This thesis examines how national advertisers work to frame gay subjectivity and queer sexual performance in the *Advocate*, the nation’s largest and most widely circulated gay and lesbian newsmagazine. Utilizing Judith Butler’s conceptions of performativity and the abject, I direct my attention to two examples of advertising discourse from Miller Lite that appeared frequently in the *Advocate* in 2002 and 2003. I argue that these advertisements evidence an ambivalence, representing queer sexuality while reifying gay male marginality and delimiting the number of ways in which queerness can be performed. I conclude by arguing for a more nuanced understanding of same-sex desire and the importance of body politics for queer, feminist, and ethnic/racial civil rights struggles while asking how gay men might be nominated as complete sexual and political citizens.
NATIONAL ADVERTISERS,
THE ADVOCATE, AND
QUEER SEXUAL PERFORMANCE

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Chapter One

Introduction

In season 2, episode four of Queer As Folk, Brian Kinney designs an advertising campaign to breathe new life into Pool Beverages, the makers of a brand of wine coolers called Pool Side Coolers. When Brian changes Pool Side Coolers to Pool Boy coolers, puts a scantily clad man on the cover, and mounts an advertising and public relations campaign explicitly targeting gay men, the Christian fundamentalist company owner is not amused. But when Brian touts the large disposable incomes of gay men and says Pool is turning his back on a golden opportunity, the owner accepts the campaign. Brian reveals his plan to close friend Lindsay Peterson, and she is furious. When Brian asks Lindsay why she is so perturbed, their exchange goes as follows:

Lindsay: “So, he hates us.”
Brian: “What he does with his money is his business.”
Lindsay: “Except when it hurts us, then it’s our business.”
Brian (pointing to the bottled wine cooler): “This is my business” (MacLennan, 2002).

While illustrating the increased visibility of gay men in advertising, this episode drastically oversimplifies the intersections between capitalism, embodiment, and gay male desire. However, it does examine what increased gay visibility in advertising may mean. Lindsay’s anger evidences a concern over who authorizes the inclusion of gay images in media forms and for what ends. At the same moment, Brian defends his decision to both objectify gay male bodies and put gay desire, and gay consumer dollars, in the service of a corporate (and in this case, conservative) project. Lindsay’s anger at Brian is not just about money; rather her anger underscores the impossibility of analytically (and artificially) separating political economic contexts from processes of meaning-making on both individual and communal levels. The television program reminds us that money and meaning are inextricably linked in capitalist culture. Through Lindsay, the program asks us to consider what effect structuring discourses – advertising being one example - have on our perceptions of non-normative gender and sexual performance. In an attempt to understand what effect advertising may have on how sexual minorities are perceived this thesis examines how the articulation of commodity discourse in the gay press affects ideas about sexual citizenship and same-sex desire.

Statement of Problem/Research Questions

Gay niche media outlets have censored themselves and changed their approach to editorial content in order to gain revenue from increased advertising. Because of this, the visual representation of homosexuality has been largely left to the whims of national advertisers. Corporations (even of which the most progressive are firmly implicated in a conservative capitalist economic system) have been given control over visual representations of homosexuality and same-sex desire. Too, the Advocate has created an image of gayness that is white, male, and upper class, largely in the hopes of increasing its attractiveness to advertisers. In the process, they have muffled the voices of countless gay men and women. If Michael Warner’s provocative claim that “highly capitalized lifestyle magazines” have become “the principal venue of the movement” holds any truth (or veracity) whatsoever, then a consideration of the advertising that has arguably led to greater self-censorship and the erasure of gay diversity is certainly warranted (1999, 77).

If advertisements and the flurry of marketing have significant effects on the way the gay press and/or activist organizations conduct their business, then there is a serious question of how the representations of sexuality in gay-specific advertising represent and/or affect performances
of same-sex desire. Lisa Penaloza remarks, “Because these representations provide a mirroring function for gay/lesbian people, they potentially have an effect upon gay subjectivity and agency, i.e., how gays and lesbians think of themselves and how they view marketing practices and consumption behaviors in relation to group interests” (1996, 17). In addition, examining the advertising in gay niche media allows a deeper consideration of what the gay press and national advertisers may consider acceptable and what silences are prevalent. Since the gay and lesbian press has censored itself in order to gain advertising revenue, it is left up to corporations to push the envelope on depictions of homosexuality. Given this surrender of control over what texts of homosexuality will appear within the gay press, it becomes imperative to examine how these corporations frame homosexual desire.

In this thesis, I examine how advertisements that directly address the gay consumer and portray physical instances of same-sex desire establish a naturalization-denaturalization dichotomy, bringing back a performance of gay sexuality that has been abdicated by the producers of editorial content and naturalizing some gay men while simultaneously reifying the marginalization of so many others. I will further analyze and critique how gay bodies are situated, how they are being placed in commodity discourse, and what effects these representations have on how gay bodies are made legible. How do representations of gay men and images of same-sex desire attempt to fix performances of gay identity? What effect will representations that render many of us invisible have on our quest for equality, our images of ourselves, and our opinions of other gay men? Given commonly held beliefs about the power of media representations over opinions of gay men and the power of media to define and channel sexual performance, how might we resist the power of these images and posit alternate modalities for performing queerness?

Literature Review

Gays and lesbians have long experienced what Larry Gross termed “symbolic annihilation” (1995, 61). When we were represented in most examples of twentieth century American film and television, the tone was almost always overtly negative, portraying us as child molesters, serial killers, or pitiful pathological individuals that were acute threats to the “natural” order. Three years before the famous Stonewall riots that many point to as the catalyst for modern GLBT activism,¹ Time stated that homosexuality deserved “no sophistry about simple differences in taste – and above all, no pretense that it is anything but a pernicious sickness” (quoted in Fejes, 2002). Out of this harsh climate, gay and lesbian niche media developed as an alternative, a place where it was hoped that gay and lesbian identities could be affirmed and not negated. But over thirty years after the Stonewall uprising, the promise of gay and lesbian niche media remains largely unfulfilled. Edward Alwood (1996) argues mainstream newspapers and magazines and most mainstream journalists have been overtly hostile to gay and lesbian issues and concerns. He posits that this hostility creates the exigency for a gay press that acknowledges GLBT lives. However, Roger Streitmatter (1995) writes that in the 1990s, “advertising takes the driver’s seat” of the gay press; the increased presence of such advertisers handicaps the gay press’ ability to represent queer lives (314). Today, anyone who picks up a copy of The Advocate, subtitled the “nation’s gay and lesbian newsmagazine,” will be hard pressed to tell the difference between it and the most insipid mainstream heterosexual lifestyle magazines. The Advocate has become the gay Cosmopolitan or the gay People. Beginning with broader concerns on the politics of visibility and “symbolic annihilation,” I consider how the evolution of

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¹ GLBT is an acronym for Gay-Lesbian-Bisexual-Transgender.
the gay press exemplifies debates over how to represent GLBT persons and who gets to count as a sexual citizen.

