

ARE WE KILLING THE BOYS HARSHLY?
THE CONSUMPTION OF THE MALE GAZE IN QUEER PAGES

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to the idea of change—the type of change that Anne Frank wrote about in her diary. Frank left a legacy that echoes the world over in which she tells us, “How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.” While this thesis took many *moments* of my life to complete, it is my hope that this research causes a moment for those that come across it. In that moment, I hope your world changes. I hope you reach out to improve the human condition for any that have been persecuted or been discriminated against for simply being who they are. If you have been one of the persecuted many, I hope you find strength in realizing that there are individuals fighting for you, and I hope that strength guides you to help others. Above all, I dedicate this work to those who find the fortitude and hopeful ambition of creating a better tomorrow one moment at a time.

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ABSTRACT

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This study provides a social-text analysis of advertising images in queer publications which represent the new millennium up until 2008 in order to explore gaze theory in a queer context by answering the research question, “How have queer men represented themselves to themselves in the new millennium through the queer male gaze?” Inspired by Jean Kilbourne’s study of the image of women in advertising, this research project examines queer, millennial visual advertising images to explore the creation of normative queer behavior, identity, representation and the possible effects of those images on queer male consumers. A brief examination of previous work concerning male gaze as well as visual culture studies and their connection to Kilbourne’s work is addressed within the study. Further, this study discusses the concept of a bi-textual existence for the queer consumer in which identity is constructed from both an out-group (heteronormative) and in-group (homonormative) milieu. The theoretical foundation establishes that the queer male is placed in a hostile visual position—one where he is the dominating and dominated visual signifier in queer culture. Utilizing a stratified random sampling method, 293 images were coded to explore the research objective of constructing what the millennial queer gaze consisted of within full page advertisements in the queer specific publications of *Gay Times*, *Genre*, *Instinct*, and

The Advocate. The results of the analysis construct a toxic visual world for the queer consumer dominated by narrow representations, sexual discourse, discriminating ideologies, and a dangerous repetition of heteronormative, hierarchical social structure found in the patriarchal gaze.

Elizabeth M. Goering, Ph.D. Chair

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Introduction

A complex process of cultural consumption including cultural participation, activities and practices related to auditory, tactile, and visual socialization and embodied experience is at work as individuals shape not only their own cultural identities but also their understanding and interpretation of the cultural identities of others. Communication of an infinite number of messages constructing cultural identity bombards us through a continually expanding, dynamic system of communication channels, and the various milieus in which we submerge ourselves have an extremely influential role in shaping our behaviors and conceptualizations of the pressing question, “Who am I?” Those individuals deemed as other by mainstream dominant ideology often have a much more difficult process of constructing self-identity due to the limited representations, stereotypes or even absence of media portrayals of their identity from mainstream discourse. Mainstream discourse has been constructed and represented through a hegemonic viewpoint of affluent, heterosexual, white male supremacy, and in the struggle to maintain that power in social structure, many groups have been ostracized and labeled as the subordinated outsider based upon various characteristics including race, religious affiliation, gender, sex, able-bodiedness and economic status. However, the formation of a sexual identity—the identification of heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual—has been one of the most recognized forms of cultural division in the 20th and 21st centuries. This otherness constructed by mainstream ideological thought and cultural representation leads marginalized groups including homosexuals to seek out culturally specific mediums in order to conceptualize their marginalized identity. These culturally

targeted mediums may provide an accepting community and communication channels which support discourse not typically found in distribution channels intrinsically connected to mainstream ideology; however, these targeted communication channels also dictate the most dominant source of normalcy for marginalized groups and subcultures. One of those processes of cultural consumption involves the assimilation and enculturation of culturally specific publications.

In order to begin to construct the relationship of culturally specific publications to queer identification, this study will provide a textual analysis of advertising images in queer publications which represent the new millennium up until 2008. More specifically, this study will focus on the process of cultural assimilation and enculturation that occurs when queer individuals consume the visual culture presented in non-participatory, printed, static, queer magazine publications. At the core of the theoretical foundation of this analysis is the conceptualization of male gaze theory postulated by Laura Mulvey as well as the work of Jean Kilbourne in regards to her study of the image of women in advertising. A brief examination of previous work concerning male gaze as well as visual culture studies will be provided. The goal of the study is to first theorize what the queer male gaze consists of within the publications, and then to examine how the visual culture presented in these magazines shapes the representation, cultural identity and possible behaviors of queer male consumers. This analysis will contribute to the theoretical work of the male gaze, and provide insight into the effects of the male gaze on homosexual consumers which I argue is even more damaging to queer individuals than the patriarchal heterosexual gaze imposed on women. I will provide a reading of the texts in question as they are connected to the creation of normative queer behavior,

identity, representation and the possible effects of those culturally constructed notions. Finally, this analysis will reveal what is considered normative and the dominant ideologies in millennial queer visual culture as found within queer, print magazine publications—ultimately answering the question, “How have queer individuals represented themselves to themselves?”

Background and Framework

Visual Culture as Iconography and Style

In order to begin to conceptualize the queer visual culture presented in the publications in question, the work of Dr. Richard Lesure, professor of anthropology at the University of California Los Angeles, needs to be discussed for its importance in examining the power dynamics created by theories of visual iconography and style. More specifically, it is his 2005 article, “Linking Theory and Evidence in an Archaeology of Human Agency: Iconography, Style, and Theories of Embodiment” that provides important insight into visual studies. Lesure begins by discussing how many scholars have scrutinized the subjects of human agency, representation and structures that create social order in society. Lesure’s (2005) article states the following:

Of the many sources of archaeological evidence relevant to theories of embodiment, human representations are of particular interest. Ancient human images provide tantalizing views from ‘within’ – opportunities to glimpse how ancient people represented themselves to themselves. Images, though, are unlikely to have been simple reflections of a social ‘reality.’ (p. 238)

More importantly Lesure provides a fundamental critical basis for studying visual culture due to the power of the visual to construct subjectivity and therefore dominance as he asserts that, “Through a combination of iconicity and materiality, images help create subjectiveness—they shape peoples’ embodied experience by providing enduring points of reference both discursive and affective (Lesure, 2005, p. 238).

Lesure is not alone in his claims concerning the importance of the visual in shaping reality. In a work discussing the value of visual sociology, Harper (1998) asserts, “Images allow us to make statements which cannot be made by words, and the

world we see is saturated with sociological meaning” (p. 38). Gardner depicts the power of the visual image to create a sense of reality and comments on the human condition when he discusses the work of philosopher Nelson Goodman. He observes:

It is misleading to speak of the world as it is, or even of a single world. It makes more sense to think of various versions of the world that individuals may entertain, various characterizations of reality that might be present in words, pictures, diagrams, logical propositions, or even musical compositions. Each of these symbol systems captures different kinds of information and hence presents different versions of reality. All we have, really, are such versions; only through them do we gain access to what we casually term ‘our world.’ (Gardner, 1980, p. 94)

Scholars have also commented on the under representation of the visual and the elitist standpoint of the written word both in and outside of the academic field. In a piece discussing the use of photographs in research, Walker (1993) discusses the subordination of the visual in research and the paradox of being trapped in a field of study constrained by the written language. He notes:

It touches on the limitations of language, especially language used for descriptive purposes. In using photographs the potential exists, however, elusive the achievement, to find ways of thinking about social life that escape the traps set by language...Therefore images ‘are not just adjuncts to print,’ but carry heavy cultural traffic on their own account. (Walker, 1993, p. 72)

Lesure examines a very specific relationship of the visual to social life by answering the question of how visual embodiment theories including both stylistic and iconography analysis connect to the concept of meaning found within the structure of visual discourse. In doing so, he provides an analysis of how those methods can be utilized as analytical resources. His work also provides a clear distinction between the resources of iconography and stylistic analysis. For instance, iconography analysis is described as, “an analytical framework from art history offering investigators tools for

exploring what it is that representations depict” (Lesure, 2005, p. 240). However, Lesure observes that iconography is too much of a prescriptive process in which there is not enough interaction between theory and method. He explains that the answer for this interaction could be found in stylistic analysis. His conceptualization of style is focused on the idea that, “styles are particular ways of doing or, in the case of artworks, ways of making” (Lesure, 2005, p. 243). Most importantly Lesure provides the fundamental difference between the two ways of viewing visual culture through embodiment; he asserts, “Conceptualizing style in this way and juxtaposing it with iconography raises the specter of the much-reviled Cartesian dichotomies: iconography starts to sound like ‘thought’ and style like ‘action’” (Lesure, 2005, p. 243). While this is one way of defining the fundamental difference between the two types of visual culture analysis, Lesure also affirms there is a, “second way of conceptualizing the relation between iconography and style...iconography focuses on relations between an image and its intended subject; the focus of stylistic analysis is on relations between *objects*” (Lesure, 2005, p. 244).

If an individual is indeed studying the relationship between image and subject, image and other images, or “thought” and “action” in visual culture, it is also imperative to consider who or what groups have access to the concepts of “thought” and “action” in visual culture, and from that access how does this affect the visual consumer. Lesure employs the use of elements of semiotics and specifically the relationships between signified and signifier as ways of enriching visual cultural analysis; however, Lesure’s analytical examination of visual studies could also be enriched by further integration of theoretical framework outside of traditional visual studies and semiotic theory. Lesure’s

examination of visual cultural studies beyond that Cartesian dichotomy of iconography as ‘thought’ and style as ‘action’ can be enriched and further explained by the principal theoretical foundation of this analysis—male gaze theory. Lesure’s work solidifies the existence of power dynamics and categories in visual culture through iconographic and stylistic representation; however, as will be expounded, male gaze theory provides how the concepts of iconography or passive thought and style or active meaning making function in a visual culture where subjectivity and dominance co-exist.

The Male Gaze

In order to support my cultural communicative critique, it is necessary to provide a cursory understanding of the male gaze and the work that academics have completed on the subject thus far. Laura Mulvey, utilizing the work of Freud and Lacan, is probably one of the most noted scholars for coining the contemporary definition of gaze theory and more specifically patriarchal gaze. Manlove (2007) explained the extent of Mulvey’s psychoanalytic work in examining the power of patriarchy in Hollywood cinema, observing:

Since the early 1990s, something akin to ‘gaze theory’ has coalesced, in large part, because of the wide influence of Laura Mulvey’s 1975 essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” Mulvey’s thesis concerning the patriarchal structure of an ‘active’ male gaze has spread its influence far beyond feminist film critiques of Alfred Hitchcock and Hollywood, to film and cultural theory, and to theories of perception generally. (Manlove, 2007, p. 83)

Mulvey utilized the work of Freud and Lacan to develop her thesis of the male gaze starting with Freud’s conception of scopophilia. In describing the pleasures of the cinema, Mulvey (1989) elaborates the connection of the gaze, Freud and the cinema.

The cinema offers a number of possible pleasures. One is scopophilia (pleasure in looking). There are circumstances in which looking itself is a

source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at. Originally, in his *Three Essays on Sexuality*, Freud isolated scopophilia as one of the component instincts of sexuality which exist as drives quite independently of the erotogenic zones. At this point he associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze. (Mulvey, 1989, p. 16)

Mulvey (1989) also explains, “Mainstream film coded the erotic [and therefore scopophilia and the gaze] into the language of dominant patriarchal order” (p. 16).

Manlove (2007) drew similar conclusions as Mulvey concerning the connection between scopophilia and patriarchy. He states, “Scopophilia is one of several drives making up the patriarchal sexual order” (Manlove, 2007, p. 86). Mulvey specifically brings the concept of the “mirror stage” from the work of Lacan into Freud’s theory of scopophilia (Lacan, 1966). Mulvey’s use of Lacan’s theory of the mirror stage focuses on identification and the concept of the ego in the pleasure of looking. Mulvey’s (1989) essay describes the importance of the mirror stage in the following manner:

Jacques Lacan has described how the moment when a child recognizes its own image in the mirror is crucial for the constitution of the ego...The mirror phase occurs at a time when children’s physical ambitions outstrip their motor capacity, with the result that their recognition of themselves is joyous in that they imagine their mirror image to be more complete, more perfect than they experience in their own body. Recognition is thus overlaid with misrecognition: the image recognized is conceived as the reflected body of the self, but its misrecognition as superior projects this body outside as an ideal ego, the alienated subject which, introjected as an ego ideal, prepares the way for identification with others in the future. (p. 17)

Lacan’s work and the concept of the ego ideal is imperative to Mulvey’s conceptualization of the gaze because she explains that the mirror stage creates subjectivity that is experienced later on in life including the cinematic experience. Mulvey (1989) asserts:

The fact that is is an image that constitutes the matrix of the imaginary, of recognition/misrecognition and identification, and hence of the first articulation of the I, of subjectivity. This is a moment when an older

fascination with looking ... collides with the initial inklings of self-awareness. Hence it is the birth of the long love affair/dispair between image and self-image which has found such intensity of expression in film and such joyous recognition in the cinema audience. (p. 18)

Mulvey's conceptualization of the relationship of the pleasure of viewing and the act of forming an identity could be summarized as the following: Scopophilia arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight, and the constitution of the ego comes from identification with the images seen and through narcissism (Mulvey, 1989, p. 18). With the work of Freud and Lacan clearly connected to the notion of image as imperative to self and sexual identity, Mulvey's claims about the dangerous nature of the patriarchal gaze in cinema is substantiated.

At the core of Mulvey's thesis is the complete destruction of the idea of pleasure, and she clearly defines the role women play and how the male gaze functions in society. Mulvey (1989) contests, "Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning" (p. 15). Mulvey would argue that woman has been subjected to the male gaze that has prevented her from creating her own identity outside of the male fantasy. Mulvey in fact, gives the female no agency at all in regards to the pleasure in looking. This inability of females to experience pleasure in visual consumption is also supported by Merck. Merck (2007) notes, "In Mulvey's work there is an extraordinarily bold generalization [Mulvey states]: 'In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female'" (p. 13). Merck, directly quoting the work of Mulvey, attempts to illustrate that by depicting the female as passive in the cultural process of looking that

Mulvey also limited the ability of females to obtain power or pleasure within visual consumption.

