of a problem for the culture at large—we must always be able to see the differences between gay and straight people because if we cannot then it becomes impossible to maintain straight privilege.
- While gay people have become a staple of reality television, they still appear in predominately heterosexual groups and environments on these programs.

Discussion Questions

1. What accounts for the increasing frequency of gay portrayals in nonfiction television?
2. Compare early television debates over the morality of homosexuality with more recent portrayals of dysfunctional gay people on tabloid talk shows. How are these programs similar? How are they different?
3. What does Larry Gross mean when he says that the regular presence of gay characters on *The Real World* is one of the ways that “its reality is marked”?
4. Katherine Sender says that the fact that Richard Hatch of *Survivor* was gay was incidental to the plot of the show. Do you agree? If so, do you think this is a positive or negative development in the portrayal of gay people on television? Why?
5. What do you think of the portrayal of both gay and straight men on *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*? Do you think that positive elements of the show might get lost amid the hyping of brands and products? Why or why not?
6. What is Joshua Gamson referring to when he talks about “straight privilege”? Do you think straight privilege exists? Why or why not? What might be some indicators of straight privilege? If you are straight, have you experienced this? If you are not straight, have you felt disadvantaged by straight privilege?

Assignments

1. Bring in an episode of a reality show that includes gay cast members. After viewing the episode in class, break up into small groups and have each group discuss the representations of both gay and straight people in the program and then share a summary of their discussions with the class. Talk about similarities and differences between the groups' interpretations.
2. Interview students in other classes about the reality shows they watch. Ask them their opinions of any gay cast members on these shows and then prepare a presentation for the class that summarizes the responses you get.
3. Watch an episode or two of Queer Eye for the Straight Guy and count up all the identifiable brand-name products included. Read "Has Product Placement Made Our Television Viewing Worse" by Alicia Rebensdorf (available at <http://www.alternet.org/rights/52069/>) and write an essay that uses Queer Eye as an example to explore your own stance on product placement on television.
4. Research the economics of reality television, why it is so profitable to television networks, and who they target with these programs. Then write an essay on why this genre of programming may be one that is particularly prone to including gay cast members in their mix.

A PIECE OF THE PIE: SEGMENTING AUDIENCES

Key Points

- The 1990s saw an explosion in the number of cable channels available to audiences. Subscription cable channels like HBO and Showtime have been particularly successful at attracting gay audiences with more frequent, more varied, and more complex portrayals of gay characters.
- Differences in how premium cable and traditional television is funded force premium channels to take more risks with their programming. They don't need to worry about negative responses from cautious advertisers but they do need to offer content that is perceived as different in order to entice people to subscribe.
- Sex and the City represented a cautious step toward integrating gay characters and a gay sensibility into television storylines. But the show was still primarily based in a heterosexual community.

- Queer as Folk, however, offered a gay community where heterosexuals were on the margins. It also included much more sexually explicit images of gay men, who have historically been desexualized on mainstream television.
- After experiencing success with Queer as Folk, Showtime then introduced a lesbian-centered program, The L-Word. The L-Word also featured explicit sex and some critics were wary of its capacity to put lesbian sexuality on display for a voyeuristic straight male audience.
- From an economic perspective, however, this was a clever tactic in terms of attracting a broad audience. And the producers of The L-Word seemed to comment on this very issue. They introduced a straight male character who strung cameras around the home of the lesbian couple he was living with so he could record and view their lovemaking. This plotline seemed to be a reflection on straight male viewership of the program.
- Despite the increased diversity of gay characters on premium cable, working-class gays still tend to be invisible, except for rare depictions in programs like HBO's Oz, which depicted a complex relationship between two male prisoners. By contrast, the characters on The L-Word all seemed to have lavish lifestyles that were well beyond the means of their professions.
- While not entirely focused on gay life, another HBO program, Six Feet Under, featured a complex interracial gay couple. While the depictions of Keith and David were somewhat stereotypical, the program also strived for a sensitive portrayal of the issues interracial couples must negotiate.
- In the 1980s and early 1990s, programs that dealt with HIV and AIDS were so prevalent that they seemed to be the only way that television producers could introduce gay concerns into their shows. However, more recently AIDS narratives have disappeared from television with the exception of a few rare occurrences on premium cable.
- AIDS narratives seem to have been replaced largely by gay parenting storylines, which tend to be more upbeat. However, this trend may also give rise to the false impression that AIDS is no longer a significant problem.
- Gay parenting narratives also tend to represent gay families as just the same as heterosexual families. A rare exception to this pattern occurred when a character on Queer as Folk argued that gay people should not aspire to lifestyles that mirror traditional heterosexual norms and values.
- The success of programs like Queer as Folk and The L-Word proved to television executives that they could target gay audiences with niche programming. This led to the creation of a cable channel devoted exclusively to gay programming. Viacom launched Logo in 2005.