Gross and others who have written on the history of gay and lesbian images stress the importance of the politics of representation and render false the claim that a direct relationship of increased visibility to increased civil liberties exists for GLBT populations. Undeniably, visibility is a prerequisite for gaining concessions from the dominant social order. Frank Browning writes, “Dissident desires win tolerance and respect in America only after they have been rendered and processed into the language of politics, law, and commerce” (1998, 33). And to echo Gross’ observation above, any population that is “symbolically annihilated” will find it difficult making itself heard.

However, conceptions of gay visibility must be problematized. Daniel Harris argues, “The triumph of gay visibility…does not mean the triumph of gay culture…Gay visibility necessarily entails the disappearance of gay culture, which depends for its survival precisely on our invisibility, on our marginalization” (1998, 24). While the thesis that gay culture needs oppression in order to exist is at the very least problematic, Harris does correctly assert that visibility may kill certain forms of gay culture and may drastically reshape what remains. Leo Bersani argues the gay community is attempting “to make itself unidentifiable even as it demands to be recognized” (1995, 32). By asking that people not even think of us as gay, we risk “erasing our identity” and reifying gayness’ perceived inferior position in relation to heterosexuality (42). Increased visibility may aid the assimilationist agenda of many gay activists and individuals, but visibility is a double-edged sword. While representations of homosexuality render some gay lives acceptable, gay men outside the limits of pop culture visibility will be ignored both by straight and gay cultures alike.

These exclusions mirror exclusions that have become reified in gay activist organizations. Alexandra Chasin (2000) argues the twentieth century has witnessed the escalation of political rights increasingly being “recast as economic liberties,” thus pushing modern social movements, many of which are embedded in identity politics, into “market-based tactics and objectives” (xvii). Chasin further argues that representations of both the market activities of the gay and lesbian social movement and advertising directed toward gays and lesbians prop up dominant forms of “power relations” in the United States through “the exclusions at work in these representations” (142).

Advertising to gay and lesbian consumers and the continual evolution of the glossy magazines in which such advertisements appear occur in a social context where the most powerful gay and lesbian groups must counter charges that gay rights rhetoric is too assimilationist. R. Anthony Slagle states that queer activists have attempted to take the social movement from “an identity politics to a politics of difference.” However, these grassroots organizations are diametrically opposed to the more mainstream Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF)(1995, 98). Urvashi Vaid criticizes the exclusions in representations of the gay and lesbian movement, noting mainstream branches of the gay and lesbian social movement have failed to address the realities of diversity within the American gay and lesbian population. Vaid (1995) and Michael Warner (1999) have both argued these mainstream organizations represent those men and women (predominantly white) who can afford to write large checks at fundraising dinners. These donors are less likely to push
for the interests of non-white and poor gay men and women. With perceived gains in political and social power under the Clinton administration and the current bushwacking of efforts at equality, the HRC and the NGLTF have been so concerned with protecting their position inside the Beltway that they are leery of including bisexual and transgender individuals in the movement. This reluctance demonstrates an unwillingness of these organizations to think more broadly about their potential activism. HRC and NGLTF fight for some of us, not all of us. The assimilationist tone of these “mainstream” gay advocacy organizations prevents them from grappling with the needs of gay men and lesbians who are not in the privileged position of being white and middle class. Intersectionality of oppression and potential coalitions are ignored as these organizations reinforce the invisibility of many gay men and lesbians.

Exclusions that have become part and parcel of mainstream gay activism occur as gay organizations hunt for “positive” images of gay life. Michele Wallace (1990) says the use of positive and negative terms to classify representations puts cultural criticism on a very short leash. She states, “The goal of cultural production becomes simply to reverse…already existing assumptions” (1). Her work in African American cultural studies argues that the plus or minus column mentality is unable to deal with how “black culture continually reincorporates and even appropriates the ‘negative’ or ‘racist’ imagery of the ‘dominant’ culture,” and how this reflects the possibility of deconstructing racist ideology. This method of evaluation also “lacks the crucial capacity to differentiate between the visual and the textual,” the ways that minorities are seen but not heard, rendered visible but not listened to (3). Wallace states, “I’ve been concerned to comprehend their [black women’s] high visibility together with their almost total lack of voice” (5, italics in original). She argues that the positive and negative classification of images “discourages us from looking at Afro-American mass and popular culture from the crucial perspectives of production and audience reception” (3). While Wallace talks specifically about African American images, her contention that the positive-negative binary precludes substantive discussion regarding visibility and representations bears special relevance to GLBT populations in the current political climate.

Thinking that it doesn’t have problems similar to the positive-negative binary, some critics like to speak of “authenticity.” Jan Oxenberg, in the documentary film The Celluloid Closet (1996), says there has been a dearth of “authentic” images of gays and lesbians. Oxenberg ignores the obvious problem. Deciding what would constitute an authentic image of gayness is impossible. No representation can be “authentic” to all gay men and lesbians without engaging in a gross essentialization of all sexual minorities. Wallace notes the positive/negative evaluation system, when used to denigrate the content of black feminist work, shows an essentialist bent (4); interestingly, so does the “authenticity” paradigm.

While any image of gay life can be accused of being an “inauthentic” representation, holding on to the notion of multiple realities of gay life is still important for demanding equality with straights. Sarah Schulman (1998) argues marketing to gays and lesbians results in the creation of a “fake public homosexuality” that has “been constructed to facilitate a double marketing strategy: selling products to gay consumers that address their emotional need to be

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2 Vaid contends that one of the major fallacies the GLBT social movement labors under is that discrimination against women and gays are not connected. Vaid’s contention leads one to wonder if the movement is even capable of representing wealthy lesbians, leaving the movement run by a slight permutation of the good ole’ boys’ club.

3 Wallace finds four major problems with the positive/negative paradigm in regards to representations of African-Americans. While not essentializing or denying the uniqueness of African American visibility, Wallace’s critique of positive and negative images is useful for assessing the conditions of various minority populations.
accepted while selling a palatable image of homosexuality to heterosexual consumers that meets their need to have their dominance obscured” (146). She continues, “Rather than elevating the centuries-old underground gay and lesbian culture to the level of mainstream visibility, straight people have invented their own homosexual culture and placed it front and center” (146). Images of gay life may tell us more about what straight people think of us than what we actually are.

Fred Fejes and Kevin Petrich encourage scholars concerned with GLBT representations to turn their attention to analyzing gay media with the goal of assessing how elements of “heterosexually-defined homosexuality” work to make the creation of “affirmative gay and lesbian identities” more difficult (1993, 412). Gay media must be analyzed in order to show that when “political pressure to conform to heterosexist assumptions about sexuality and the media increases,” “the creative vitality and diversity of the community decreases” (412). Instead of cultivating an oppositional voice and exposing the distorted vision of gay life that is embraced as “real” by dominant society, we implicitly buy into a narrow definition of a gay or lesbian existence.