Robert Schultz (1995) depicted this same conception of Laura Mulvey's work in an article in the *Hudson Review* in which he states, "Beginning in 1975 with Laura Mulvey's founding essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' male gaze theorists have regarded our culture's man-made images of women as the artifacts of male sexuality, analyzing how their patterns reveal the wishes, fears, and strategies of obsession" (p. 367). In other words, the visual culture that the male gaze constructs tells us more about the men than it can ever tell us about women. Consequently, many scholars suggest that the theory of male gaze conceptualized from Mulvey's standpoint is detrimental to women due to its limiting discourse of female subordination. Schultz (1995) himself asserts, "Male gaze theory ... leaves no space for heterosexual desire" (p. 370). Kaja Silverman questions Mulvey's definition of male subjectivity and desire for visual pleasure arguing, "Mulvey leaves unchallenged the notion that for the male subject pleasure involves mastery" (Silverman, 1980). Recent publications by feminist scholars including Katie Roiphe, Christina Hoff Sommers, and Nadine Strossen have focused on a discursive effort to counteract a tendency in previous feminist research to continually define woman within a continuing "cult of victimhood" such as the narrow passive/female characterization of women in Mulvey's work (Schultz, 1995, p. 370). Consequently as Schultz (1995) goes on to explain, "Some feminists, reasoning the implications of male gaze theory, have expressed reservations [with Mulvey's assertions]. Their chief objection has been that Mulvey casts women too narrowly in the role of object, with masochistic female spectators and actresses colluding in their own

exploitation” (p. 370). Cultural analyst Camille Paglia has a more radical interpretation of male gaze theory. She observes, “male gaze theory is a stale cliché and accuses academic feminism of having a man problem” (Paglia, 1989). These types of questions are aligned with the third wave of feminism that questions the construction of feminism as an affluent, white able-bodied construction.

While all of these scholars present relevant arguments connected to Mulvey’s conceptualization of patriarchal gaze and feminism, it is the question raised by Teresa de Lauretis in her work *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* which is most significant to my analysis. She asks, “What happens, I will ask, when woman serves as the looking-glass held up to women?” Lauretis introduces a complex cultural identity of homosexual womanhood into a power relationship that according to Mulvey was narrowly defined in a heteronormative milieu with woman only as the passive visual consumer. While this relationship and Lauretis’ question have great academic merit and warrant future research in the conceptualization of gaze theory, it is the homosexual male consumer and male representation in patriarchal gaze which I find to be intriguing subjects of inquiry. Consequently, this study explores male gaze in a queer male context to begin to construct how the concepts of iconography, style and patriarchal dominance manifest in queer visual culture. What happens when queer men serve as the looking-glass held up to men?

Scholars in a number of fields have completed exploratory research to examine gaze theory in a queer context. For example, Judith Mayne in her 1991 work entitled “Lesbian Looks: Dorothy Arzner and Female Authorship,” argued for the specific need to account for the lesbian spectator in the gaze (Mayne, 1991). Aside from the work of

Lauretis, there are other academics who specifically questioned the heteronormativity of Mulvey's patriarchal gaze. Manlove (2007) cites the work of Steven Neale: "In 1983, Steven Neale argued that the manner in which Mulvey describes the passive, feminine sense of 'to-be looked-at-ness' can also be applied to images of masculinity, both with regard to heterosexual female and gay identifications" (p. 85). However, I do believe that examining the distinction between the resources of iconography versus stylistic embodiment available to queer males as an avenue for creating meaning as well as formulating the communicative messages of the millennial queer male gaze is a beneficial way to add to the current academic theory in queer studies, communication theory, and gaze theory.

Linking Iconography, Style, and Male Gaze

It is imperative to understand that there is a theoretical link between the analytical concepts of iconography and style discussed by Lesure and the patriarchal gaze postulated by Mulvey. A comment by Mulvey must be revisited, "Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as a signifier for the male other, bound by symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning" (Mulvey, 1989, p. 15). Lesure defines stylistic visual culture as, "way of doing and making" (Lesure, 2005). Consequently, woman is not, in the eyes of the conception of Mulvey's male gaze, ever allowed to partake in stylistic representation. Instead, she is confined to the iconographic state of passive objectification; she can never partake or be aware of the stylistic means in which objects work together to create meaning in her life. So, if we are to believe that these conceptions put forth by Mulvey and Lesure are indeed

supported substantially, what is the male gaze in a queer context? Can men be represented stylistically as well as iconographically at the same time? Can this duality exist, and if so what are the implications on queer consumers? Whose interests are being served in the queer male gaze? At the core of the male gaze theory is the idea of a power relation created in the social order in which one individual is dominated by another through visual culture. So given the same-sex orientation of queer individuals and more specifically gay men, how can they exist in these roles simultaneously—oppressor and oppressed, visually present and absent, exploiter and exploited, bound by iconography and represented in style? And specifically what exactly does this duality create in queer visual culture? This study will answer some of those questions by performing a social text analysis of culturally specific male queer publications. While the theoretical foundation of this analysis was developed from analytical concepts of iconography and style as well as Mulvey's psychoanalytic patriarchal gaze theory, it is the critical, pragmatic research of feminist scholar Jean Kilbourne along with mass media and cultural studies researchers that provide the methodological basis for examining advertising as a vital communication milieu to explore the queer male gaze.

Advertising, Popular Culture and Power

Examining aspects of advertising and mass communication in various academic fields is definitely not a new phenomenon. For instance, cultural studies scholars have examined elements of mass popular culture for decades as cultural studies scholar

Douglas Kellner (1995) points out:

Radio, television, film and other products of the culture industries provide the models of what it means to be male or female, successful or a failure, powerful or powerless. Media culture helps shape the prevalent view of

the world and its deepest values: it defines what is considered good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil. (p. 1)

Media scholars have examined advertising from a multitude of perspectives in order to gain insight into the structure, meaning, and implications of mass mediated culture. As media scholar Linda Holtzman framed her work *Media Messages: What Film, Television, and Popular Music Teach Us about Race, Class, Gender and Sexual Orientations*, she depicts the various theoretical foundations from which elements of popular culture including advertising have been examined. Some of those theories included socialization theory, social learning theory, liberation theory, cultural competence theory, fabric of oppression, cycle of oppression, media literacy, analysis of production and economy, and character investigation, among others (Holtzman, 2000).

However, some of the most influential research has been the work performed by Jean Kilbourne, a social theorist most known for her revolutionary examination of the image of women in advertising. She has authored several books which have examined representation, values, relationships, and commitment to civic life as it is depicted through advertising messages. The most notable of these works came in the form of a documentary, *Killing Us Softly*, which has since been updated with two more versions in which advertising images of women are deconstructed and discursively reflected upon for their power over the way women have been depicted through advertising. For Kilbourne, advertising is a form of socially ingrained propaganda—the most effective kind. In her work *Deadly Persuasion*, she purports, “The most effective kind of propaganda is that which is not recognized as propaganda; because we think advertising is silly and trivial, we are less on guard, less critical, than we might otherwise be” (Kilbourne, 1999, p. 27). Her work into deconstructing advertising has been and continues to be revolutionary, and

it would be a detriment not to mention that my analysis of visual culture in a queer context was inspired by the work of Kilbourne. While Kilbourne never specifically cites male gaze theory in her work, it would be logical and beneficial to bring the theory into her work enriching the multi-disciplinary manner in which she examines advertising. However, like Mulvey's work, Kilbourne's theoretical perspective is steeped in assumptions of heteronormativity. Kilbourne clearly asserts the goals of her research and her ambition for continuing to deconstruct the image of women in advertising. She professes:

I have a daughter who is on the brink of adolescence. She is smart and kind, funny and radiant, creative and soulful (and I, of course, am completely objective), and I fear for her. I feel that I am raising her in a culture that is hostile to every single thing I want for her. I am raising her in a culture that still teaches girls are less valuable than boys, that girls are sex objects and must be beautiful and thin in order to be successful, that women who are the victims of sexual harassment and violence asked for it, and that women are completely responsible for the success or failure of their relationships with men. (Kilbourne, 1999, p. 30)

Kilbourne's concentration in her research has predominately focused on the examination of women in the media, and although she does concede that "the cultural environment is toxic for men and boys too," the examination of those advertising images are at best cursory (Kilbourne, 1999, p. 32). This is the point where my analysis was fully inspired. The comments that Kilbourne stated concerning her daughter are the same types of feelings I have seen in countless queer adolescents including my own experience of growing up a gay male constantly bombarded with advertising messages telling me what I should or should not, could or could not do or be. What is problematic specifically to the male gaze as a way of viewing utilized by queer consumers is that there is a distinct and detrimental dichotomy of messages presented—ones from the heteronormative

milieu and then from the homonormative one. Then, even more toxic to the queer identity, the homonormative visual culture presents the queer male consumer with a patriarchal gaze which constructs them as both the objectifier and objectified simultaneously. The queer male because of his dominant biological identification as male is caught in a cognitive dissonance where he is constructed as colluding in the meaning found within the queer gaze while also being subordinated by that same gaze—a position that according to Mulvey women do not experience.

Bi-Textuality and Dual Existence

Manlove (2007) discusses the work of Samuels (1998) who researches the concept of bi-textuality in a queer context. Utilizing Lacanian theory Samuels made two explicit arguments: “The unconscious is primarily homosexual rather than heterosexual, and that, when this is repressed and consciously replaced with a heterosexual vision of the world a ‘bi-textuality’ in film and culture exists” (Manlove, 2007, p. 85). This idea of “bi-textuality” lends itself to the concept that homosexual identity, representation and advertising images are constructed from an in-group and out-group perspective, and that those messages are extremely divergent from one another. There has been substantial work given to consideration of the homosexual representation in a heterosexual world. Corliss (1996) explored the evolution of gay representation through Hollywood culture beginning in the early 20th century. He begins by explaining that in the 1930s gays were familiar screen types of pansies, and moving into the 1950s, gayness was viewed as a social disease. Corliss goes on to explain that in the 1970s there was a new moral: the only good gay was a dead gay, and the only solution for being homosexual or engaging in a homosexual fling was suicide. Depicting the 1990s, Corliss depicts mainstream

America as typically treating gays as a joke or a curse (Corliss, 1996). According to James Keller, a new media phenomenon functioned in the discourse of popular culture in the beginning of the new millennium. Keller asserts, “[There was an] effort to construct a new, positive, and even mainstream media image for gays and lesbians” (Keller, 2002). However, Keller also goes on to explain that with this new found representation, there was also a severe disconnect to the socio-political struggles of the queer community and the struggle for equality. In a piece exploring queer imagery, Benshoff and Griffin (2006) shared the same view of the early millennium as Keller. They state:

Today there is a sense that queers have been constructed by dominant American culture as more of a target market than a political movement. Token queer inclusion within the public sphere has arguably lulled some people into a sense of complacency or at least changed the focus of the struggle. (Benshoff and Griffin, 2006, p. 268)

In more of a contemporary sense, the tokenism and inclusion in the public sphere that Benshoff and Griffin refer to has assisted in a movement toward positive identity and progression for the queer community in mainstream America in the latter half of the first decade of the new millennium. That is not to say that the current climate of mainstream American ideology is progressive and completely accepting of the queer individual, only that there has been substantial progression in the discourse of popular culture and the queer identity. Benshoff and Griffin also comment on the progression that is occurring in contemporary American culture. They observe:

But perhaps more important than a few openly queer celebrities or the handful of queer characters in Hollywood films is the fact that more and more people in Hollywood (as in America at large) now understand queer people as a minority group deserving of equal rights and protections under the law. As Suzanna Danuta Walters expresses it, ‘the attention to gays as a mis- and underrepresented minority marks a shift for the popular press....Newspapers, magazines, industry journals, and newsletters regularly report on the dilemmas of depicting homosexuality in the cinema

and publish quite stinging denunciations of Hollywood homophobia.’
(Benshoff and Griffin, 2006, p. 263)

While a small portion of mainstream American culture has been progressive in the representation of the queer identity, this analysis focuses on turning the lens inward to in-group representation and visual discourse.

To understand why the male gaze is central in constructing queer identity, it is imperative to understand that we as cultural consumers are involved in a highly complex process of collecting visual culture, not only the objects found in visual culture but often becoming the object ourselves. In a work examining the idea of collecting, White (2006) referenced the work of Elsner and Cardinal (1994) when she asserted the notion that, “Collecting is classification lived” (p. 257). She goes on to explain, “objects become understandable because of the way they are described and related to other things; collecting, in part the desire to acquire and group items, requires articulating a set of essential attributes” (White, 2006, p. 257). White’s assertions support the concept that being a cultural consumer of visual culture including advertising images, is a way of collecting visual cultural artifacts that assist in not only defining group identification but also demanding the enculturation of specific characteristics for the consumer to enact lived classification. Male gaze being a governing system of consuming visual culture also insinuates that it is a process of collecting visual artifacts and culture that are intrinsically connected to essential attributes focused in the paradigm of domination. A severe disconnect is found however in the idea of “essential attributes” of the queer experience of the male gaze. The homosexual experience exists in this idea of bi-textuality as there are messages which exist outside the dominant ideology of heteronormative advertising; consequently, there are culturally specific homosexual

advertising avenues such as gay magazines which construct representation, identity and community for the queer individual aside from mainstream representations. Continuing the representation of visual culture through iconographic and stylistic representations through the male gaze, in a heteronormative representation it would appear that queer males are not given agency to be involved in stylistic representations of meaning making; instead, they are limited to iconographic representations in which they are bearers of meaning limited by heteronormative ideology in the same manner in which women are confined.

The argument for the bifurcation of visual culture is further supported by the work of Worth (1980) who explains this concept in a slightly modified manner. Through his research, he has found there are “records of” and “records about” culture. Records of culture are the documents made by members of a culture themselves, while records about the culture are the documents made by outsiders (Worth, 1980, p. 123). As a queer consumer, we assume that stylistic representation is given when the male gaze exists in a queer context; therefore, queer individuals are in some way assisting in meaning making of their visual representations while making “records of” the queer culture. This in-group stylistic representation exists simultaneously while still being bombarded with iconographic visual culture and “records about” queer culture from the heteronormative mainstream in which queer consumers are confined as the bearers of meaning. So, the queer consumer is placed within a conflicting visual framework. The heteronormative gaze casts the queer male as bearer of meaning while the homonormative one constructs the queer male as the maker of meaning. At its core, gaze theory is constructed with the idea of pleasure in viewing with objectification occurring in order to uphold dominant

social order of the patriarchy. What is most volatile for the queer consumer and most intriguing for my analysis is the idea that the queer male gaze gives agency to the queer male to be the maker of meaning while concurrently objectifying the queer male consumer to be the bearer of that same dominating gaze from an in-group perspective. The purpose of this thesis specifically is to explore the following research question: If queer male gaze can be theorized as constituting a method of viewing in queer visual culture, what visual culture has been exhibited within the millennial queer gaze through queer specific publications? In other words, what constitutes the millennial queer male gaze? While the thesis will focus mainly on illustrating what visual culture has been constructed in queer pages due to the male gaze, implications of cultural consumptions of queer consumers in regards to normative queer behavior, identity and the possible effects of the queer male gaze will be explored as secondary research objectives.