- Logo was originally planned as a premium channel (available only through subscription but without ads) but it eventually appeared as part of the basic tier of channels. This means that its programming is available to a wider audience but it also leads to a more cautious approach to content as programmers must be concerned about potentially offending both viewers and advertisers.
- Katherine Sender notes that the birth of Logo was the outcome of two trends in the television industry. The first is the general tendency to segment audiences into demographic groups that can most effectively be targeted by advertisers. The second is the increasing awareness that gay audiences can be quite profitable for the industry.
- Suzanna Danuta-Walters argues that there is also a concern about the “new ghettoization” of gay visibility as most of the programs that really focus on gay characters and lifestyles are restricted to pay cable.
- While it is true that cable has offered audiences more diverse representations of gay characters, transgendered characters are still rare throughout the television environment.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you watch any of the cable programs mentioned in this section of the documentary? Why or why not? Do you agree that cable offers content that cannot be found on broadcast television? If so, why do you think that is? What other examples can you think of that either support or contradict the notion that cable offers audiences something new?
2. What do you think of explicit representations of gay sexuality on television? Are your feelings about explicit representations of heterosexual behavior the same or different in any way? Why?
3. Why are there very few depictions of working class queer people on television? How does this compare to television’s portrayal of working class straight people?
4. Why might television producers shy away from stories about AIDS and replace them with upbeat stories about gay parents?
5. Are gay families and straight families just alike? In what ways might they be similar and in what ways might they be different?
6. What do you think of the decision to make Logo part of basic cable? Should it have been a premium channel available only to subscribers? Why or why not?
7. Do you agree with the contention that gay characters are “ghettoized” on television? Do you think any other groups have experienced this tendency? Examples?

Assignments

1. The creator of *Sex and the City*, Darren Star, is gay and some critics have argued that the female characters on this show appear as stand-ins for gay men. Read the short article, “Is *Sex and the City* Gay?” and participate in a class discussion on the arguments presented by the author. (Article available at <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2004/02/09/1076175068807.html>)
2. Break up into two groups and hold a debate on the following statement: Explicit depictions of women making love to each other simply provide titillating images for voyeuristic straight men.
3. Watch the 2003 HBO mini-series *Angels in America* and write an essay that analyzes the program based on some of the arguments made in this documentary.

gIbT: NEW TRANSGENDER VISIBILITY

Key Points

- Transgendered people are just starting to be represented on television.
- Following a common pattern when groups begin to emerge in popular culture, they are usually depicted either as villains or as victims.
- The victim representation, however, may at least open up the possibilities of transgendered people being accepted as human.
- In 2003 HBO debuted *Normal*, the first television movie about a man in the process of becoming a woman. While attempting to provide a sensitive portrayal, this movie still framed transgender issues in a fairly narrow way, as purely biological—being born into the wrong body. Transsexuality may also be about ambiguity—feeling that one is neither male nor female, or both simultaneously.
- In contrast to *Normal*, *The L-Word* represented the character of Ivan as a person whose gender was up for grabs—ambiguous and fluid.
- Occasional television documentaries and reality programs have also provided more complex and diverse, albeit rare, representations of transpeople.

- The focus of most television depictions of transpeople is still on the struggles and tribulations they have to endure. The next logical step will be representations that accept transpeople for who they are.
- One rare program that does this is *The Brini Maxwell Show*. This talk show never acknowledges that the host is transgendered. It remains completely unstated.
- One of the reasons trans representations are so rare on television is because of the relative lack of economic and political power that transpeople have in the larger society, including in gay communities themselves.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think it took television so long (six decades) to begin to even acknowledge the existence of transgendered and transsexual people?
2. Are there problems with the representation of transpeople as victims? What might be some alternatives to this portrayal?
3. What do you think Suzanna Danuta-Walters means when she talks about gender ambiguity? What does it mean to say that sexuality is fluid?
4. How does the lack of economic power translate to less representation on television? Is this inevitable in a commercial system?

Assignments

1. Read “Unequal Exposure? Media Representations of Transpeople’s Intimate Relationships” by Tam Sanger (available at <http://www.gender.org.uk/gendys/2004/25sangr.htm>). Participate in a class discussion about how Sanger’s arguments compare to those presented in this section of the documentary.
2. Search the Internet for the term “genderqueer” and write an essay that explores the various ways this term is used.
3. Watch the film *Transamerica* (2005) and write a review that focuses on its depiction of transsexuality in light of the analysis provided in *Further Off the Straight and Narrow*.