Capitalist machinery, and advertising in particular, has had an important role in shaping gay identity even as this regulatory mechanism also limits performances of same-sex desire. From the beginning of advertising’s development, advertising has had a role in formulating desire. Stuart Ewen writes even in advertising’s infancy, “the home and community was attacked and deemphasized, as corporate enterprise formulated commoditized sensual gratification” (1976, 82-3). Historian John D’Emilio argues that the emergence of gays and lesbians as a self-identified group is tied closely to modern capitalism’s system of labor that allows “large numbers of men and women in the late twentieth century to call themselves gay, to see themselves as part of a community of similar men and women, and to organize politically on the basis of that identity” (1993, 467).

If capitalism and advertising have had a role in channeling performances of gayness, then we must historicize advertising’s role in interpellating gay consumers and in financing the gay press. Absolut’s entrance into gay marketing in The Advocate in 1979 set a trend of the alcohol industry being the “first to perceive a clear interest in cultivating the gay market” (Baker, 1997, 14). Paula Span (1994) notes that alcohol and cigarette manufacturers are the dominant advertisers in the gay press (D1+). Kara Swisher argues that in 1993 conservative companies,
such as Procter & Gamble Co. and major automakers, sought detailed demographic information about the gay community (F1+). Michael Wilke states that in 1997 advertisements from automakers, rental car companies, and hotels were still difficult to find in gay niche media. Foreign automakers (Subaru and Saab) had advertised, but few domestic automakers had chosen to address gay consumers directly. Wilke asserts that in 1998, even though the number and variety of ads have increased in gay niche media, advertisements from car rental companies, hotels, and the automotive industry were still hard to find in gay publications. In 2001, Jaguar, Volkswagen, and Volvo began advertising to gay men and lesbians (Rothman, 2001, F1+). Subaru, which began addressing gay men and lesbians as a distinct category in 1997, along with Saab and Saturn, have had a presence in the gay press for years (F1+).

Sandra Yin (2003) states that advertising spending in gay niche media doubled to $208 million between 1997 and 2001. In 1997, “49.1% of ad space in gay publications was “composed of ‘personal’ ads and telephone sex services as well as companies and organizations promoting gay events, meeting, fundraisers and clubs” (1+). Now, these ads are only 21.5% of total ads, “reflecting the growing presence of mainstream companies” (1+). The price differential may be one reason for the entrance of advertisers into the gay press: “For example a one-page four color ad in Men’s Health can run $109,625, while the same ad could cost just $9,500 in The Advocate and reach a more consistently upscale audience, albeit fewer individuals” (1+).

Ellen’s coming out episode was the first time advertisers used prime-time network TV to address gay and lesbian consumers, although some companies that had been regular advertisers during Ellen bowed out (Wilke, 1997).9 Ikea’s television ad featuring a gay male couple shopping for a dining room table resulted in charges that Ikea was guilty of “tokenism and exploitation, of including gay people just to make a media splash” (21+). A 2000 ad from John Hancock Family Services featuring a lesbian couple adopting a child met with a firestorm of criticism.

While more advertisers are addressing the gay market, controversy still reigns regarding what media advertisers will use to target gay consumers. Lisa D’Innocenzo (2002) points out that some marketers believe that “the ambiguous route is a clever way for a larger brand to speak both to mainstream and GLBT consumers with a consistent message,” but some “brands are eager to address the gay market but only in niche media” (News 1+). Cliff Rothman points out that marketers place these promotional messages targeting gay men and lesbians in places where only gay eyes will see them, a for gay eyes only approach that can save mainstream corporations

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7 Saturn is one exception. Saturn has become a popular brand with GLBT consumers and women, perhaps due to its no-hassle sales policies and increased marketing to both groups.

8 He asserts that over-the-counter medicine manufacturers are beginning to address gay audiences, as are producers of household products, who believe that males have been historically “undermarketed to for household goods” (58+).

9 Volkswagen of America aired a spot from Arnold Communications, Boston, portraying two guys driving around in a car and picking up a chair that had been put out with the garbage. Volkswagen said the ad did not reflect a gay relationship, but many viewers thought the ad coded the men as gay (Wilke 1997).

10 Stuart Elliott (2001) writes, “Complaints that the Hancock commercial endorsed same-sex relationships led to its being edited to play down those elements. That led to complaints from lesbians and gay men that the changes were homophobic” (C6+). Eventually, after the commercial was reworked again, the ad was pulled (C6+).
a “political nightmare” (2001, F1+).\footnote{Adam Pertman (2001) notes the controversial nature of advertisements directed towards gay men is “evidenced by the fact that clearance for it invariably has to come from the top echelons of almost any company, whereas comparable decisions for other would-be customers are routinely made at lower levels” (E1+).}

Stuart Elliott believes television ads “may often be less overt than what magazine and newspaper readers see” (1997, D12+), reinforcing the idea that gay niche media outlets may be the entry point and the dead end of gay marketing.\footnote{Subodh Bhat, Thomas W. Leigh, and Daniel L. Wardlow (1996) state: “Most recently, marketers have begun to target the gay and lesbian audience with advertising that features gay or lesbian characters, uses appeals and themes unique to this minority segment, and is placed in media targeted to gays and lesbians” (162). Later, though, the authors sadly state (and I believe casually endorse homophobia in their finding) that “appealing to these different segments [GLBT persons] through the use of homosexual imagery in advertisements in mainstream media is not a good idea”; “ads depicting same-sex…couples probably ought to be ‘micro’ targeted, i.e., targeted specifically to the tolerant and intolerant groups respectively” (173). While we may see our bodies rendered in gay niche media, our invisibility will remain pervasive in mass media.}

Michael Bronski (1984) writes of what he termed “gay-window advertising,” arguing that major corporations have used these advertisements to speak to straight and gay audiences. In gay-window advertisements, gay audiences are addressed, but they are addressed indirectly. Straight viewers who do pick up on the gay double entendre are rewarded “with a longed-for place outside of the humdrum mainstream” (187).\footnote{This consumption of gay modes of style and culture is hauntingly reminiscent of bell hooks’ concept of “eating the other” (1992, 21-39). Such advertisements have also been termed “gay vague advertisements” by Michael Wilke, “referring to ads that covertly seem to imply gayness -- an intention often denied by the advertiser. Other ads have simply been adopted by a largely invisible gay community as "theirs" to unconsciously feel represented” (Commercial Closet, “Portrayals,” accessed 08/10/03). Wilke (1997) again defines gay vague advertising, stating: “Ambiguous relationships that could be construed as gay are becoming increasingly common in ads that put representation in the eye of the beholder. Straight viewers may not otherwise consider the sexuality of those pictured, while gay audiences can feel represented” (31+). So advertisements that might suggest gayness but also give corporations plausible deniability over representing othered sexualities fit easily into Bronski’s or Wilke’s conception of gay-window or gay vague advertising.}

Corporate and advertising firm desires to only address gay men in gay niche media illustrate anxieties surrounding the interpellation of gay consumers. Walters (2001) notes a fundamental difference between gay window advertisements and advertisements that directly address the gay consumer. Walters writes, “It is one thing to graft ‘a straight’ ad into a gay publication or to entice with vague, ambiguous imagery...It is quite another to actually create images that attempt to directly address the specificity of the gay consumer” (255). Creating an ad where the producer can easily deny homoeroticism’s presence in the text is remarkably different from creating images designed to specifically mark relationships as gay or lesbian. The direct address signals a significant shift in the interpellation of gay and lesbian consumers. Direct address or gay specific advertisements code actors as gay. These advertisements represent the male body as unabashedly queer.