Research Design

Methodology

In order to analyze a body of visual culture, several different methodologies could have been employed to discover implications of the male gaze in a queer context. However, my research objective is to examine the meaning and uses of the micro-level visual documents found in the queer male publications in question as they connect to the larger macro-level phenomenon of the social order and normative culture created from those artifacts. More generally, this analysis is meant to align with the critical paradigm of communication research. With those objectives in mind, I chose to utilize social text analysis as the analytical tool to deconstruct and then re-contextualize the images in question. Social text analysis can occur from a variety of perspectives including discourse/conversation analysis, the narrative approach, performative/dramatistic approaches and semiotics. For this particular examination, the communication criticism perspective on social text analysis is utilized. This perspective includes the steps of textualization, analysis, interpretation and judgment. As Baxter and Babbie (2004) explain, the goal of communication criticism is based, “within the case study tradition because communication critics usually seek to understand a single public message or a cluster of specific messages” (p. 354). Within that perspective of communication criticism, there are three distinct fields of communication criticism including the rhetorical tradition, the social tradition and the cultural tradition. This analysis is based upon the cultural tradition paradigm as the remaining traditions do not suit the research objectives of this particular study. Sillars and Gronbeck (2001) explain the fundamental

differences between these fields as well as what could be considered weakness in the research design in regards to examining culture from the other two perspectives.

The social tradition replaces persuasion [or rhetoric] with a different assumption about communication. Instead of viewing communication as a message transmission designed to persuade, scholars from the social tradition view communication as a process of identification: ‘showing people what they share in common.’ From [the social tradition], analysis is organized around goals of understanding how rhetorical texts construct (or fail to construct) shared meaning between people. (Sillars and Gronbeck, 2001)

The third category of communication criticism—the cultural tradition—fits the research goals of this particular analysis as it is aligned with the critical theory paradigm. From this perspective, Baxter and Babbie (2004) explain, “the social world is a world of fragmented voices, cultures, and groups; the goal of communication criticism is to liberate voices from cultural domination and to understand how cooperation is possible under conditions of cultural diversity” (p. 355).

The first necessary step of social text analysis is described as textualization. Textualization was depicted by Sillars and Gronbeck (2001) as, “constructions made from the work yet, in an important sense, are grounded *in* that work” (p. 26). This process, unlike quantitative research approaches, is meant to be subjective and several meanings and subjects of inquiry can be constructed from the artifacts in question. Baxter and Babbie (2004) explain the multi-dimensionality of meaning and research interests possible with textualization; they state, “many credible ‘texts’ can be located in a single ‘work’ or message” (Baxter and Babbie, 2004, p. 349). This step involves creating a method of analyzing the text(s) in questions; Baxter and Babbie (2004) describe this first step as “sense making” where important features of a work are constructed (p. 349). My particular method for textualization of the advertising images

involves coding the advertisements based upon the following categories: sponsoring company, a description of the ad, important ad copy, actions being performed, objects in the advertisement, appearance and state of the individual(s) in the advertisement, and settings. The process of social text examination moves from textualization to the step of analysis specifically. Analysis, as defined by Baxter and Babbie (2004), is, “the taking-apart process, breaking down a social text into its relevant units, dimensions, or themes” (p. 354). Consequently, each advertisement was coded along the dimensions that were outlined above. From this coding scheme, certain themes became apparent across the visual culture. These themes developed both from the “breaking down” process I employed and from previous themes that Kilbourne discovered in her own research of the image of women in advertising. It is important to note that the results will not simply mirror themes that are found within a single dimension; instead, advertising images have a high level of inter-textuality. This inter-textuality of the visual culture presented through the queer male gaze makes it important to this analysis to consider the various dimensions of each image simultaneously so that macro-level social themes could emerge. Once these themes became apparent utilizing the coding scheme, the next step of social text analysis was to apply interpretation which explained what the emergent themes may embody within and among the text(s). Baxter and Babbie (2004) define interpretation as, “the heart of social text analysis, [it] is [the] putting back together process that culminates in an argument by the researcher about what the text means to him or to her” (p. 354). The analysis section will delineate the themes found after employing the textualization step as well as include the interpretation step which will elaborate the meaning of the themes found across the visual culture. My decision to

combine the descriptive and analytical portions of my research directly correlate to the inter-disciplinary research style utilized by Kilbourne in her approach to deconstructing the image of women in advertising. Her approach to discursively reflecting upon the texts she has studied is one in which she discusses themes as well as the interpretation of both specific advertisements and groups of advertisements concurrently. The final step of textual analysis is considered to be an optional phase; Baxter and Babbie (2004) describe this step as one in which “effect[s] of the message and the communication competence of the speaker,” is assessed. This step is also discussed throughout the results as well—much in the same line of reasoning as the combination of the analysis and interpretation step. Kilbourne assesses the effects of emergent themes as she discusses them throughout her research. I believe that presenting these steps in a segmented manner would be a detriment to this critical analysis.

Other methodologies do exist for examining a body of visual culture; however, as I will illustrate these methodologies have inherent weaknesses in addressing my research questions and the queer male gaze. From a quantitative perspective, content analysis could be utilized to enumerate the details of communicative messages. However, the goal of this analysis is to go beyond structure and into the cultural implications of the messages being produced in queer visual culture. There has been debate among communication scholars as to the ability of quantitative content analysis to make conjectures concerning latent content of communicative messages. In his 1952 work, Berelson defined content analysis as, “a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (p. 18). However, other communication scholars have extended the conceptualization of content

analysis to include the ability to make inferences on latent content. Krippendorff (1980) believes that content analysis is, “a technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context” (p. 21). Baxter and Babbie (2004) working from the idea instituted by Krippendorff conceived content analysis as, “a research technique for the systematic, replicable, and quantitative description of the manifest or latent features of communication texts” (p. 240). While this technique may at first seem proficient especially in regards to Krippendorff and Baxter and Babbie’s conceptualization, quantitative text analysis has an underlying unilateral assumption in meaning. In other words, it assumes that there is only one relationship between meaning and the symbols found in texts. Scholars including Baxter and Babbie forfeit the weakness of content analysis; they concede that content analysis, “ignores connotative meanings and cultural (or sub-cultural) differences in meaning making” (Baxter and Babbie, 2004, p. 253).

When examining Berelson’s definition of content analysis, there is also an emphasis on the *objective*. While the concept of objectivity in academic research is debatable, in this particular analysis I have to concede that my analysis is a highly subjective reading of the texts in question. I did not conduct any type of participant related research; instead, the analysis is a highly subjective examination of visual imagery as it connects to a larger macro-level phenomenon of queer male culture. The justification for this subjectivity is found in my disclosure of my personal cultural identity as a queer male. Several scholars discuss the importance of understanding the context and group identification when examining visual culture. Becker (1998) stated that, “photographs [and other visual images] get meaning, like all cultural objects, from their context (p. 88). In a work examining the use of the visual medium of photography

in visual ethnographic research, Schwartz points to the importance of in-group identification and shared meaning. His research states, “Viewing photographic imagery is a patterned social activity shaped by social context, cultural conventions, and group norms... data [must be] assessed within the context of ... shared meanings (Schwartz, 1989). My identity as a queer male not only strengthens my assessment of the queer visual imagery, but it provides me justification in my subjectivity as a researcher. Being that I have been an openly queer male for a decade, I have achieved an in-group status that assists me in deconstructing and then recontextualizing queer visual imagery from a much more informed, socialized position. A researcher must share or learn linguistic, visual and non-verbal communication codes with the cultural group that is being analyzed; without this perspective, it is almost impossible to accurately decode the cultural artifacts presented to a researcher from an in-group perspective.

Another method that could have been utilized was rhetorical criticism; specifically, ideological criticism could have been applied to the texts in question. Ideological criticism focuses on how “many critics seek to explore the relationships between language, power, physical conditions, and the fundamental attitudes, values, and beliefs of a culture” (Burghardt, 2005, p. 451). Evaluative beliefs are applied to identify the natures of the ideologies presented as well as the strategies for upholding these ideologies. However, this methodology is extremely extensive in nature and examining such a large sampling of social texts from this perspective would be a very daunting task for a researcher.

Social text analysis, with its focus on critical analysis and cultural meanings, was the best method for achieving my research objectives. Visual culture as the focus of my

analysis of the queer male gaze was chosen not only due to Kilbourne's influence but also because the history of visual imagery in academic research. Visual culture as a document of socio-cultural pedagogy and as an anthropological unit of analysis dates back to the early 19th century with the advent of photography. Marcus Banks, a lecturer in social anthropology at the University of Oxford, explains, "In the late 19th century photography was used by anthropologists and para-anthropologists to record and document supposed 'racial types' as part of the discipline's project to provide a scientific study of humankind" (Banks, 1995). Furthermore, Banks provides the inherent connection between visual culture and the material culture which exists outside the visual world: "Photography was also employed as a 'visual notebook' by anthropologists to document aspects of material culture produced by a particular society" (Banks, 1995). Visual culture is not limited to the constraints of artistic or personal photographs; visual culture as a document form of a social text encompasses an almost limitless amount of possibilities.

Sampling

However, being inspired by the work of Kilbourne, my decision to examine the mass communication form of magazine advertisements as social texts was an uncomplicated decision; conversely, the selection process for obtaining a representative sample of queer millennial visual culture proved to be more problematic. In order to sample from the largest population possible, I conducted research and sampling at the ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives which houses the largest research library on GLBT history and culture (Burroway, 2008). Since the study is an examination of representation of the queer male gaze in visual culture representing the millennial queer

male, the volume of visual culture available for that time period at the ONE Archives was extremely copious. In order to answer the questions of what sampling method and size would not only be efficient, but also represent the vast amount of visual culture available, the work of Lacy, Riffe and Randle in their 1998 piece, *Sample Size in Multi-Year Content Analyses of Monthly Consumer Magazines*, was utilized as a sampling model. In the article, the researchers are attempting to answer the research question, “What size and type of probability sample will allow valid inference from a monthly magazine over an extended period of time?” (Lacy, Riffe, & Randle, 1998, p. 408). Specifically, “the study tests the efficiency of probability samples of issues of two monthly consumer magazines over five years, contrasting simple random samples with stratified, or constructed year, samples” (Lacy et al., 1998, p. 408). The evaluation of the sampling efficiency involved five variables typically used in magazine content analyses, and the sample efficiency was based on the distribution of sample means predicted by the Central Limits Theorem. The researchers arrive at the conclusion that a stratified, or constructed year, sample is superior to a simple random sample of a monthly magazine, concluding:

As with other forms of media content, sampling of monthly consumer magazines is more efficient using a stratified sample than a simple random sample. When sampling from a five-year period, a constructed year of 12 issues (one issue randomly selected from among the issues in each month) is more efficient and accurate than 20 randomly selected issues—the smallest simple random sample meeting standards of efficiency on all content measures. (Lacy et al., 1998, p. 414)

The researchers pose one other vital assertion in the concluding remarks of their study that is imperative to the sampling method that is utilized for this particular examination. The researchers assert, “even though we used a five-year ‘population’ to explore sampling efficiency, [the] study’s guidelines on sample size and technique may be more

useful for researchers who study trends in content in consumer magazines over even longer period of time, say 10 to 100 years” (Lacy et al., 1998, p. 414).

Consequently, with the support of the findings of the study completed by Lacy et al., it was my original intention to utilize a stratified random sampling method in order to create a constructed year for each publication which is sampled. Therefore, every month would have been represented, and each possible magazine and year that was printed and is available in the ONE archives for the millennial period being tested would have had an equal chance of appearing in the sample. Unfortunately, upon arrival at the ONE Archives, their electronic database was not equipped to populate a list based upon my criteria. In order to create the population list that I was hoping to gain electronically in a few seconds, it became more than evident that I could be spending years attempting to create the population list. The lead researchers at ONE Archives and I decided to further focus the possible population. We constructed a population based upon purposive criteria that included the following: In order to appear in the possible population, the publications had to be available on a national scale so that they did not represent smaller geographical locales; the publications would have to be active publications in that they either began publishing in or before January 2000 and were still actively being produced at the time of sampling¹; publications could not be pornographic in nature; and publications that were not printed in English would be excluded. After applying this criterion to the publications housed in the ONE Archives, we found the following publications: *Gay*

¹ The lead researchers and I made the assumption that the publication would most likely continue to publish through the rest of the millennial period so that the publication would indeed represent the millennium. However, this was an assumption made on my part as a researcher, and the likelihood or validity of this statement cannot be proven or disproven at this time.

Times, Genre, Instinct, The Advocate, and Out. For the timeframe in question, this created a population of 515 possible magazine issues. After applying the first level of random sampling, there were 60 issues selected which represented a constructed year for each publication. Unfortunately, due to constraints in travel plans and finances, I was unable to complete sampling for *Out*; however, my committee as well as the researchers at the archives did not believe that this would affect my ability to answer the proposed research questions.

As for the advertisements themselves, all of the covers and any advertisement including editorial shots which composed a full page were included in the sample. So, I collected data creating constructed year samples based upon the sampling frame of 2000 to 2008 for the four remaining publications. See table 1 for this level of sampling. The data collected represented over 1200 images; therefore, it was determined for the scope of my study that the analysis of that magnitude of visual culture would not be feasible for a master's level thesis. Consequently another level of sampling was completed where a constructed year for the sample frame in question was created across the publications. To ensure that one publication did not dominate the constructed year across publications, a probability proportionate to size sampling method was used. Since there were 4 publications and 12 possible months, each publication could only appear in the final data set for a fixed number of 3 times. Therefore, each publication represented three months of the randomly selected constructed year across the publications for the time frame in question. This level of sampling populated 293 images which were examined and coded using social text analysis. See table 2 for the final sample. It should also be noted that some issues of the publications were special double issues representing two months; these

issues were part of the sampling frame for both months that they represented. *The Advocate* was actually a bi-monthly publication, and each issue for a given month had an equal chance of appearing in the sample.