HERE AND QUEER: GAY TELEVISION IN CONTEXT

Key Points

- Since the mid-1990s there has been a sizeable increase in GLBT characters on television.
- Katherine Sender argues that this is not some sort of natural move toward diversity on the part of the television industry but is instead due to two larger social trends: The increased visibility of the gay civil rights movement, and a new awareness of the profits that can be earned by appealing to gay consumers.
- Since the 1990s, there have been a number of highly visible public confrontations over the inclusion of gays in mainstream U.S. society. These have included legal battles over inclusion in the boy scouts and the military, the overturning of anti-sodomy laws, and the conflicts over gay marriage.
- Simultaneously, marketers have begun to focus on GLBT consumers as a desirable target audience. Gay consumers have come to be seen as trendsetters, and advertisers are now more likely to appeal to gay audiences. Often this is done implicitly, through suggestive imagery and innuendo. But increasingly we are also seeing the explicit use of gay celebrities as spokespeople for products and companies.
- There is a parallel here to the use of African American spokespeople in the past. Initially there was fear that a black celebrity or model associated with a product would lead the audience to think of it as only a “black” product. This began to fade with increased visibility just as the reluctance to associate a product as a “gay product” is beginning to fade now.
- Despite this progress, there is still a tendency to stereotype gay spokespeople by confining them to ads for home decorating or personal grooming products.
- There is a cyclical pattern when it comes to the use of gay images in advertising and programming. As programs begin to introduce gay characters, advertisers feel emboldened to do the same, and as the appearance of gays in advertising increases, program producers in turn feel freer to include gay characters in their shows.
- Increased gay visibility on television can offer young people a sense of legitimacy and of not being alone. This represents a significant positive development in the history of television.
- Moreover, society in general can no longer pretend that gay people do not exist—the evidence of their presence is right there on the television screen. Young people in particular are beginning to take the presence of gay people in their communities for granted.

- As with any social progress that challenges the traditions and norms of a society, however, there is a potential for social, political, and cultural backlash. Anti-gay sentiments and movements are thus also increasingly visible.
- Major changes have occurred in terms of the representation of GLBT people on television since Ellen DeGeneres came out in the mid-1990s. Gay characters now seem to be not just tolerated, but often welcomed in a range of television genres. However, there is still pressure on these characters to quietly take their place in the existing social structure, and few representations offer a radical challenge to basically conventional sexualities, expressions of gender, or family structures.

Discussion Questions

1. Katherine Sender identifies two trends in society that have led to the rise in gay visibility on television: the increased visibility of the gay civil rights movement and the increased awareness that advertisers can profit by marketing to gay audiences. Can you think of any additional explanations?
2. What positions do you take on the issues raised by the gay civil rights movement regarding gays in the Boy Scouts and the military, gay marriage, etc.? Why do you think you hold the positions you do? What has influenced your beliefs on these issues?
3. If a lot of the developments discussed in this film are due to the recognition that gay audiences can be a rich source of profit for advertisers and the media industries, is this simply a case of exploitation? Why or why not?
4. Do you agree that advertisers are less concerned about their products being associated with gay people than they were in the past? Can you think of examples that support or refute this idea?
5. Do you think that the positive developments identified in this documentary are reflected by positive changes in society at large? Why or why not?
6. Can you think of examples of the anti-gay backlash that is mentioned in this section of the film? What do you think motivates the people behind these movements?
7. What do you think is meant by the concluding statement of the film—that few representations of GLBT people on television really challenge conventional sexuality, gender expressions, and family structures?

Assignments

1. Go to:
http://www.vault.com/nr/newsmain.jsp?nr_page=3&ch_id=265&article_id=20437&cat_id=1021 and download the article “Targeting the Gay Consumer.” In class discuss the 5 reasons the author gives for why advertisers are targeting gay audiences.
2. Scholars and media critics have suggested that a lot of advertising uses what has been called “gay window dressing.” In these ads there are subtle gay references that straight audiences may not even notice. Bring in some examples of ads that you think have a gay subtext and discuss them with the class. Pay attention to subjective differences in reading the ads and possible explanations for why two people may interpret the same ad very differently.
3. Write an essay in which you explore the developments in gay representation on television as discussed in this film and how these developments both reflect and influence changes in the larger culture.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Reading the L Word: Outing Contemporary Television edited by Kim Akass and Janet McCabe, 2006.

Straight News: Gays, Lesbians, and the News Media by Edward Allwood, 1998.

Freaks Talk Back: Tabloid Talk Shows and Sexual Nonconformity by Joshua Gamson, 1999.

Up from Invisibility: Lesbians, Gay Men, and the Media in America by Larry Gross, 2002.

New Queer Aesthetic on Television: Essays on Recent Programming edited by James Keller and Leslie Stratyner, 2005.

Queer Popular Culture: Literature, Media, Film, and Television edited by Thomas Peele, 2007.

Documenting Gay Men: Identity and Performance in Reality Television and Documentary Film by Christopher Pullen, 2007.

Queer Words, Queer Images: Communication and the Construction of Homosexuality edited by Jeffrey Ringer, 1994.

Business, not Politics: The Making of the Gay Market by Katherine Sender, 2005.

The Prime Time Closet: A History of Gays and Lesbians on TV by Stephen Tropiano, 2002.

All the Rage: The Story of Gay Visibility in America by Suzanna Danuta Walters, 2003.