Marketers treat gay men as chic trendsetters and as checkout counter poison.\footnote{This discomfort that advertisers and consumers have with gay sexuality echoes even in disease prevention campaigns. Jeremy Kohler (2001) writes that a St. Louis billboard featuring two shirtless men embracing, “one with his head buried in the neck of his partner, the other with his hand on his partner’s shoulder,” that encouraged people to get tested for HIV before engaging in sexual activity, was removed when St. Louis mayor Francis Slay’s spokesman commented that the billboard was only appropriate for newspapers and adult magazines (C1+). This discomfort is particularly ironic given the subject matter of the ads, and the unwillingness to be frank about sexuality} Paul Burston notes, “The interesting thing about brands like Absolut vodka targeting the gay market is
not that they thought there was money there, but they wanted to gain the cachet of the gay market to sell it to trendy straight people” (quoted in Branigan, 2001, Home 7). Stuart Elliott (1990) echoes this tension: “Gays are an influential, trend-setting subgroup...Many advertisers fear that a brand marketed to gays will acquire an image as being a brand for gays. Their worry: ‘Straights saying, ‘I don’t want that, that’s what the gays have…’” (B1+).

Andrew Hornery (2002) notes that while gay imagery and characters have been present in advertising to sexual minorities, real gay men and women (most often in the form of celebrities such as RuPaul or Elton John) in ads “represents a major departure from traditional advertising culture” (27), a departure evidenced by ads for Baileys and Mac cosmetics featuring the respective celebrities. Leon Stafford (2002) says that companies successfully marketing to the gay community “study the buying patterns of gay customers, show support of causes important to the community with donations and, most importantly, are willing to show a variety of portrayals of gay women and men, including as couples” (Cox News Service, 2002, accessed 05/09/03). Common advertising techniques differ markedly, however. Kahn asserts that there are three basic tactics for advertisers targeting gay men and lesbians: “Run ads with a single person, “run good looking crowd scenes with no obvious different-sex couples,” or running ads with no people (and often using gay iconography or linguistic innuendo)” (21+). Adam Pertman (2001) argues that gay advertising is “most effective when it speaks to the desire of one-on-one relationships and families” (E1+). Pertman’s statement disconnects gay men and lesbians from any semblance of community and chains us to the logic of “family values.” Paul Poux, head and founder of advertising company Poux Co., says, “Good gay advertising ‘doesn’t have to have a picture of a gay couple in it. What it can do is communicate more subtly that it has a gay sensibility’” (Curry, 2000, 66). Wesley Combs of Witeck-Combs Communications, a gay and lesbian marketing firm, asserts, “Companies that fail to do business with gays and lesbians usually have not gotten to know the community,” but instead rely on “misconceptions about gay culture” (Stafford, Cox News Service, 2002, accessed 05/09/03). Poux and Combs both assume a knowable gay culture and a fixed range of gay sensibilities. 16

Poux, Combs, and firms such as Overlooked Opinions have made their position clear: consumption serves the goals of gay liberation. However, close examination of this position renders the consumption as liberation paradigm problematic. Michael Bronski (1984) points to “the commercialization of a subculture” as a means “to promote the assimilation of that culture into the mainstream” (177). Fred Fejes (2002) questions whether this view of liberation via consumption “represents a pioneering political strategy in which pulling out the American Express Card has replaced the raised fist” (197). He argues many gay organizations see “the

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15 A. Scott Walton (2002) noted that underwear brand 2(x)ist distanced itself from its reputation as a “gay” brand and made football star Jason Sehorn its “million-dollar spokesmodel” (F1+). Walters (2001) develops an analysis of advertising to gays and lesbians that explores the dichotomy reinforced by this increase in visibility. While gay men and lesbians “are shown as having the same needs as heterosexuals (for financial security, familial happiness, etc.),” they are simultaneously portrayed as “hypersexualized and hyperchic arbiters of style” (237).
16 While I would argue that an “authentic” gay culture does not exist, Poux and Combs are hunters of the subculture. Plus, if we are going to talk about anything, it must be gay cultures, with emphasis on the possible infinite plural. Bronski’s efforts to defend notions of “gay culture” indicate his opposition to an assimilated gay culture that has lost its oppositional and unique stance vis-à-vis heterosexist discourses.
18 Perhaps consumption occurs in order to divert attention from our political struggles. Deborah Bosanko (1995) reported survey results of Yankelovich Partners, which found that high levels of gay stress (as compared to the life
proliferation of ‘positive’ (read young, healthy, attractive, mainstream, affluent) gay and lesbian images in the media, be they on television shows or in advertising, as the surest route to political equality and power” (203).

Rosemary Hennessy (2000) argues that “not only is much recent gay visibility aimed at producing new and potentially lucrative markets, but, as in most marketing strategies, money, not liberation, is the bottom line” (112). Danae Clark (1995) echoes this sentiment. She says advertisements invite gay viewers in only as consumers, thus negating any gay politics. Gay advertisements champion “a liberal discourse of choice that separates sexuality from politics and connects them both with consumerism” (147-8).

One could argue that this separation of politics from the performance of identity – in this case, consumption – works to reify our oppression. Sarah Schulman (1998) argues gay marketing puts homosexuality in the service of a heterosexist project (150). Daniel Harris echoes Schulman’s sentiment, arguing gays are enlisted in the cause of capitalism. He says, “The politicized consumer quickly degenerates into the consumerized politician, who serves the best interests, not of the gay community, but of the marketers” (1997, 79). Schulman and Harris remind us that the equation of increased consumer power with increased political power fails. Gay men and women may be the ultimate victims of such equations. Dollars spent by gay consumers may bankroll perpetuated inequality.

We cannot ignore, however, that the guiding logic behind the increased visibility in commodity discourse is the myth of gay wealth. Gay men have been targeted as the objects of advertising because of gay media campaigns and the dissemination of specious statistics that cite gay wealth. The pink pound or dollar may be “ad adman’s chimera” (Branigan, 2001, Home 7), but most marketers and ad execs are quick to cite gay wealth as a reason for mainstream corporate America’s increased attention to gay consumers.19 Amy Gluckman and Betsy Reed state, “Eager to persuade reluctant corporations of a lucrative yet dormant gay market, Overlooked Opinions [one of the most well-known gay public relations firms of the early 1990s] circulated misleading statistics depicting gay people as disproportionately rich (1997, 4).” M.V. Lee Badgett (1997) argues that the gay income figures cited by Overlooked Opinions are “unreasonable when we match that argument against evidence that lesbians and gay men face

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19 Mike Wilke and Michael Applebaum echo the spurious accounts of gay wealth: “The need to relax drives heavy consumption of leisure travel among gays and lesbians” (24). Kahn (1994) echoes the comments of Rex Briggs of the Yankelovich Monitor’s Gay/Lesbian Report, asserting that gay men and lesbians typically feel “a need for identity, for acceptance and association, for recognition, for being dealt with directly, for stress reduction, introspection, indulgence and escapism. They tend to feel alienated, victimized, cynical towards business and other historically heterosexual institutions” (21+). Remarks like these infantilize gay men and lesbians in the name of market measurement while they reify the consumption as liberation paradigm.