One last dimension of this analysis involves the semantic and cultural difference distinguishing gay and lesbian culture. While it can be assumed that a true queer culture does exist in which individuals of same-sex orientation do share similar cultural beliefs and behaviors, it is also necessary to distinguish that biological sex of male and female, and therefore the identification of gay and lesbian, do create distinct cultural groups in queer culture. This analysis is focused on queer visual culture and the experience of queer gay men. Consequently, the male body and identity will be the most prominent elements of discussion, and queer male gaze is discussed from the vantage point of queer male consumers. However, the effects of the queer male gaze on female and lesbian culture and identity will be discussed in this analysis as well.

Results

After I completed the textualization of the 293 images, a plethora of themes emerged from the coding of the visual culture, and interestingly some of the same themes utilized by Jean Kilbourne in her work *Deadly Persuasion* were also applicable to the queer male aesthetic. The results section is organized by first exploring some of Kilbourne's themes from her work that I observed being repeated in the queer male gaze, and then I discuss emergent themes connected to the ideology of the queer male gaze.

Individual and Object: One in the Same

One of the initial themes that mirrored the work of Kilbourne was that of the concept of individual as object, and this connected to a chapter from *Deadly Persuasion* written by Kilbourne called "We Are the Product." As an advertisement for Gay.com stated there is "steamy chat, pride personified, and men to watch." Apparently the pride that gay men experience is derived from their ability to have "steamy" discourse and their talent in level of look-at-ness or voyeurism is a necessity. This voyeurism is where the objectification of the queer male begins. There are numerous examples of gay chat lines being advertised especially in *Gay Times* in which for a small price per minute, gay men can "Get right to the action." At the extreme level of capitalistic objectification, several images featured escorts advertisements in which gay men could actually be purchased and used by other men. This type of objectification does not end with purchasing advertising space to promote these ideas; it is actually glorified. In a *Gay Times* editorial spread, the queer male viewer is presented with a photo of Slava Mogutin, an abundantly tattooed New York go-go boy and escort. The text on the page reads, "They're hot.

They're sweaty. And they're doing it for your pleasure – if you pay, of course.” The viewer is encouraged to pay for the sexual gratification that they are seeking, and in doing so, one reduces the queer male, or even “the straight guys who'd do ‘gay for pay,’” to being a consumable product that can be bought at will, if the price is right. And just in case someone was confused about actually purchasing a boy for their pleasure, one can go to rentboy.com to rent whatever pleasure one desires except that, “Money can't buy you love, but the rest is negotiable...” As well, in case the message was somehow ambiguous to the consumers of queer visual culture that men are indeed to become a product and objectified, an advertisement by AussieBum demands that the viewer remembers, “Guys are just sexual objects to abuse.”

But, what is that “price” and the “pride personified” in these images? Examining these particular ads, it would appear that the male gaze in a queer context dictates that human beings and more specifically men are indeed objects—objects which can be consumed and even possibly bought given the capitalistic means. This type of objectification is what Shultz (1995) calls sheer objectification where, “a person is reduced to mere object, the object of our selfish manipulations” (p. 377). The extreme of this sheer objectification occurs when individuals are reduced to actually becoming tangible objects without any real corporeal presence in the image. Interestingly enough, this type of objectification only occurred once among the sample which lends itself to the importance of the queer male body in visual culture which will be discussed further. But, the implications of this type of objectification go beyond selling; they affect self-identity of the consumers.

In her article entitled “Jesus Is a Brand of Jeans,” Kilbourne comments on the concept of the self as it is seen through advertising:

We know by now that advertising often turns people into objects. Women’s bodies—and men’s bodies too these days—are dismembered, packaged and used to sell everything from chainsaws to chewing gum, champagne to shampoo. Self-image is deeply affected. The self-esteem of girls plummets as they reach adolescence partly because they cannot possibly escape the message that their bodies are objects, and imperfect objects at that. Boys learn that masculinity requires a kind of ruthlessness, even brutality.” (Kilbourne, 2006, p. 11)

If this objectification in the heteronormative milieu has stark consequences on the self-esteem of girls and women, the same type of effects can occur among queer boys and men being subjected to a queer gaze that objectifies their bodies and identities.

We Are Not Whole: Segmentation and the Gay Marketplace

Kilbourne’s comments on identity and the self also connect to several other themes that became apparent after I completed the textualization of the advertisements in the sample. For instance, the idea that men’s bodies are shown fragmented rather than as whole individuals in many advertisements was also apparent. The viewer is shown entire backgrounds of chiseled torsos and muscular buttocks to show off designer underwear with no other means of identifying the wearer. The consumer is presented with headless, sculpted bodies selling products including videos, gay phone chat, a men’s only sauna club, and lubricant.

It is apparent that men’s bodies are also used to sell almost anything including a way of life that dictates sociological thought and the creation of normalcy in queer culture. This type of forum where body politics are being navigated to sell products as well as a way of life for the queer consumer has been identified as the gay marketplace of

desire. In an article examining the embodied experience of the pursuit of the gym body and heroic myth in queer culture, DiCarlo (2001) elaborates on the unsettling significance of the male body in that gay marketplace of desire. He asserts, “the values of the marketplace rule the central circles of gay life, perhaps to a disturbing degree, where the body is advertising and ‘knowing the price of everything’ is a main principle of doing business” (DiCarlo, 2001).

So, the question arises who exactly are queer consumers doing business with; in other words, what types of products are being marketed to queer consumers. Certain groupings of consumer products were very apparent through the analysis. Queer consumers were bombarded with messages connected to the ideas of travel, fashion, alcohol, parties, adult products, chat lines, and treatments for HIV and AIDS all of which created a commodity out of the male (often segmented) body. Experiential consumerism rather than the physical consumerism dominated the sample unless the image of course sold the queer consumer products that either provided sexual gratification or assisted in obtaining sexual gratification. Consequently, the queer male is implored to purchase those experiences which create the sensationalized life of a free sexual being travelling the globe all while looking stylish and sipping on a cocktail. The only apparent responsibility that seems stressed is after completing this sensationalized journey, the queer consumer has the responsibility to educate himself and be prepared for treatment of the epidemic of HIV and AIDS which has plagued the queer existence.

Great Sexpectations: Selling Sex

Without a doubt, the number one product that queer consumers are not only encouraged to consume copiously, but also to become themselves is—sex. Higgins

(2006) discusses the centrality of sex in the politics and identity of queer individuals' lives as a result of the lack of legal supports and socio-cultural practices and rituals for gay partnerships; this in turn causes a focus on sex and the body. Higgins statement about the focus on sex and the body was robustly supported when examining the visual culture represented in the sample. First, the queer visual culture presents the queer male consumer with clear images of men engaging in sexual acts or at least the beginnings of sexual experience. Wearing no more than their underwear, there are several instances in which one or both male(s) are reaching into or pulling down the underwear of the other. If the individuals shown in the image are not engaging in some type of sexual interaction with another subject, the visual culture often portrays the beginning of either self-gratification or the passive, chiseled male with inscribed messages of "horny sex chat," "sex date," "horny guys," "only for the perverted," "horniest, most explicit gay hardcore sex flicks," "tune in lie back and get off," "hungry for sex," "get into bed with these boys," "get screwed," and as the cover of one issue of *Instinct* stated, the queer consumer has "great sexexpectations." The queer male gaze functions in limiting queer visual discourse to cultural avenues intrinsically connected to sex and sexuality; that is not to say that visually present sexual acts or imagery of sexuality are in themselves inherently dangerous to the queer consumer. However, it is the saturation of sex and sexual products that dominate the queer male gaze, and in turn, other political and social ideological messages are subordinated within the gaze. Without living up to the "great sexexpectations" set forth for them in the queer visual discourse, the queer consumer would be left feeling empty as sex and sexuality dominate the inventory of the queer millennial gaze. The impetus put on sexual activity and desire expands far beyond visually present

sexual acts; it is insinuated within the inter-textuality of the image, the text and the product as well.

Sex seems to seep out from the visual culture presented concerning both the products we *need* and how we are in turn are *told* to use them. “More taste. More fun. More yum.” One has to wonder does the phrase refer to the three attractive men smiling flirtatiously at the viewer or is it the Diet Pepsi in the advertisement? Living in what Simpson (2004) called the “hyperconsumerist, post-industrial age of consumerism” of the new millennium, most male queer individuals would say both. The queer millennial man will not hesitate in having his “taste, fun, and yum” along with his Diet Pepsi. Even in the absence of the actual male body, the outward signifiers of the presence of the male body engage in sexual gratification. Gay Paris Las Vegas where “Everything’s sexier” features an overhead shot of two sets of male-gendered fashions engaging in a mockery of the beginnings of sexual practices. One set of clothes reaches over to begin to disrobe the other set of clothes by unbuttoning its shirt. The other set of clothing appears to be pulling off the belt of the other set of clothes. So even in the absence of the male body engaging in sexual acts or gratification, the objects which we use, buy, and consume can stand in as valid alternatives to remind the queer consumer of their role as sexual beings. Further, the viewer of this image is given the omniscient viewpoint to engage in voyeuristic pleasure of inanimate objects performing sexual acts. Even the Xerox copy machine that one should purchase for their business becomes an object which reminds us that even paper copying can be sexy while there are juxtaposed phallic images of red, green, and yellow peppers and the following caption: “Take your everyday business document spice it up with Xerox color and it could attract 82% more attention. Now,

that'll heat things up.” It is indeed a very easy act to cognitively connect the act of being sexy while making copies, and in turn, attracting the type of sexual “attention” that has been presented through the sexual inter-textuality presented throughout the magazine publications.

If the practice of the absolute need to engage in sexual gratification is not seen or declared within the image, even the interrogative culture presented insinuates that the queer male consumer should be or at least thinking about engaging in sexual activity. Atlantis Cruises presented this type of sexualization as their advertisements appear several times across the various publications in which they ask the queer male consumer, “Do you cruise?” Cruising sites, a place where queer men go to engage in or find sexual encounters, along with the act of cruising which is to make apparent that an individual wants to engage in sexual acts with another is an enacted, embodied experience of the queer male. This type of sexual encounter requires no depth, knowledge of the other person’s background, or at times even their name to engage in sexual encounters. It has become natural and easily distinguished among queer males to recognize the act of being cruised. In an interview discussing violence in the gay community, a young male interviewee responded in the following way describing the act of cruising:

Respondent: You know, it’s scary, when you see all those men looking at you like that.

Interviewer: How do they look at you?

Respondent: Really horny, they just want to fuck you there and then.

(Van Der Meer, 2003)

So, the Atlantis advertisements repeatedly position the queer male consumer with the question of cruising, and the repetitive nature of the message in itself dictates that not only should a queer male be performing the act of cruising if they are not, but it also

creates the normalization of the act. Atlantis encourages that their cruise ship can and will indeed become a spatial manifestation of a cruising frenzy especially with the abundance of perfectly sculpted, happy queer men shown within the images. So, without this enactment of cruising, the queer male feels somewhat incomplete and empty in his fulfillment of his identity, but Atlantis will gladly assist them with fulfilling this need for a price.

Another travel company, RSVP Vacations, posed the question, “Wanna have some fun?” The queer consumer can’t help but insinuate that the “fun” within the image is intrinsically connected to the shirtless, smiling and highly attractive men that look directly at you enticing you to be a part of their world. A shirtless, muscular male promoting a gay chat line also asks the queer consumer, “Up for it?” The inquisitive text presented in the visual culture which continues to suggest and almost demand sexual exploration is found throughout various other images in the sample. The queer consumer is presented with the pressing questions, “Hungry for Sex?,” “You are getting enough, aren’t you?,” and “How will you swagger in?”

Sex but No Romance

Sexualization of the queer identity also has an explicit effect on how the queer male maintains romantic relationships. Kilbourne discussed this in *Deadly Persuasion* when she discussed the corruption of human and romantic relationships that occurs within the visual and the written culture presented by advertising.

The problem with advertising isn’t that it creates artificial longings and needs, but that it exploits our very real and human desires. In some ways, advertisers know us better than we know ourselves, and they use this knowledge to take advantage of us. Above all, advertising promotes a corrupt and bankrupt concept of relationship. (Kilbourne, 1999, p. 77)

Interestingly, for the queer male consumer it is almost impossible to find evidence of romantic relationships; instead, the relationship role is replaced with a very clear message that could be summarized as, “Sex, not love.” The constraints of the sexual politics of the queer consumer become clear in an advertisement sponsored by Inerflora—a website which specializes in florists. This particular advertisement is for a day that has been reserved for love and the lovers, Valentine’s Day. The visual culture presented in the image is of three red roses and one stem which form the phallic shape of the male penis, and the text above this phallus reads, “Floral sex.” On a day that has symbolically stood for the romantic relationship and celebration of love, the queer consumer is not instructed to love. Instead, the queer male consumer is to engage in sexual acts. Further, the corporeal existence of the male body or a couple is not visually presented in the image leading a queer consumer to narrowly define their role within the sexual rather than the romantic culture typically associated with Valentine’s Day. Not interested in “Floral sex” on Valentine’s Day? Well, the queer male can instead go to www.sexyflorist.com and send a dozen long stemmed G-strings. This editorial advertisement features the sculpted torso of a faceless male holding one of the G-strings bouquets over his pelvic region in which the predominant text reads, “Fluffer what’s up and out front this month. A sexy florist? Finally.” In this instance, the queer male gaze functions in a similar way to the heteronormative patriarchal gaze. As Kilbourne (1999) states, “advertising promotes a corrupt and bankrupt concept of relationship” (p. 77). The millennial queer male gaze creates a visual discourse where relationships are outside the sense of normalcy for queer individuals; instead, a damaging alternative of sexual pleasure and desire replaces the concept of relationship for queer men.