20 Of course, if you did what Overlooked Opinions did, and based your determination of gay and lesbian incomes on the basis of surveys of gay newspaper and magazine readership, your figures would be inflated too. In the same way that the income of people who read The New Yorker would never be taken as a representative sample of American heterosexuals, the income of people who read The Advocate should never be taken as representative of American gay men and lesbians. Penaloza writes: “In general, media audience studies tend to overestimate such consumer characteristics as income and purchase intentions for the general population because they draw from a distinct subgroup that tends to be better off financially” (1996, 26).
discrimination in hiring and promotions and even lose their jobs simply because of their sexual orientation” (66).  

Ironically, “equality” may be championed because advertisers want to target gay dollars.  

Daniel Drolet writes, “Quebec has done a good job of marketing itself to gay travelers of late by touting provincial legislation legalizing domestic partnerships as proof that it is gay-friendly” (2003, E16+).  However, the danger that the myth of gay wealth may be used as a weapon against us lurks underneath this rhetoric of empowerment.  David Becker illustrates the political necessity of destroying myths of our inflated income: “We also need to deal with the larger stereotype prevalent in the popular media, and especially the far right, that all lesbians and gay men are a monolithic wealthy elite” (1997, 230).  While the myth of gay wealth creates visibility, this myth fuels Religious Right arguments against “special rights” for gay men and lesbians.

While the myth of gay affluence enables some forms of visibility, this myth works to erase a range of queer identities that fall outside the scope of the “quality” audience.  Fred Fejes asserts, “The advertising-filled magazines now filling the lesbian/gay magazine sections of chain bookstores like Borders and Barnes & Noble represent a reality in which their [many gay men and lesbians’] lives and experience are once again invisible” (208).  In John Champagne’s (1996) analysis of an ad for the Gay Games, he argues that the ad portrays a “certain urban, upwardly mobile, gay-male-consumerist mentality that unreflectively celebrates and eroticizes the continuing commodification and objectification of gay bodies” (49-50).  Gay and lesbian populations not considered a part of the demographics of the gay press’ readership find themselves invisible and outside popular conceptions of gay and lesbian identity.

It would be easy to singularly demonize the advertising industry, but a nuanced account of gay men’s visibility in commodity culture would be incomplete without discussing changes in the gay press.  Katherine Sender (2001) argues the Advocate moved from positioning itself as an outlet of the gay social movement to its current incarnation as a glossy lifestyle magazine.

21 When Badgett conducted her research on gay and lesbian incomes, she discovered that gay men and lesbians earned substantially less than their heterosexual counterparts; however, her finding was not statistically significant, because of the small sample size (69).

22 Lawrence D. Cohen writes a tongue-in-cheek column that asserts that coming up with some fake marriage thing could lead to a huge amount of gay tourism from civil unions.  Cohen asserts: “But the accountants may have shown us the way.  Gay rights?  Traditional family values?  Nothing but a distraction.  The smell of money is in the air” (2003, A15+).

23 Drolet notes that Ottawa, Canada city leaders, who previously would have been embarrassed talking about gay subject matter, “are now glad-handing at gay gatherings and promoting the merits of their city’s gay and lesbian bars.  Some of it is about openness and tolerance and a recognition that the world has changed.  But a lot of it is about money.”

24 He concludes there are two possible ways to read the communication of gay male masculinity in this ad.  The reader might see that ad merely replicating “gay men’s unself-conscious adoption of a patriarchal, often misogynist masculinity, muscles acting in this photograph as the symbolic embodiment of male power and aggression” (49).  However, an oppositional reading of the ad is possible.  This reading sees the ad as “a parodic representation of masculinity.  Gay men’s subversive appropriation of the codes of masculinity foregrounds gender as a performance (50).

25 Suzanna Danuta Walters (2001) works to expose the current visibility hype, noting that while “gay magazines and newspapers are becoming glossier and more well-funded through advertising dollars,” “magazines geared to women remain marginal and comparatively under-advertised” (239).  And even in The Advocate, subtitled “the nation’s gay and lesbian newsmagazine,” rarely has editorial or advertising coverage of lesbian issues even come close to the level of attention received by gay male issues.
Sender posits that the magazine did this in an attempt to reel in more ad revenue and make the magazine more commercially viable. She states that the increased presence of national advertisers led to “the elimination of explicitly sexual material from The Advocate, the erasure of the diversity of gay and lesbian lives from its pages, and an increasingly class-specific gay habitus” (91). Larry Gross (2001) echoes Sender’s findings on the history of The Advocate, stating that the magazine, which had for years subsisted on its reliance on sex-related advertisements, “relegated its sex-related ads to a separate pull-out section in an effort to attract skittish national advertisers” (236). Streitmatter states, “The switch from newsprint to glossy paper and the addition of flashy graphics immediately reeled in three national advertisers – Academy Entertainment, Naya spring water, C.J. Wray Rum” (1996, 315). Of The Advocate’s decision to place sexually oriented material in a separate plastic envelope, Lisa Penaloza observes, “Hermetically sealing and physically distancing the more controversial aspects of gay/lesbian culture may make sound business sense…but it may not be in the best political interests of gay/lesbian communities” (1996, 34).

The glossy gay magazines’ efforts to court advertisers in the form of national corporations reflect an ideological shift in how the gay press interprets its social role. Larry Gross (2001) writes that “the lesbian and gay press is torn between acknowledging its historic role as a committed advocate for the interests of a marginalized community and a desire to be seen as fulfilling the professional role of objective journalism” (247). He asserts, “By aping the pretensions of mainstream journalism, minority media risk losing their reason for being, while still not fooling anyone. No one picks up a gay paper expecting the managerial aloofness of the New York Times, nor should they” (248). Eve M. Kahn (1994) notes the lack of a unique voice is due to what Gross described as “aping the pretensions of mainstream journalism.” She quotes Ron Goins, the Advocate’s art director, who says the magazine takes its “cues from Time, Newsweek, and U.S. News and World Report” (21+). In the hopes of attracting national

26 Later, in 1992, The Advocate spun off all sex-related ads “into a new publication, the Advocate Classifieds, a venture that eventually spawned a number of new sex-oriented magazines, Advocate Men and Fresh Men, that rely on classified and porn-video ads” (Gross, 2001, 237). One could potentially argue that this move allows some representations and expressions of gay sexuality to be embraced with support through their appearance in a magazine at least sparsely populated with mainstream advertisers while it delegitimizes others by ghettoizing them in the “dirty” community of porn.

27 Gay media, in the era of media monopolies, may cease to exist as self-determining entities, as they may be increasingly incorporated into multinational media conglomerates. Larry Gross (2001) writes that in 2000, The Advocate’s parent company, Liberation Publications, acquired Out magazine; however, “before that sale could be completed, the increasingly familiar pattern of new media eating old media made an appearance in the gay realm, as PlanetOut, which enjoys backing from America Online – the recent purchaser of Time Warner – announced an agreement to acquire Liberation Publications’ (243). Although the sale eventually was put on hold due to the dot.com crash, Gross’ findings indicate a potentially threatening trend. If the gay press is going to become deeply implicated in market strategies and dependent on mainstream national advertising, it may not be long until gay dollars are spent with the unfortunate result of continued inequality and the gay press is bought up as new wholly or partly owned subsidiaries of large conglomerates that will silence alternative voices as soon as they become unprofitable or too much trouble.

28 Kahn argues that gay media have not been able to find their design voices: “They look stiff, artificial, fearful of offending anyone unable to live up to any kind of gay esthetic, if, in fact, one can be articulated” (21+).

29 While journalists and current manifestations of the gay press may believe they are embracing an apolitical stance of objectivity, they are simply trading one set of political concerns for a new one. Instead of being unapologetically connected to the causes and issues of the identity group on which they report, the gay press seems to desire a sense of detachment that borders on the ridiculous.
advertisers, the Advocate has self-censored and become complicit in the myth of gay wealth and a practice that works to erase millions of gay men and women from a vision of what it means to be gay in America and who counts as a sexual citizen of the gay community.

Scope of the Study

The connection between national advertisers’ products and gay sexuality in gay niche media occurs while these publications show few other visual representations of sexual practice. I have chosen to focus on advertisements that specifically represent same-sex desire (in a physical manner) appearing in The Advocate, one of the longest-running and arguably most well known national gay and lesbian magazines currently operating.30 This thesis aims to demonstrate the need for increased representations of gay diversity in the pages of gay niche media by analyzing the exclusions in visual representations of same-sex desire.

I have chosen to focus on two advertisements in The Advocate in order to consider how two texts from one major advertiser model a performance of homosexuality and link that performance to consumption. To this end, I plan to explore two advertisements from the Miller Lite “More Than Friends” campaign: “Twist One Off” and “Threesome.” SABMiller placed the advertisements, which ran in The Advocate in 2002, with the campaign managed by Zipatoni (Commercial Closet, “Twist One Off,” accessed 08/10/03).31

Wilke (1997) asserts Miller Lite has marketed to gay men since 1987. A close look at the web site of Wilke’s organization, Commercial Closet, shows that Miller Lite has produced nineteen print advertisements targeting gay men and lesbians since the 1990s. Most of these ads are gay-vague advertisements, although some do make use of gay iconography (the rainbow flag, symbols of pride) to interpellate gay men and lesbians. This thesis examines ads that have appeared over several issues of the magazine, making any analysis derived more representative of a trend in marketing and not just one isolated discursive incident. While lesbians have been commercially addressed, the relative invisibility of lesbians in popular culture (and the dearth of both content and advertising directed to them in The Advocate) makes it difficult to analyze in terms of presence that which is mostly structured by its absence in discourse. For this purpose, I focus on the interpellation of gay men, noting the exclusion of lesbians in gay niche media, but also recognizing that to generalize gay and lesbian experiences32 would be an exercise in essentialism that denies the differences between the two groups.

30 While I believe there are significant parallels between the way advertisements frame homosexual practice in The Advocate and other magazines such as Out, Genre, Instinct, Curve, Girlfriends, etc., this analysis is not meant to be representative of all gay niche media outlets.

31 This campaign did feature one ad, “Your Hands Are Cold,” that was directed to lesbians, but it appeared very few times. The ads analyzed in this thesis can be accessed on the world wide web at http://www.commercialcloset.org/cgi-bin/iowa/portrayals.html?record=1004 and http://www.commercialcloset.org/cgi-bin/iowa/portrayals.html?record=856.

32 Throughout this thesis, I will most often use “gay” as a marker of sexual identity. I understand the inclusion of lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered and am aware of the positive connotations of a queer social movement with a larger agenda of sexual liberation for all. I also personally feel that queer may be the best linguistic appellation for us and the social movement for our equality, and I have come to realize that many of my heterosexual friends are more “queer” than many of the gay men and lesbians I have known. I understand that in many GLBT organizations, a debate over whether to include “questioning” is emerging. But since gays and lesbians have been the only groups in GLBT“Q” populations to be subjected to the gaze of capitalism through marketing and advertising and only gay men have been addressed frequently by a large range of advertisers, I use gay to highlight the invisibility of the other component populations of a queer social movement in popular and commodity culture. I have also chosen to use the pronoun we throughout this thesis, directing my primary address to other gay men. In writing about how gay men were being addressed in discourse, could I really critique a method of address without attempting my own? I
Methodology

In order to analyze how these advertisements posit acceptable performances of homosexuality while rendering other performances of same-sex desire transgressive (and reifying the invisibility of a great many gay bodies), I employ Judith Butler’s notion of the performative (and her elaboration of the abject as a theoretical construct) as a springboard for examining how these texts frame same-sex desire. I examine the representations of gay bodies and same-sex desire in these advertisements in order to discover how the visual construction of bodies in these advertisements works to aid in the suppression of sexual expressions and bodies that express an alterity not embraced by commodity discourse.

Applying the performative to texts of visual culture will help us see how bodies are manipulated in print advertising discourses. One example of such an application of performativity is Peggy Phelan’s (1993) analysis of the ways Robert Mapplethorpe and Cindy Sherman’s photography and Mira Schor’s paintings frame the gender performances. Phelan notes, “All portrait photography is fundamentally performative,” an assertion that robs the photograph an omnipresent knowledge and absolute truth and leads the critic to questions of image construction (35). In her analysis of one of Mapplethorpe’s photographs entitled *Ken and Tyler*, Phelan notes it is “the space between the models” that “defines their bodies” (51). She states the performativity of the body is not only created by the body’s “language,” but also by its context and its spatial relationships to other bodies. She echoes photographer Richard Avedon’s contention that “the performative emerges in the dual manipulation of the surface of the photographic image and the surface of the model’s body” (37).

Richard Avedon (1989) stresses the importance of a conception of performativity to photography. Although his analysis deals specifically with the intricacies of “high” art self-portrait and portrait photography, I believe his contentions are easily applicable to most visual images. Avedon asserts that “all portraiture is performance,” leading to his assertion:

> I can understand being troubled by this idea – that all portraits are performances – because it seems to imply some kind of artifice that conceals the truth about the sitter. But that’s not it at all. The point is that you can’t get at the thing itself, the real nature of the sitter, by stripping away the surface. The surface is all you’ve got. You can only get beyond the surface by working with the surface. All that you can do is to manipulate that surface – gesture, costume, expression – radically and correctly (17).