The inability to escape the sexually constructed visual world far exceeds the day reserved for lovers; it is repeated continuously across and throughout the publications that were included in the final sample. Three advertisements found in succession of one another sponsored by the Gay Men Fighting AIDS (G.F.M.A.) in *Gay Times* posit the question, “Enjoy Fucking?” across all three advertisements in which anthropomorphic cartoons are engaging in sexual intercourse. Each of the advertisements also contains the phrase, “Condoms and plenty of water-based lube still provide the safest fuck.” With what seems like a visual attack of sexual desire and enactment, a queer male is also directed to the products that he will need to satisfy his *innate* sexual desires. Elbow Grease, a personal lubricant, features an advertisement where a male torso (once again faceless), is being massaged by a set of clearly male hands with the inscription, “Serious lubricant for serious sex.” There are numerous examples of advertisements which feature both locations where sexual gratification can take place or be planned and adult products which will assist the queer male consumer in achieving the “serious sex” he has been demanded to achieve.

The sexual politics of the male body is not, however, confined to the homosexual identity. The Aussie Bum advertisement discussed earlier in which the ad copy read, “Guys are just sexual objects to abuse,” actually features a male in his Aussie Bum underwear and a female in the background reapplying her lipstick as they appear to have just finished a sexual encounter in a pickup truck. While this is interestingly one of the few instances of heterosexuality portrayed throughout the sample, it also reinforces the idea that not only queer men, but all men regardless of sexual orientation are to be used and abused at will. With the limited number of heterosexual signifiers found throughout

the sample, the queer male consumer easily draws the distinction that no matter what his sexual orientation, his role as a male in visual culture is indeed intrinsically linked to sexual practice and not love, romance, or a relationship. Or perhaps better stated, the only relationship he should be concerned with is the one between himself and his sexual partners—not partner.

There are instances when the concept of love does appear among the sample; yet, this sociological construct is still connected to the concept of sexual gratification rather than romance. A social awareness advertisement sponsored by the Community HIV and AIDS Prevention Strategy (CHAPS) features a male wearing army pants, tall leather boots, and a mesh tank top that apparently is experiencing cognitive warfare between his penis and his brain. A line pointing to his penis reads, “I want to feel close to him. I want us to fuck without a condom.” The line pointing to his brain states, “We don’t need to fuck without a condom to show we love each other.” Romantic love in the physical sense seems out of the grasp of the queer consumer; all while, sex and “fucking” is readily available. Queer men are constructed as such sexually active beings that they also engage in overtly sexual intercourse and foreplay with inanimate objects. In an editorial spread called Peepshow that featured Diesel underwear, four men are shown engaging in sexual interactions with male mannequins. With their underwear strategically placed to expose their perfectly round buttocks, men engage in various sexual acts with inanimate mannequins including licking the ear, simulating intercourse, dripping saliva down the buttocks of a mannequin, and seductively kissing. The mannequins and the subjects are apparently very important people as the one of the signs in the six page spread says, “VIP Room.” So, the viewer of the image can easily deduce that in order to be labeled

someone with any level of importance in the queer world, said individual would naturally be engaging in sexual encounters. As to not leave any ambiguity for the queer male consumer concerning the magnitude and importance of his sexual existence, he is reminded finally that he is “Licensed for SEX” as an advertisement for an adult store plasters across close to 75 percent of a full page advertisement.

Relationships are not completely absent within the visual culture presented to the queer male consumer; however, these sporadic portrayals of relationships become trivialized and commoditized in order to sell queer male consumers products which in turn devalue those relationships. Kilbourne discusses this trivialization as well. She asserts, “We are surrounded by hundreds, thousands, of messages every day that link our deepest emotions to products, that objectify people and trivialize our most heartfelt moments and relationships” (Kilbourne, 1999, p. 77). Avis, a car rental company, utilizes the image of two smiling men touching foreheads to sell the queer consumer the idea of 10 free songs and the ability of a domestic partner to be included as an additional driver automatically if an individual signs up online. Another Avis advertisement also appeared in the sample in which the advertisement was very similar to the previous; except, this time two free DVDs were promised to the queer consumer. Six other instances of romantic relationships appeared among the 293 images that appeared in the final sample in which couples were visually present within the picture. Ironically, one of those images is for an editorial about the concept of monogamy in gay relationships, and the title of the article is “I Only Have Eyes for You.” The visual information presented to the viewer contradicts the statement completely. A male couple who are walking down the beach holding hands glances back to the background where another attractive man is

standing behind them. As previously discussed, the act of cruising is illustrated within the image. For the queer consumer, the ability to maintain a monogamous relationship with another individual even when the textual information dictates one can is discredited within the visual culture presented to the viewer. The other text imposed on the image reads, “Yes, it’s the one topic you thought *Instinct* would never touch: Monogamy! But can we make it through without our eyes wandering?” The visual culture presented in the image clearly answers the questions for the consumer with a firm, “No.” Further, the coverage of such a topic of monogamy among gay men seems to be almost implausible according to the text presented.

That is not to say that monogamy was not presented as an option for queer men; however, when these options are available to the queer consumer, the male corporeal representation is incomplete or absent. Wyndham Hotels & Resorts pose the question, “Do you want a wedding venue with experience making two grooms happy? Tell us your idea of a perfect commitment ceremony and we’ll make it happen.” The visual culture presented is incongruously only of one male smiling with the text next to him, “I want a band that’s so good even my dad will get up and dance.” In the one advertisement that mentions marriage and a commitment ceremony—the only opportunity among the sample to present a solid, committed relationship—the visual signification of a male couple is incomplete. With the inability to create a holistic image of visually present stable relationships, the queer male is even more susceptible to the alluring sexually promiscuous lifestyle presented throughout the visual culture existing among the publications. In an advertisement for Washington Mutual, the viewer is shown an image of two small black male icon figures holding hands and presented with a list of their

separate possessions. Then the viewer is taken to the final textual signifier of “their joint checking account.” Should this image be considered the one shining example of stability of the queer male relationship? Can queer men identify themselves with the same visual symbols that adorn restroom doors to signify that this space is indeed for men? With the vast amount of bright colored, visually present and muscular male bodies found throughout the rest of the sample, it seems highly implausible that queer men would identify or find commonality among the flat, non-muscular restroom door icons that stand as one of the few symbolic instances of love and relationships throughout the sample. Overall, it is apparent that the queer male gaze is functioning in subordinating the concepts of monogamy and romantic love. The hazard in the visual absence of these concepts in millennial queer visual discourse is found not only in limiting queers in their possible identities but also in the on-going battle for marriage equality in the United States. If queer individuals are continuously bombarded with images imploring them to be promiscuous sexual beings along with the virtually absent examples of stable relationships in the sample, the in-group visual culture acts in opposition of the political struggle for the advancement of marriage equality for queer consumers.

Pursuing Perfection

With sexual desire, objectification, and engagement as the most visually present themes among the sample, one would assume that this sexual gratification is easily accessible and instantly available; however, this is not the case. The sexual politics that are portrayed throughout the visual culture presented to the viewer are restricted to a very specific sect of queer men—those that fit into narrowly defined physiognomic characteristics. The queer male should exemplify and desire a very specific, perfected

male body image which Lambert (2006) described as, “the robotic, numerically ordered ‘man,’ with big muscles, a big dick, and tough outlook” (p. 61). The theme of the male perfect body image is depicted throughout almost all of the images found in the sample. Not only are these models muscular, sexually assertive, and mostly naked, they are flawless in every way possible. There are no pores, no acne—no room to be anything but perfection. These visual representations leave no room for interpretation of what corporeal characteristics gain inclusion or exclusion in not only gaining sexual gratification and sexual self-esteem, but even achieving in-group status within visual culture. The queer viewer is virtually demanded to achieve this idealized embodiment in order to obtain this inclusion and satisfaction of the sexual desire that is so prevalent within the pages of millennial queer advertising.

The queer male is visually assaulted with images of male perfection and the pursuit of that ideal in every type of advertisement in the same vein as women in Kilbourne’s research. The queer consumer is involved in an intricate internalization process related back to the mirror stage of the male gaze. As Mulvey had elaborated, images are collected in order to create identification along with (mis)recognition. The pursuit of the perfection idealized within the pages of the millennial queer aesthetic is the norm created for queer men. This normalcy almost leaves no choice for the queer male than to strive to achieve the idealized male body form or be forced into visual exile as the outsider. Even more dangerous, the queer male gaze casts the queer male in creating the visual world that he consumes; he fashions this world of perfection.

If a viewer has a medical ailment such as, for example, cold sores, they are reminded, “Nobody looks HOT in a cold sore.” In a simple declarative statement

promoting the fashion company Otter Fashion, the queer consumer is instructed, “BehOtter.” Even if the individual happens to be clothed in a manner in which their torso or underwear is not exposed, they are the epitome of fashionably, confident men who serve as exemplars to embody aesthetic perfection. The importance of fashion in the visual representation of gay men was noted by Ball (1998) in his work discussing the visual availability of culture: “The powerfully symbolic visual availability of the person in culture is evident in styles of clothing and self decoration, as revealed in for example body and facial art, tattooing, body piercing and clothing fashions” (p. 136). The “styles of clothing and self decoration” for queer men are clearly defined across the sample, and any divergence from the symbolic visual culture presented could lead to a form cultural exclusion.

This perfected visual image of the male body comes at a severe cost to the queer male consumer. First, with the abundance of the idealized image across the sample, the naturalness of this perfection becomes the standard. The queer consumer is persuaded to believe that any queer male can achieve this idealized state. The effortlessness is supported by examining the sample for images that would indicate that the perfected male body image actually requires substantial effort from the viewer. Those types of images are virtually absent from the visual culture presented. Out of the 293 images that were coded, only 3 of these images actually present the queer male viewer with indications that the perfected image may in reality require effort from the viewer. One cover of *Gay Times* portrays a man engaging in weight training; he is posed perfectly to be mid rep of a bicep curl so that he can look directly at the viewer with no sign of struggle or effort. Bud Light presents the viewer with an image of three men running

along the beach; however, these men are not purposely engaging in physical activity for health reasons. Instead, the men appear to be roughhousing in the water enjoying their Bud Lights. The third image, an advertisement for a testosterone booster and dietary supplement called Gamma-O, finally offers the queer male viewer the one avenue through which he can achieve the sculpted, muscular ideal that he has been presented continuously to him. With Gamma-O, the queer male can, “Get Hard...Stay Hard,” “Build Lean Muscle,” “Increase Energy,” “Enhance Sex Drive,” and “Boost Testosterone Naturally.” Aside from these images, there is no evidence portrayed visually to the queer male consumer which would indicate that the perfected idealized male body image was not easily obtainable. The pursuit of this idealized body image and dangerous behaviors associated with it has been described as the Adonis complex by Higgins; he stated, “The Adonis complex and obsession with body image means that men are now muscling in on what was seen as the almost exclusive domain of women body image disturbances and eating disorders” (Higgins, 2006, p. 90). Kilbourne also commented on the hazardous effects and dangerous normalcy related to the idealized state in her own research.

In the world of advertising, only young and beautiful people have sex. We rarely see eroticised images of older people, imperfect people, people with disabilities. The gods have sex, the rest of us watch - and judge our own imperfect sex lives against the fantasy of constant desire and sexual fulfillment portrayed in the media. Inevitably, this affects our self-images, making us feel less desirable, less sexy. (Kilbourne, 2005, p. 120)

While queer visual culture cannot be attributed as the sole determinant in hazardous behaviors associated with achieving the idealized queer male image, it is apparent through this analysis that it is one of the contributing factors leading to it as the visual culture presents no other alternative for the queer male consumer.

It's Still a White Washed World

This perfected image extends beyond chiseled crevices and perfect skin, it reaches into an area of divisional sociological thought—race. Within the framework of race, there begins an ontological and epistemological battle of hierarchies of dominance where whiteness repeats the hegemonic structure of the heterosexual world. In examining the sample, whiteness begins to look like the standard or an undetectable model which operates to create normalcy in queer culture. Examining images which contain crowds of individuals, the viewer is presented with a veritable sea of whiteness for which racial diversity is never achieved. The looking glass which queer men hold themselves up to within the visual culture presented in queer publications is predominately a white one. In a work examining the white male body in society, Perkinson discusses the dangerous normalcy which the white male body has been inscribed with the elitist position within visual culture.

The White middle-class male body remains the presupposition of gaze, the norm of ontology, the artifact of institutional discipline, [and] the criterion of ethical interrogation... White middle-class male forms of embodiment in this country are largely unconscious and inarticulate. They tend to encode technologies of normativity that do not require the work of conscious performance. They constitute an unproblematic physicality in the body politic. They navigate social space—both public and private—unobstructed, un(re)marked. (Perkinson, 2002, p. 174)

It is evident that Perkinson's assertion also applies to the visually constructed world of the queer male consumer. There exists a homosexual white privilege in which queer individuals see whiteness not only as the dominant in the visual culture, but the unquestioned norm.

Whiteness may be the dominant within the queer visual culture represented; however, some racial diversity does exist within the sample, but with one important area

in which racial diversity seems to be virtually absent—sex. So, first where does racial diversity exist in the queer consumers' visual world? Racial diversity only exists within the everyday, non-intimate settings that include instances of practicing for a play, a group of businessmen enjoying a ride in a convertible, office workers completing tasks, a group of hikers overlooking a cliff, and advertisements that feature the consumption of either beverages or beer. There are also several images that feature racial diversity which constitutes transitory images that would have had the likelihood to show up in heterosexual publications as well, and these images include advertisements for the television show *Weeds* and an ad for Cannon Cameras.

What is often and most interestingly shown through various images in the sample is a segmented visual frame which acts as a socio-spatial barrier to racial diversity occurring within the image. Basically, several advertisements feature different races as well as various ethnic representations; however, this diversity within the whole image is most often segmented into smaller racially specific images within the larger image. For instance, in several advertisements for RSVP Vacations as well as an advertisement for the site OnlyinSanFrancisco.com, the viewer is presented with smaller images that are clearly demarcated with a divisional border within the whole advertisement. Within each of these borders, a viewer will find black men with black men, white women with white women, Hispanic men with Hispanic men, and white men with white men. Taken as a whole these images may at first gaze appear to be racially diverse, but the socio-spatial barriers of empty space or divisional lines dictate that there is actually a separation between these images and therefore a visual barrier of racial diversity. Racial diversity exists within the constraints of the divisional lines not between them. While this

representation could be attributed to a white construction of racial diversity, a clear message of homogeneity and separation of groups is presented to the queer visual consumer.