While I take issue with Avedon’s assertion that one can arrive at an authentic essence by probing and mapping the surface of things, Avedon’s placement of profound importance on the manipulation of the surface of the body resonates with Butler’s conceptions of performativity. The best one can do to create the illusion of interiority is to manipulate the surface of matter. Therefore, by analyzing how the surface of matter is constructed, one will be able to read for what is being constructed or posited as essence/“authenticity.” If some gay bodies are rendered as visible, “acceptable,” and “authentic” gay bodies, and others remain invisible, then, how does this structuring absence affect issues of gay male embodiment?

wanted to address other gay men in a way that I would like to be addressed, a sort of “golden rule” of discourse if you will. I am writing with my intended audience as other gay men, gay men that may or may not feel comfortable with the state of “gay culture,” gay men who want to feel proud of their identity but don’t want to be judged solely on the basis of their sexuality. To them, I offer a spirit of community, a tone of alliance and potential solidarity. To my heterosexual readers, I ask that you attempt to translate. After all, we have been translating (from heterosexist discourse) our whole lives. Now, it’s your turn.
Chapter Organization

Chapter Two elaborates Judith Butler’s account of performativity and the abject before demonstrating Butler’s applicability to analyses of queer culture. Effeminacy as an abjected trait in gay male discourses and performances of same-sex desires are particularly stressed. Chapter Three develops a performance-centered analysis of the two Miller Lite ads to demonstrate how these texts reify the visibility-invisibility dichotomy surrounding gay representations. Chapter Four details implications regarding performances of same-sex desire.

Conclusion

How does performativity help us understand how sexuality is constructed, and specifically how queer sexualities are both elaborated and delimited? How does the abject give us a critical vocabulary with which to analyze subaltern cultural representations that make subjects visible and invisible in the same moment? I turn to these questions in the next chapter by reading Judith Butler’s work closely and by examining the way scholars interested in gay and lesbian identities have taken up the concepts of performativity and the abject.
Chapter Two
Theory and Methodology

Joseph Roach (1995) argues that “performance,…though it frequently makes reference to theatricality as the most fecund metaphor for the social dimension of cultural production, embraces a much wider range of human behaviors,” including the most mundane of everyday actions (46). Most important for his thesis, Roach asserts the importance of the body to the understanding of the performative. He states, “The persistence of collective memory through restored behavior…represents an alternative and potentially contestatory form of knowledge – bodily knowledge, habit, custom” (47). Here, Roach points out that knowledge possessed and embodied by bodily actions, experiences, and habits can be seen as a form of resistance to dominant culture; at the least, corporeal knowledge posits itself as a force contesting rational thought and linguistic reasoning that often devalue the body and personal experience.

In a performance-centered analysis of Anna O. and the talking cure of psychoanalysis, Peggy Phelan (1993) finds that “different body parts of the patient join the doctor in an ongoing conversation whose subject is no longer strictly speaking ‘her’ body but is rather ‘their’ body, the body being made in their discursive and physical interaction” (51). Phelan later asserts that one of the more important elements of psychoanalysis is that it renders a “somatic utterance” as “something that needs to be unearthed,” making the body both a text to be analyzed and a speaker/rhetor (51). Both Roach and Phelan invest the body with a great deal of power, the power to speak, and the potential power to resist.

In the introduction to Acting Out: Feminist Performances, Peggy Phelan (1993) references Eve Sedgwick’s characterization of “the performative utterance’s repetitious exposure of the Self-Same” that leads Sedgwick to “claim that performance and performativity are queer” (19). While Sedgwick’s contention and Phelan’s utilization of this tenet may be provocative assertions, both authors illustrate how the conceptions of performativity are tightly bound to the work of scholars working in gay and lesbian studies. In a similar vein, Andrew Parker and Eve Sedgwick (1995), in their introduction to Performativity and Performance, make the point that one of the groundbreaking works on performativity in linguistic philosophy, J.L. Austin’s How to Do Things with Words, seems to link theatricality “with the perverted, the artificial, the unnatural, the abnormal, the effete, the diseased,” and a normatively homophobic politics (5). The authors further suggest that “if the performative has thus been from its inception already infected with queerness, the situation has hardly changed substantially today,” using the Pentagon’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy as a contemporary example (5). The authors conclude: “As a certain stress has been lifted momentarily from the issues that surround being something,

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33 Roach examines the historical and performative nature of the funeral, before turning specific attention to New Orleans jazz funerals. Roach asserts an approach similar to that embodied by many performance studies departments in the academy today.

34 The earliest accounts of the body in philosophy embrace a distinction between mind and body. A project of much feminist thought has been to deconstruct this philosophical postulation, to find “an alternative view of the body and power” that “might refuse this dualistic manner of articulating the issue of sexual difference” (Gatens, 1999, 228). Trinh T. Minh-ha (1999) rebukes the very thought of a dichotomy between mind and body, stating: “We do not have bodies, we are our bodies, and we are ourselves while being the world” (258, italics in original). To Minh-ha and others, the division between body and mind or body and soul is at the very least an arbitrary one, and at its worst this division creates the body as something less important, less pure, and more corruptible than the mind/soul. While the soul is exalted, the body and its intricate experiences are disavowed. However, the body is of undeniable importance.
an excitingly charged and spacious stage seems to open up for explorations of that even older, even newer question, of how saying something can be doing something” (16, italics in original).

While the goal of this thesis is to show how advertising images of gay sexuality create models for the expression of gay sexuality, the notion of the performative serves as the theoretical foundation for this analysis. In this chapter I provide an overview of Judith Butler’s theory of performativity. Butler’s notion of performativity enables a necessary turn from the purely logocentric and rational ways of measuring and explaining resistance to an approach that places the body at the forefront. Performativity enables a consideration of transgressive and normative performances, for at the heart of Butler’s writings are a consideration of what makes some performances unmarked and “normal” and others subversive and “unnatural.” Thus, Butler’s approach, including her theorization of the abject, allows us to consider how gay male bodies can be sites of resistance to hegemonic masculinity and compulsory heterosexuality as well as the instruments of intra-community oppression.

Butler (1990) emphasizes that the performance of gender is evidenced both by what is enacted and what is disavowed; structure and absence are placed in a sort of dialectical tension, the product of which helps to reveal the construction of the “surface of the body.” Butler continues:

…Acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this on the surface of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means (173, italics in original). Here, Butler argues that the very notion of an essence is hinted at but never revealed by what she calls a “corporeal style,” and that in that end the idea of essence remains a fabrication (177). Phelan (1997) states that the “conflation of act and body is much the same conflation that Judith Butler has articulated in reference to gendered performances and gender identities – we tend to read gestures as expressions of ‘authentic’ selves, performances as identities” (3).

Leading into some of the ideas she would develop more fully in Bodies that Matter, Butler asserts that “as in other social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is repeated” (1990, 178, italics in original). Here Butler hints at what would be more fully developed in Bodies that Matter as “performativity as citationality.” The development of “performativity as citationality” may be deemed as a part of Butler’s response to critics of Gender Trouble, who believed that her writings in 1990 overstated personal agency, putting at the heart of performativity a fully volitional subject. According to Fiona Webster (2000), Seyla Benhabib’s critique of Butler “ultimately…wants to contest Butler’s claim that her theory of performativity can, in fact, give an account of agency” (5). But Butler (1993) answers her critics, saying: “For if I were to argue that genders are performative, that could mean that I thought that one woke in the morning, perused the closet or some more open space for the gender of choice, donned that gender for the day, and then restored the garment to its place at night” (x).