There is one area of a queer man's visual identity that is concisely defined across the sample, and that is his role as a sexual being. Ironically, in this *principal* area of a queer man's visual identity, racial diversity is either completely nonexistent or is only achieved within a fantasy world. The images which contain multiple individuals engaging in or insinuating sexual acts do not represent racial diversity, and in fact have a predominant white racial aesthetic which once again supports the notion of the impetus set on the enactment of sex when the dominant hierarchical group is the foremost group engaging in the interactions. Referring back to the comment by Kilbourne in regards to the notion that, "The Gods have sex, the rest of us watch," the queer male gaze clearly defines the dominant, and therefore God-like, racial identity as white. Across the sample, the white aesthetic defines the ideological impetus set on sex and sexuality, and the virtual absence of other racial identities engaging in or being included in the conceptualization of sex constructs them as subordinate and devalued within the queer male gaze. In fact, only one image out of the sample featured a black male promoting sexual engagement. In an advertisement for ProwlerTV, a ripped black male with small gym shorts that accentuate the outline of his penis looks down at the viewer demanding, "Tune in, lie back and get off."

Interracial diversification in sexual practices only occurs within the fictitious fantasy worlds of symbolic caricatures that stand in for the actual male physical body. The advertisements for the GMFA which featured the text, "Enjoy Fucking?" discussed

earlier, feature drawings of racially diverse individuals engaging in explicit sexual acts; however, the real male body is absent. The queer visual culture presented across the sample provides no realistic representation of racial diversity in sexual engagement; instead, that diversification is left to the world of fantasy in which the enactment of sexual gratification between races does not occur in the real world.

Whiteness seems to dominate the visual frames of the queer visual world; however, there are instances, albeit a few, where the white aesthetic is not featured as the central subject of the image. Perhaps one of the few positive examples of visual culture among the sample, an advertisement for Viracept, a HIV treatment, features a black male that has a tank top on and his arms crossed. The image reads, “What about the long term?” The GFMA produced an image to raise awareness for the connection between HIV positive smokers and lung cancer. In this ad, a black, faceless man is smoking a cigarette as his exposed torso is utilized to pictorially draw a set of lungs. One other image features non-white subjects as the central image, and this is for an advertisement for Tylenol PM in which a black male who is clothed is seen lying in bed sleeping. These may be considered somewhat positive visual portrayals; however, one other instance featuring dissent from the dominant whiteness of the visual frame seems to completely destabilize the previous images in regards to the black male body. In an editorial advertisement featuring the photographic work of David Rothwell, a black male is presented in what Werness calls a zoomorphic state; zoomorphism involves, “art that imagines humans as animals” (Werness, 2004). The black male has taken on the characteristics of a wild, enraged cheetah evident by the black spots inscribed on his skin and his razor sharp fangs showing as he growls ferociously for the viewer. This

embodiment of the black male figure is also collared with a diamond encrusted chain choker that sparkles in the image. Not only has queer visual culture presented the queer, black male body as animalistic and primitive in nature, he too is to be owned and trained due to his ferocious disposition. One cannot help but see the correlation to the visual propaganda created during and pre-Civil Rights Era that was meant to dehumanize and devalue the black body. In a work discussing the visual representation of the black male body, Herman (1995) stated, “Self representations of black masculinity in the United States are historically structured by and against dominant (and dominating) discourses of masculinity and race, specifically whiteness” (p. 402). The reading of the visual image in question is clearly one that has been constructed “by and against dominating discourses” of race. The dominant white, out aesthetic does not feature the white male body in a zoomorphic state or in any type of primal visual mode for that matter. Since the access and enactment of sex is absolutely necessary in the queer visual, the lack of that access combined with the subordinated, animalistic nature of the black male body in queer visual culture makes it clear that the black male body is oppressed within the queer male gaze.

Race is not only segmented and compartmentalized between the dichotomies of black and white. Queer visual culture creates distinctions for other racial identities as well; identities that reminds the viewer that these individuals—these groups of people are indeed different and should in turn be labeled in that manner. In one of the few representations of Asian individuals in the sample, Water Bearer Films promotes three movies which only feature Asian actors. The images within the advertisement are those of the covers of the three films. Interestingly, the viewer is presented with images of

fully clothed and affectionate, rather than sexual men. One cover includes a male couple kissing and then embracing one another, and another portrays a couple leaning their heads against one another's in a loving manner. It would also seem that the Asian male has the same lack of sexual embodiment that the black male has within the visual culture presented. Further, the image as a whole reminds the viewer that these individuals are indeed different both visually and textually from everyone else. The ad reads, "Hot...Sexy...Romantic...Asian." The irony and visual constraints of the statement are found in the lack of representation of "hot" and "sexy" that the white out aesthetic dominates. Perhaps once an individual purchases the video and watches it behind closed doors, the queer aesthetic will provide the representation of "hot" and "sexy" for the Asian male; however, those types of visual identifiers are not provided for the queer Asian male. In his 1996 work, "Notes on Queer 'N' Asian Virtual Sex," Tsang discusses the work of Fung (1991) concerning the otherness inscribed in queer bodies and the subordinated sexual representation of races other than white in the gay milieu.

Gay society in North America, [being] organized and commercial, is framed around the young middle-class white male. He is its customer and its product. Blacks, Asians, and Latin-Americans are the oysters in this meat market. At best we're a quaint specialty for exotic tastes. Native people aren't even on the shelves. (Tsang, 1996, p. 159)

There is a clear message delivered through the queer male gaze as to what the *shelves* contain for queer consumers, and the message is even more concise in regards to the ontological and epistemological norm of whiteness in the millennial queer aesthetic.

Masculine Up *Here*, Feminine Down *There*

Within the queer pages, the struggle of visual, hierarchical dominance extends far beyond the sociological conceptions of race and white privilege; it continues into a dangerous repetition of the hierarchical authority of masculinity that is seen within heteronormative milieus. The impetus placed on the standard of masculinity is first defined within the semantic identification of queer men with their label as gay. The linguistic identifier carries with it an implied sense of effeminacy that has been constructed within a heteronormative social structure. The connotative constraints that the heterosexual dominance created around the identifier gay became intrinsically linked to feminine behaviors and, consequently, a devalued state. Bergling (2006) discusses his interviews with gay men concerning masculinity which led him to an assertion of the perception of femininity within queer male culture: “[Gay men] don’t like effeminate behavior much, because our society at large devalues femininity itself. Men are up *here* in the social structure; women are down *there*” (p. 32). Ironically, the in-group perspective of the gay male in queer pages is one inundated with masculinity—one which is demanded, not chosen. This type of hyper-masculinity is a necessary attribute of the queer male gaze, and within this masculinity, cultural hegemonic forces are functioning to oppress those outside of those hyper-masculine ideals. For the effeminate-gay male or even a queer male taking on any level of effeminacy, his identity is one virtually absent from the millennial queer gaze; however, with the inundation of hyper-masculine visual imagery, he is persuaded to believe that these ideals should be his own. This hegemony is very similar to the manner in which heterosexual women feel compelled to achieve ideals of hyper-femininity portrayed through mainstream representation of women.

Kilbourne discusses the dissonance that is created by these unrealistic ideals in advertising:

The wreckage that ensues when people try to emulate the kind of sexuality glorified in ads and popular culture is everywhere. And many who choose not to act on these impulsive sexual mandates nonetheless end up worrying that something is wrong with them, with their flawed and ordinary all-too-human relationships. (Kilbourne, 2005, p. 122)

Martino further discusses the dangerous demand of masculinity and its lineage beginning with linguistics in a piece examining masculinities in queer culture:

The effect of the iteration of such norms is experienced as a lived necessity for these gay men who are compelled by law of doing masculinity in the service of warding off any attributions of effeminacy that further reinforce the reading of homosexual as deviant. In this sense, 'straight-acting' functions as a compensatory mechanism for displacing an already internalized sense of inferiority that is attributed on the basis of identifying as gay, constituted as failed masculinity. (Martino, 2006, p. 43)

So with the label of gay, the battle of bi-textuality begins with masculinity as the variable between the heterosexual and homosexual visual worlds. Martino is not stating that masculinity only develops in queer men out of a necessity to displace the effeminate characteristics that heteronormative society placed upon them; however, the perpetuation of the female and femininity as inferior and a heterosexist viewpoint of gay men as effeminate leads to a sense of hyper-masculinity within queer men in order to defend the subordinate position created for them from an out-group perspective.

This hyper-masculine ideal in queer visual culture begins with the perfected male body that has been previously discussed. The male body stands as the first visual signifier to assert masculinity as an outward, embodied experience. When discussing the Adonis complex, Higgins (2006) elaborates the role of the male body in asserting masculinity and devaluing femininity; he stated, "If male equals power within patriarchal

societies, and the quintessential signifier of male is an idealized version of the hard, athletic, muscular physique, a gay man's assertion of his masculinity through the sculpting of his body is a means by which to eradicate all vestiges of the feminine" (p. 85). Higgins' beliefs in the corporeal significance of the male body in asserting masculine dominance is also substantiated by the following claim by Martino (2006): "The appropriation and corporeal significance of the category of 'straight-acting' and its signifying potential in gay men's lives, given the reiteration of norms that compel investing in hegemonic structure of eroticized masculinity" (p. 43). With the predominance of the "hard, athletic, muscular physique" saturated across the pages of queer publications, it is easy to see how queer visual culture asserts "eroticized masculinity" as the norm. The extreme of that masculinity is found in the visually present theme of the queer male engaging in or portraying signifiers of sadomasochism or S&M which Martino (2006) also described as an attempt on behalf of gay men to reclaim a masculinity that has been denied to them, and in turn break the stereotypic casting of gay men as effeminate.

The sheer volume of images that demand masculinity as the norm make it impractical to describe those images within this study; however, the instances of men engaging in feminine behaviors is easily depicted. The reason for the ease of describing this phenomenon is that there are only a few clear cases of males engaging in or embodying feminine characteristics and behaviors which correlate to the substandard position of femininity in gay culture. The most evident of these images is of an eccentric male in an advertisement for Q Television Network. This particular individual does not have the Adonis like body or looks and is clearly not like the others found throughout the

293 images in the sample. The male appears with two other males and one female in the image. The advertisement even recognizes the difference of the visual culture presented in the image by noting, “We cover the gay community from every angle.” The angle of the effeminate gay male is definitively an underrepresented group that is not only abnormal for the queer consumer, but an identity that should be virtually non-existent according to the ideologies established in the visual culture of the queer male gaze. One other image, an advertisement for STEPS (a theatre performance) in which two males are wearing metallic pants along with three females portray characteristics of queer male femininity through fashion.

Although questionable in its connection to effeminacy, two advertisements for Avis car rentals show male couples engaged in extremely affectionate embraces which do not coalesce with the image of the strong, stoic muscular figure depicted through virtually the entire sample. As with racial diversity in the images, the limited visual representations of male effeminacy have no sexual identity within the visual culture presented, and therefore, almost guarantee the continued discrimination of the effeminate queer male in and out of the visual world.

Women and the Queer Gaze

It is apparent that the hierarchy of male dominance is not constrained to biological identification for the queer male consumer; it moves beyond sexism into gender. The masculine is glorified and visually present among queer males, while femininity is nearly nonexistent. The subordinating position of femininity and the continuation of masculinity as the dominant ideological visual signifier is part of a

system of hegemonic discourse that has been termed “masculine mimicry” by Kendall (2001) and what Bergling (2001) referred to as “sissyphobia.”

The dangerous practice of devaluing femininity among queer men in visual culture reinforces the normative ideology of male superiority over women found in the heterosexual gaze. This repeated cycle of dominance was also described by Bersani (1995) who argues:

In his desires, the gay man always runs the risk of identifying with culturally dominant images of misogynist males. A more or less secret sympathy with heterosexual male misogyny carries with it narcissistically gratifying reward of confirming our membership in (and not simply our erotic appetite for) the privileged male society. (p. 64)

Due to the devalued state of the feminine in queer male visual culture, the leap to systematic oppression and misogynistic representations of women among queer male visual culture is a very short one. Queer visual culture repeats the malicious cultural mandates portrayed to women in heterosexual milieus; this repetition ensures that male dominance remains the standard. In this cycle women’s portrayal to queer men remains one of, ironically, objectification of heterosexist desires and powerlessness. Initially, in a holistic view, women appear only sporadically among the images where the hard, male physique dictates the standard visual signifier. This lack of representation in itself ensure the continuation of male dominance within the queer social structure; however, what makes the oppressive cycle even more intense are the visually present images of women in the sample. Apart from the infrequent images of female models in bikinis (who are of course thin and flawless), there are few images in the sample which feature women as the central subject. Two of these images could be called progressive or at least neutral in achieving equality for the female in queer culture. One of these, an advertisement for

AT&T and diversity, features a professional black female working at her desk, and the other is actually one of the 12 covers that were sampled in which Portia de Rossi is smiling on the 2005 September issue of *The Advocate*. The neutrality or progressiveness stops there and seems to be completely deconstructed when a queer male consumer examines the remaining visual culture presented. Camel cigarettes created the fictitious character Lola to promote their brand. Lola is dressed in a fashion to resemble a Las Vegas Showgirl as she sits on the edge of the table in a bikini top with her leg hiked just right to expose almost her entire thigh. She holds a cigarette and cigarette pack in one hand and a deck of cards in the other. The text reads, “Here’s 20 chips on me XOXO Lola. Redeem at PleasureorBust.com.” Camel created an online gambling game to drive consumers to their brand; however, what exactly does this image ask the queer male consumer to desire? On the surface, one might assume the incentive to play the online game or the Camel cigarettes; however, it is the objectification and consumption of female sexuality that is the central message of the advertisement. Lola exposes her legs and cleavage as a visual signifier of welcomed objectification, and then the consumer is even directed to a web address with the words, “pleasure” and “bust” as the destination. The queer male gaze is only perpetuating the subordinate position of women as objects of consumption—beings of pleasure even for the queer male consumer.

Lesbian desire and sexuality is portrayed as the central message of only two advertisements among the entire sample. Again, the essential absence of lesbian sexuality devalues the position of women and more specifically queer females in the sample. One advertisement is for a Love and Pride jewelry collection by Udi Behr, and features two females who appear to be nude. The viewer is presented with a black and

white image in which one female, who is standing above the other female, appears to be preparing to kiss the other female simultaneously wrapping her hand around the neck of the other female in what is clearly not a soft caress but a preparation of a violent act. The other female, who reaches her head up towards the other female welcoming her kiss, is also pulling down a choker chain connected to the female who stands above her. The jewelry found in the image is shown in color while the rest of the image remains monochrome. The significance of this image among the sample is monumental. The one instance of enacted lesbian sexuality is a performance of violent sexuality completed by two flawless, thin and perfected females who dictate that the hostility of female sexuality is not only welcome, but the standard. The devalue of female sexuality is furthered by the fact that the image is not focused on selling the consumer the idea that lesbian sexuality should be present, but that females should be adorned with the visually significant jewelry collection—while committing violent sexual acts against one another. What is interesting about this representation of lesbian sex in comparing it with other images of gay males engaging in violent sex or sexual acts is that gay sexuality is predominately used to sell sex across the sample while lesbian sexuality is used to sell products unrelated to their sexual identity. The sample is flooded with advertisements for sex products, chat lines, internet sites, and even escorts in which queer male sexuality is used to sell sex to queer men; these do not exist for lesbians. Lesbian sexuality is instead presented in a detached voyeuristic manner much like the dominating discourse of mainstream visual patriarchy. The queer male gaze gives the gay consumer every possible avenue to enact his sexual identity; lesbians are not granted this same access within the queer gaze. With the significance placed on sex in the queer male gaze,

lesbian representation in the sample only perpetuates the hierarchical dominance of the queer male in his ability to have access to his desire for sex while lesbians are left yearning for products not intercourse.

There is one other image in the sample that features lesbian sexuality; although, this image does not actually portray the act occurring for the viewer. This advertisement features a movie poster for the film *Beautiful Creatures*, and features two females. One of these females is caressing her lips slightly biting her fingers in the process. The textual information in the advertisement reads as follows: “A girlie film your man will love too.” This image definitively replicates the heterosexist misogynistic viewpoint of women within the queer milieu. Starting with the title of the film, the queer viewer is informed that the female is indeed a “creature,” a substandard human being not equal to the queer male viewer, and that creature is of course one of beauty. Further these are not women found in the image, and the females viewing the film are themselves not women; instead, they are girls as constructed by the textual information of “a girlie film.” This identification of girl is damaging to the female due to its nature as a historically oppressive term used to place the female in a subservient position to men in society, especially when used to describe an adult female. For the male consumers of this image, they are instructed that their masculinity will not be threatened, and therefore the hierarchical social order, by viewing this “girlie” film. The reason for this is found in the consumption of the visual material in which it is obvious that the film will fit within the patriarchal constraints of the feminine not to disrupt the established social order. Since these are the only visually present exemplars of lesbian sexuality within the sample, the degradation and violence of the female body in queer social structures is intrinsically

linked to these images and therefore, a world where violence, subservience and abuse of women is easily constructed as a dominant ideological discourse.

Not to leave any room for interpretation of the lack of significance of the female in queer male social structure, Svedka Vodka produced an image featuring an anamorphic female robot who takes on blatant sexual signifiers; however, female sexuality is not only devalued, but it is completely dismissed with the textual information within the image. Next to the sexualized anamorphic female, the text reads, “Gay men still prefer Svedka over sex with women. Svedka_GRL.” The misogynistic, oppressive nature of queer visual culture is no clearer than it is within this particular advertisement. Gay men are instructed, by a female no less, that given the choice they should choose to consume alcohol rather than engage in sexual intercourse with females. First, this creates a dangerous parallel to the female being equated to a consumable product—one in which gay men would rather enjoy a cocktail rather than female sexuality. With sexual gratification and enactment being a core visual identity for the queer male consumer, the fact that sexual practices with females are devalued at the expense of consumption of alcohol have catastrophic effects for females in and out of queer social structures. Kilbourne discusses these dangerous effects. She stated, “When men objectify women, they do so in cultural context which women are constantly objectified in which there are consequences—from economic discrimination to violence—to that objectification” (Kilbourne, 1999, p. 279). Even more dangerous is the manner in which the textual information was communicated through the advertisement. Svedka GRL, who one could assume is the anamorphic female robot in the image, is the originator of the derogatory message. The advertisement covertly insinuates that females should participate in their

own systematic oppression, and given that this is one of the few examples of the centrality of the female presence in the sample, gay men are stealthily instructed to participate in oppressing the female and femininity within queer culture.

Lambert (2006) attributes this to the pressure of performing what he called the idealized masculine as it is [the gay man's] ticket to participation of (gay and straight) spaces and activities. Gay men's representation of the female body and female sexuality in queer pages demands that they participate in the same hegemonic social system operating in a heterosexual world in order to belong to the queer visual world presented to them. This visually oppressive world leaves no room for change as the advertisement also provides one other piece of textual information; the bottom of the image reads: "Svedka voted #1 vodka of 2033." Even the future of queer culture demands the subservient, devalued position of women leaving no ability to escape the discourse of oppression. Although these images of the female exist in the queer visual culture, they are limited to the point of almost silencing any remnants of the feminist movement or equality for females.

Further, these images of females and female sexuality in the sample also reveal that the queer male gaze functions to create a discriminating discourse between sex and gender identification. The queer gaze presents the viewer with images of men in predominately hyper-masculine roles, and women are even more confined within hyper-femininity in the sample. In a culture predicated on the complete biological reversal of sexual gratification found in heterosexual, mainstream culture, the queer gaze only provides the queer viewer with the same limited binary ideological structure where male equates to masculine and female to femininity. For the gay male who is effeminate or the

lesbian woman who is masculine, they are constructed as the subordinated other within the queer visual discourse of the queer gaze—absent in the pages and devalued by *their* own community.

Codes of Silence in the Gaze

While the predominance of this study has discussed the visually present, it is the visually absent, and therefore silenced, that lead to other interesting discoveries of queer visual culture. The imperative nature of examining the visually absent has been noted by several scholars. In a work examining the study of visual images in image-based research, Chalfen (1998) states, “In addition patterns of exclusion are as significant to this approach as patterns of inclusion” (p. 218). Even more cogent to the concepts of systematic oppression, McBride authored an essay on race and sexuality in which he discusses the codes of silence and the power they maintain in creating reality and normalcy. He asserts, “Power of a variety of sorts—whether corporate power, institutional or governmental power, intellectual or epistemological power, or the force and power of identity politics—depends upon the maintenance of codes of silence for its very vitality” (McBride, 2005, p. 93). The visually silenced or absent dictate what cultural identities and behaviors are not accessible to the queer male consumer; in other words, silence is a way of thought which demands what must be absent from the queer male’s conception of his social structure as well as his identity.

The silence and visual void begins with the conception of age. The visual culture sends a clear message to the queer consumer in regards to what age groups should be present in queer social structure. Within the sample, the first age group that is virtually absent from the sample is that of children. In examining the sample, there are

only two images which contain an infant. The first advertisement features a baby with a rainbow afro wig promoting the Philadelphia International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival. The second image features an advertisement for a design showroom found throughout Europe called Ligne Roset which features a female body and infant, both of which heads are not visually present, in the upper right hand corner in which the female is holding the baby. Out of the 293 images appearing in the final sample, these are the only images which portrays infancy to the queer consumer; however, the products being sold have no connection to queers engaging in caring for or purchasing products related to infants. Instead, the image of the baby is used to evoke emotional response and persuasive communication to drive attendees to the film festival or to buy expensive furniture.

The limited representation of children in the sample extends beyond infancy; only one image features younger children—the advertisement for Canon Cameras discussed earlier. However, these children stand alone within the social landscape of the image, and there is no indication that these children are cared for by queer individuals. Teenage representation was only found in one image across the sample as well. With children being virtually missing from the sample, the internalized perception of queer not equating to child rearing is easily constructed within the psyche of queer individuals. Theorizing advertising as the most covert form of propaganda, the in-group visual perspective of queer visual culture in the sample also dictates that the queer identity is not one that should include children or parenting. The queer family is something much different from their heterosexual counterparts as defined by an advertisement for PetInsurance.com which features a smiling male and his K-9 counterpart. The text within

the advertisement reads: “Family Redefined.” The family for the queer male consumer is inextricably one that does not include children or even marriage; instead, the relationship is confined to a discourse that is diametrically opposed to the heteronormative definition of family.

The lacking representation of children in the sample is another way in which the queer male gaze dramatically differs from that of the heterosexual patriarchal gaze. A substantial amount of Kilbourne’s research focuses on the sexualization and objectification of little girls in heterosexual milieus. She asserts:

Our children, bombarded with these sexual images in advertising, TV programmes, music videos and on the internet, are pressured to look and act 'sexy' at absurdly young ages...What used to be part of an adult, secret, mysterious world is now public, ordinary, everywhere. Graphic sexual messages have replaced romance in the media aimed at our teens. At the same time, we have to fight to get honest sex education into our schools and there is never any emphasis on relationships, communication, intimacy. No wonder eighth-grade girls are performing oral sex on boys on the school bus and that 'hooking up' (random, casual sex with no expectations) has replaced dating for many high-school and college students. (Kilbourne, 2005, p. 120)

This type of visual representation or sexualization of children is completely nonexistent within the queer male gaze. Interestingly, the dominating queer male gaze may actually be subordinated by controlling heterosexual ideology stemming from a historical stereotype fashioned for the queer male. This discriminating typecast was that of the “strange, sick, and potentially dangerous” queer male, and this was often connected to the villainous identity of pedophile (Benshoff, 2006, p. 35). One possible explanation of the visual lack of children in the sample can be attributed to the same type of polarization against effeminate portrayals of homosexual men in mainstream discourse that is manifested in the sample. The queer male gaze constructed a hyper-masculine ideal in

order to counteract that effeminate portrayal in heteronormative discourse. In order to avoid the perpetuation and continual labeling of pedophile, it is viable to believe that queer visual discourse was constructed to avoid this portrayal by virtually erasing the visual identity from children from the in-group perspective. While this may have assisted in minimizing the label of pedophile in the millennial aesthetic, it also, unfortunately, limits the queer identity.

The ageist view of queer visual culture operates in a dichotomous nature. It is not just children who constitute a code of silence in queer visual culture; it is also the elderly or for that matter any signs of aging. With either the young or middle-aged individual being the standard in the sample, the elderly are practically non-existent in the images sampled. This could be interpreted in several ways, all of which are dangerous to the queer consumer. First, the visual culture clearly devalues the elderly and the process of aging. Therefore, an extreme pressure to maintain the standard and idealized age range as well as image connected to those age ranges in queer visual culture is presented to the queer consumer. In regards to the contextual world outside of the visual culture in the publications, this visual oppression of the elderly is interestingly a complete distortion of reality. According to US Census, “Senior adults make up the fastest-growing population in the nation in which Americans over 60 comprise about 17 percent of the total population, and that number is expected to increase by 50 percent within the next two decades” (Brandett-Solomon, 1999). This visual dissonance of the representation of the elderly or even signs of aging in queer visual culture as compared to the real world demographics are alarmingly dangerous to the queer consumer. A clear message is delivered: “Don’t get old—at any cost.” And if one indeed becomes elderly as portrayed

through the one advertisement featuring the age group, there is a special place outside of the world of the fit, sculpted, young queer where the elderly should live out their undesirable days. The advertisement for Palm Springs Living: An Active Adult Community for America's Gay and Lesbian Elite states, "You've waited long enough for an adult community just for you." The ad even bolds the phrase "just for you" to ensure that the elderly viewer or young onlookers realize that there is a place for those people who are not the visual standard of the perfected, young queer seen throughout the remainder of the sample.

The codes of silence found in the visual imagery of the queer visual culture presented extend outside of femininity, females, age, and parental status. There are many absent visual signifiers that dictate exclusion and devalue characteristics as constructed within the queer male gaze. For instance, the able-bodied individual completely dominates the sample. A clear standard of successful economic status is developed throughout the visual culture presented. More importantly an examination of the label GLBT leads to the observation that there is no indications of bisexuality and only two images, one for an advertisement for the book *Twisted Sisters* and the other featuring Chi Chi Larue pornography, which contain images of individuals that may be decoded as transgender, transvestite or transsexual. The expansion of the research question to focus on what is visually absent from the sample would lead to the discovery of even more important themes and codes of silence.

"We're Queer! We're Here!" But Not There

While a perilous visual queer male gaze has been constructed in which the visually present and absent dictate the sense of normalcy, ideological thought, and sense

of queer social structure, it is also imperative to discuss where the visual culture dictates these enactments of queer culture can exist. This question has been at the forefront of homosexual discourse as safe locations to enact queerness have been threatened by mainstream heterosexism. Lambert (2006) discusses the centrality of these spaces as well as their limited scope:

Homosexual communities have always sought to create or find spheres of activity in which both the “freedom of expression” and “safety” lacking in the dominant heteronormative structuring of social spaces can be found. Certainly virtual environments can be seen to promote the idea of such freedom and the possibility of identity and activity without limits. (p. 62)

Somewhat supporting Lambert’s notion, there are a plethora of examples in the sample which instruct queer male consumers to flock to electronic forms of communication either for sexual gratification or destinations to meet other queer individuals. These are the predominant safe spaces created within the sample; however, these supposed safe spaces created in the fabrics of cyber space may actually be doing more harm along with creating more *limits* than benefit for the queer community. Being bombarded with messages which dictate that a queer individual’s life should be performed within an electronic milieu can lead to disengagement of that identity in real-world social settings. This electronic presence and identity may also contribute to the continued perpetuation of heteronormative ideological discourse outside of that electronic milieu; therefore, a decrease in queer social activism in real-world settings could be feasible. So with the advent and promotion of electronic communication to support the queer identity, it is not yet clear if the electronic safe spaces will assist in or unfortunately degrade real-world social spheres where queers would be free to express themselves in safe settings.

Across the sample, there were no instances of queer individuals present in public spaces in which homosexuality could be enacted in public discourse outside of queer specific social structures such as Pride celebrations or circuit parties unless they existed within travel advertisements. Queer individuals were continually inundated with images of far off exotic places to enact queerness in public settings. This enactment of course was limited to witnesses also of queer identity. The message delivered to queer individuals is one of limited public identity where the only safe spaces created through millennial queer visual culture are distant, temporal vacation spots among members of the queer community, special days set aside for queer celebration, or an electronic social sphere. These constraints create limited intercultural discourse which leads to the inability of queerness to engage in a meaningful level of acculturation with heterosexual milieus.

Covering the Covers and Facing the Issues

There is some meaningful discourse occurring within the pages of queer visual culture in regards to addressing issues important to the queer community; however, these messages are still juxtaposed within a visual culture saturated with sex and dangerous portrayals of discriminating normalcy. Nowhere within the visual culture presented is there more important cultural landscape than that of the covers of the publications. These images and textual information beckon readers to consume themselves in the publication; consequently, these covers often set the standard for ideological normalcy and tone for the reader's experience. The 12 covers of this sample present interesting textual information in regards to issues important to the queer consumer. Some covers feature visual information that is poignant to the queer consumer and issues that are indelibly

connected to the discourse of optimistic queer identity such as the following: “Death, Faith, and Homophobia: An Advocate Investigation”, “Is Judge John Roberts Pro-Gay?”, “Do Muscles Make You Masculine?”, “Hip-Hop Homo Revolution”, “Until Death Do Us Part...in defense of monogamy—no really”, and “The Smartest Man in the World is Gay”. While the concepts of masculinity, homophobia, legislative constraints, social capital, and silenced discourses of homosexuality are discussed, these issues are simultaneously found next to covers with images of sculpted perfection and messages reinforcing the damaging discoveries found throughout this examination such as the following: “Hard Up Confessions of a Hardcore Virgin”, “Hot in Here! Trashy Poolside Fashion”, “Lean & Sexy 5 Easy Tips”, “Hot & Sexy Underwear 8 Lust-Filled Pages”, “The Wet ‘N’ Wild Issue”, “Great Sexpectations you are getting enough, aren’t you?”, and certainly not least, “Take It Like A Man”.

Aside from these messages adorned on the covers of the sample, significant messages that focus the queer psyche on critical issues of the homosexual community were also found within the visual culture presented. Many advertisements featured medicines or products related to HIV and AIDS in an attempt to create some level of social consciousness within the queer millennial consumer that the pandemic is still at the forefront of a homosexual identity. The one image that contained representation for teenagers is actually an advertisement for a book titled *The Next Wave* which is collection of short stories written by youth discussing their experiences and frustrations as silenced queer individuals. A *Gay Times* advertisement sponsored by the London Metropolitan Police Department features an image of a cracked porcelain face that brings awareness to domestic violence. The text reads: “Domestic violence it’s not only men to women, it

women to men, men to men, women to women.” The GMFA also produced several ads which discussed the implications of smoking and lung cancer as it correlated to HIV positive individuals. In an advertisement featuring a Hispanic male, the Point Foundation produced an image that spoke to the need for social change and escape from discrimination. The ad copy reads:

I was born in Mexico and baptized Catholic. Throughout my childhood in South Central Los Angeles, my brothers took to calling me ‘joto’ or ‘faggot.’ My escape and refuge was education. I plan to become a lawyer and help create a society where LGBT people have equal opportunity to meet their full human potential.

The full human potential that the queer male consumer is being pushed toward with these images of social awareness and empowerment represent only a microcosm of visual culture compared to the dominance of images steeped in sexual practices, achieving an idealized perfected state, and the treacherous sense of normalcy created when examining the millennial queer male gaze.

However, these images are still intrinsically connected to images that remind the queer male consumer what is so imperative to his identity. As a man looks down at his unbuttoned jeans to see the most important male signifier—his penis—the text reminds him and the viewer the following: “Get hard stay hard naturally. Get your confidence back!” The queer male can do this of course through the product featured in the advertisement—Ecomplex. Or perhaps the queer male consumer should be concerned with the messages communicated in an advertisement for Elbow Grease Lubricants. One side of the image features a naked male in a crouched position with an ominous shadow covering his body; the text above the subject reads: “Choosing a Pride outfit is difficult.” The other half of the image contains a bottle of Classic Gel Elbow Grease lubricant, and

the text above the product reads: “Choosing a great lubricant isn’t.” These men represent the instances where the queer male body is at its frailest—the point where the queer male seems to be most visually distraught among the visual culture sampled. These distressing situations of what to wear for Pride or how to get one’s confidence back through the hard erect penis are the pressing issues the queer consumer must tackle; but the reassuring information for the queer male consumer is that they can either buy their idealized state or at least realize their personal lubricant choice is an easy one. This is the legacy that the queer millennial visual culture is leaving for tomorrow.

Conclusion

Prosser and Schwartz (1998) affirmed the connection and realistic internalization of the visual worlds we consume: “We also make the assumption that the appearances of naturally occurring objects, events and behaviors provide a gateway to the taken-for-granted and reflects deeply embedded and therefore unquestioned aspects of culture which are critical to studies of society” (p. 119). The visual representations presented constructed a treacherous sense of normalcy. The absence of racial diversity, an ageist viewpoint, a rhetorical discourse steeped in masculinity, and the demeaning objectification of men and women as perfect, sexual objects are the core components of the queer millennial gaze. These unfortunate “unquestioned aspects of the [visual] culture” presented reflect that the queer society has not yet found value in many representations beyond those discussed, and there are catastrophic effects connected to both the visually present and the visually silenced. Kilbourne (2000) herself asserts, “The truth is that there’s no way not to be influenced by advertising...Advertising is cumulative, and it’s mostly unconscious.” The recurring queer visual gaze manifests an “unconscious” rampant with oppressive and discriminating images for which the queer male has been covertly persuaded to believing that he himself created the meaning within the visual culture.

The effects begin with anxieties related to the perfect body image so prevalent in the sample; this flawlessness can lead to risky behaviors associated with achieving the ideal male body form which may include body modification, eating disorders, drug use, and even death in extreme cases. While not to discount sexual gratification or

appreciation of sexual desire, the extreme focus on sexual objectification has severe outcomes for queer consumers. By being viewed as sexualized objects shown in compromising and often constrained positions, domestic abuse and rape seem not so distant from some of the images and ad copy found throughout the sample. A cognitive dissonance of queer identity, including psychological, sociological, and communicative constraints, seems to be one of the most problematic implications of the male gaze in a queer context. Simultaneously as an individual is constructed as the oppressed and the subservient, sexual object, they are also told to be the oppressor and the confident, assertive queer, and in either state—perfection is demanded. This caustic position of queer identity was also described by Kendall and Martino (2006) in describing the work of Signorile (1997); the researchers asserted, “‘identification with as well as desire for the sexual object’ which leads to ‘many if not most of us becom[ing] both the rigidly objectified as well as the rigid objectifier, holding ourselves and each other to rigid standards’ dictated by norms for eroticizing the male body” (Kendall and Martino, 2006, p. 7).

The paradox arrives in an inherent struggle between the ideas of being the dominant and at the same time being constructed as the dominated in queer culture all while supposedly being represented in a stylistic manner. The paradox of internalized oppression seems inescapable for the queer consumer based upon the millennial queer visual culture represented in the sample. It was my research objective to show how the theories of visual culture—specifically iconography as a way of “thought” and style as a way of “meaning making”—would benefit from incorporating the patriarchal gaze established by Mulvey. After providing this connection between the visual theories, I

utilized social text analysis to first decode and then reconstruct what the queer male gaze in queer specific publications would encompass. The notion that the male gaze in a queer context is in a constant battle between the iconographic and stylistic states was supported within the visual culture. The advertisements also supported the idea of a bi-textual identity which queer individuals must endure from an in-group and out-group perspective. Kendall and Martino (2006) depicted this ideological battle best when describing the findings of Rose (1996) as well as Simpson (2003):

It is in this sense that the porn and media industries targeting gay male sexuality and masculinity need to be thought of as ‘apparatuses of thought and action’ that compel a certain ‘heterogeneous assemblage of bodies, vocabularies, judgments, techniques, inscriptions, practices’ for understanding the subjectification of gay men. It is in this sense that gay magazines and porn films function as ‘gender manuals, maps and bibles.’ (Kendall, 2006, p. 9)

What is the queer male gaze? What other *maps* and *gender manuals* exist that will contribute to the conceptualization of the queer male gaze? These questions still remain on the horizon to be answered by various types of scholars of which many interpretations may be produced dependent upon both the context and the time frame. My research question focused on answering how queer publications construct the millennial queer male gaze, and I concede there are various other cultural communicative forms which must be analyzed in order to further develop the idea of a millennial queer male gaze. I also support conducting a longitudinal study that will utilize both social text as well as contextual analysis to examine the queer male gaze as an evolutionary cultural mandate which has not only assisted, but demanded metamorphic change in the queer community. This particular analysis examined only one piece of the queer male gaze; however, it proved to be extremely insightful in beginning the possible deconstruction of

the queer male gaze through visual culture. The results support the exaggerated notion posed in the title of this work. The queer male gaze is indeed *killing the boys harshly* one image at a time.

To conclude this examination of queer visual culture, I would like to offer a modification to a statement printed in a leaflet distributed by students at Columbia University during the Free Speech and Anti-war movements of the 1960s; the students of the communication department proclaimed, “A choice of words is a choice of worlds” (Pace University, 2010). Apparent from this analysis, it is imperative to consider the following: “A choice of images is also a choice of worlds.” We now live in era where our stories—our ways of being are not disseminated solely by our teachers, our friends, and even our parents, but from companies with capitalistic means of selling us not only products, but also our own identities one piece of underwear, one vodka bottle, and one pair of tennis shoes at a time. It is about time that we stop gazing, and start looking.

Table 1

Sampling Level 1

Publication	Month	Year	Volume	Issue
<i>Advocate</i>	January	2008		1001
<i>Advocate</i>	February	2002		857
<i>Advocate</i>	March	2006		958
<i>Advocate</i>	April	2002		860
<i>Advocate</i>	May	2007		985
<i>Advocate</i>	June	2002		866
<i>Advocate</i>	July	2006		967
<i>Advocate</i>	August	2001		843/844
<i>Advocate</i>	September	2005		946
<i>Advocate</i>	October	2002		874
<i>Advocate</i>	November	2001		850
<i>Advocate</i>	December	2000		826
<i>Gay Times</i>	January	2002		280
<i>Gay Times</i>	February	2001		269
<i>Gay Times</i>	March	2002		282
<i>Gay Times</i>	April	2003		295
<i>Gay Times</i>	May	2000		260
<i>Gay Times</i>	June	2008		357
<i>Gay Times</i>	July	2001		274
<i>Gay Times</i>	August	2001		275
<i>Gay Times</i>	September	2000		264
<i>Gay Times</i>	October	2007		349
<i>Gay Times</i>	November	2007		350
<i>Gay Times</i>	December	2000		267

<i>Genre</i>	January/December	2002		100
<i>Genre</i>	February/January	2007		154
<i>Genre</i>	March	2006		146
<i>Genre</i>	April	2002		103
<i>Genre</i>	May	2005		137
<i>Genre</i>	June	2006		149
<i>Genre</i>	July	2005		139
<i>Genre</i>	August	2005		140
<i>Genre</i>	September	2006		151
<i>Genre</i>	October	2000		86
<i>Genre</i>	November	2001		98
<i>Genre</i>	December	2005		144
<i>Instinct</i>	January	2008	11	1
<i>Instinct</i>	February	2005	8	2
<i>Instinct</i>	March	2006	9	3
<i>Instinct</i>	April	2002	5	3
<i>Instinct</i>	May	2001	4	4
<i>Instinct</i>	June	2006	9	6
<i>Instinct</i>	July	2005	8	7
<i>Instinct</i>	August	2004	7	8
<i>Instinct</i>	September	2000	3	7
<i>Instinct</i>	October	2003	6	10
<i>Instinct</i>	November	2007	10	11
<i>Instinct</i>	December	2004	7	12

Table 2

Sampling Level 2

Publication	Month	Year	Volume	Issue
<i>Advocate</i>	March	2006		958
<i>Advocate</i>	May	2007		985
<i>Advocate</i>	September	2005		946
<i>Gay Times</i>	January	2002		280
<i>Gay Times</i>	February	2001		269
<i>Gay Times</i>	June	2008		357
<i>Genre</i>	August	2005		140
<i>Genre</i>	October	2000		86
<i>Genre</i>	December	2005		144
<i>Instinct</i>	April	2002	5	3
<i>Instinct</i>	July	2005	8	7
<i>Instinct</i>	November	2007	10	11

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Curriculum Vitae

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Education

Masters of Arts in Applied Communication Studies

Indiana University.
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Bachelor of Arts in Media Arts

Butler University.
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Honors

21 Club Distinguished Teaching Award

Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis.
Indianapolis, IN. May 2010.

Outstanding Creative Project

Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis.
Indianapolis, IN. May 2008.

Clubs | Organizations

Change 4 Change Campaign Founder

Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis.
Indianapolis, IN. January 2010—May 2010.

Graduate Communication Club Vice President

Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis.
Indianapolis, IN. August 2008—May 2009.

Graduate Communication Club Founder | Secretary

Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis.
Indianapolis, IN. August 2007—August 2008.

Butler University Student Foundation Member

Butler University.
Indianapolis, IN. August 2001—May 2005.

Presentations | Speaking Engagements

4 Change Benefit

Host and Organizer. Fundraiser to Benefit the Freedom Writers Foundation.
Indianapolis, IN. 2010.

Joseph Taylor Symposium

“Pop Politics in an Internet Age: Mediated Political Discourse in Youth Culture.”
Indianapolis, IN. 2008

National American & Pop Cultural Conference

“Why and How Politics Went Pop: A Contemporary Analysis of Political Voting
Discourse in Youth Culture”
San Francisco, CA. 2008.

National American & Pop Cultural Conference

“*Mean Girls*: A Model Experience in Living the Levels of Intercultural Awareness.”
San Francisco, CA. 2008.

Central State Communication Association

“Why and How Politics Went Pop: Examining Youth Culture in Political Discourse.”
Madison, WI. 2008.

ERAU Distinguished Lecturer Series.

“Flipping the Script on Millennial Politics: Why and How Youth and Pop Culture Have
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Employment

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Indianapolis Public Schools - Charity Dye Elementary School.
Indianapolis, IN. January 2007—May 2007.

Substitute Teacher

M.S.D. of Wayne Township.
Indianapolis, IN. August 2005—May 2007.

Entertainment Related Positions

Owner | Director of Marketing

House of 5th.

Indianapolis, IN. January 2008—November 2008.

Account Executive | Promotions

NUVO Newsweekly.

Indianapolis, IN. January 2005—December 2005.

Production Management Intern

MTV Total Request Live.

New York, NY. May 2004—August 2004.

Affiliate Sales & Marketing Intern

MTV Networks.

Chicago, IL. May 2003—August 2003.

Promotions Street Team

Emmis Communications (Radio Now 93.1).

Indianapolis, IN. January 2003—December 2003.

Other Professional Experience

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