35 Jon McKenzie (1998) asserts that the strength of Butler’s work lies in her ability to theoretically explain both accepted and transgressive gender performances. McKenzie states: “To try to bottle the essence of what Butler did – and continues to do: she theorizes both the transgressivity and the normativity of performance genres. If (Victor) Turner’s centrality lies in his theory of performative liminality, Butler’s subversiveness lies in her theory of performative normativity” (221, italics in original).
She rejects this simplistic formulation of the performance of gender by arguing that the existence of “such a willful and instrumental subject” is a fallacy, given that a person’s “existence is already decided by gender” (x, italics in original).

Butler states that performativity “is always a reiteration of a norm or a set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition” (12). Thus, the more accepted the norms repeated through behavior, the more unmarked that behavior becomes. Later, Butler asserts: “If ‘sex’ is assumed in the same way that a law is cited...then the ‘law of sex’ is repeatedly fortified and idealized as the law only to the extent that it is reiterated as the law, produced as the law, the anterior and inapproximable ideal, by the very citations it is said to command” (14). Here, Butler argues that the originality/naturalness of the law of heterosexuality is “fortified” by its continued repetition as the norm, but she also stresses that heterosexuality exists as “an inapproximable ideal,” arguing that there is no “authentic” representation or perfect epitome of heterosexuality; indeed, heterosexuality emerges as a sign without any definitive denotative meaning. Later, Butler helps to amplify her conception of “performativity as citationality”:

If a performative provisionally succeeds (and I will suggest that ‘success’ is always and only provisional), then it is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because that action echoes prior actions, and accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices.

What this means, then, is that a performative ‘works’ to the extent that it draws on and covers over the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized (227, italics in original). Butler also argues that the accumulated force of the reiteration of the performative act results in the “performer” achieving the perception of a greater sense of agency and beginning to believe in the fiction of an essential, unitary identity. Butler asks: “Is iterability or citationality not precisely this: the operation of that metalepsis by which the subject who ‘cites’ the performative is temporarily produced as the belated and fictive origin of the performative itself?” (1995, 203, italics in original)

Butler (1993) also elaborates the theoretical construct of the abject, an area outside definitive and legible boundaries of subjectivity. While at first the definition of a person or group as the abject may seem to limit one’s agency and put them on the marginalized fringes of society, one could argue, as Butler does, that being the abject has its distinct advantages. Butler writes: “Paradoxically, but also with great promise, the subject who is ‘queered’ into public discourse through homophobic interpellations of various kinds takes up or cites that very term as a discursive basis for an opposition” (232, italics in original). For Butler, the potentiality of the abject is not reducible to the rhetorical strategy of re-appropriation; rather, a group’s status as the abject allows for and may perhaps encourage a substantive critique on the limits of subjectivity, providing not only for an expanded critical consciousness of the subaltern group, but providing a rallying cry for dissent and resistance.

Butler asserts that it is through the abject that the norm achieves a force of authority and convention, but that the abject’s existence is critical, since it points out that the “natural” has achieved its respected status due to the construction of reality. She writes about the subversive potential of drag performances: “What drag exposes, however, is the ‘normal’ constitution of gender presentation in which the gender performed is in many ways constituted by a set of disavowed attachments or identifications that constitute a different domain of the ‘unperformable’” (236). Thus, heterosexuality achieves its honorary status not only because of the marginalization of homosexuality, but also because homosexuality is excluded from much or
all of discourse. Homosexuality is rendered as the “sex that dare not speak its name,” the sex that heterosexist institutions attempt to erase or render invisible.

**Performativity and Queer Identity**

Elspeth Probyn (1995) urges critics: “So instead of the body as location, let’s take the body as loca-motion” (5, italics in original). Instead of only examining all the ways in which ideological forces, regulatory constraints, and compulsory heterosexuality circumscribe and limit the ways in which bodies can be performed and where they can move, Probyn urges us to consider precisely that movement, that ability to transgress boundaries - to consider where, how, and when bodies can move. Moira Gatens writes: “By drawing attention to the context in which bodies move and recreate themselves, we also draw attention to the complex dialectic between bodies and their environments” (1999, 228). For gay men, naming, describing and performing gayness are dangerous corporeal endeavors. When gay bodies move, what meaning is derived from their motion, from their existence and action in space? How will such “loca-motion” be represented in popular culture? How will we as gay men come to see and understand our “loca-motion”? And what factors prevent, derail, or severely limit such “loca-motion”? Having articulated some of the central elements of Butler’s notion of performativity, this section will outline some of the ways in which issues of sexual performance and the queer body have entered queer cultural analyses. Janet Price and Margit Shildrick (1999) write that postmodernist feminism exists in a kind of Scylla and Charybdis, because “what falls to postmodernist feminism…is the task of reclaiming the marginalized female/feminine body without reinstating it as a unified, closed, and given category” (218). A similar predicament faces gay and lesbian scholarship. As scholarship attempts to reclaim the queer body, it must simultaneously resist the temptation to overly essentialize experiences of queerness, while problematizing gay and lesbian identity construction along the lines of race, class, gender, and other discursive categories. Indeed, Cathy Griggers (1994) notes that the increased visibility of lesbian bodies in popular culture makes the difference between and among lesbian bodies more pronounced (119).

Lynne Segal (1999) writes that “bodily experiences are themselves socially constructed, not only by the culturally specific ways we have of interpreting them, but by socially variable factors like diet, exercise, training, and reactions to ageing, illness, and so on” (108). Denise Riley (1999) echoes this sentiment, when she argues that the body is never “an originating point” or “a terminus; it is a result or an effect” (221). Observing “‘the body’ is never above – or below- history,” Riley goes on to comment on how bodies become readable in culture. She states: “The body becomes visible as a body, and as a female body, only under some particular gaze – including that of politics” (224, italics in original). Given the relative invisibility of gay

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36 For feminists, this enables a critique of public versus private space; while men inhabit the public sphere and women are confined to the private sphere, men possess the mobility to move in an out of either realm of human life. 37 In an analysis of Derek Jarman’s Sebastiane, Michael John Pinfold (1998) examines how Jarman treats the queer body. Pinfold writes: “We enter a space where homosexuality is legitimated, where its expressions are tolerated, where its sex is both the subject of ribald humor and of personal self-fulfillment – the same, it might be assumed, as with heterosexuality” (77). Utilizing Butler’s theoretical position to supplement his analysis, Pinfold eventually concludes that what Jarman actually does is to confront “us with the replication of a patriarchal definition that finds its most obvious manifestation in the heterosexual disposition where power is unevenly distributed and endlessly contested” (78). To Pinfold, Jarman’s work serves to essentialize queer identities in a way that takes away their revolutionary power and that may indeed replicate power inequalities already inherent in relations between men and women in heterosexual relations.
sexualities in American history, it is important then to examine the “particular gazes” under which gay bodies become legible in popular culture.

Undoubtedly, many of the contexts in which gay bodies have emerged have been anything but hospitable to queerness; indeed, opponents to homosexuality’s visibility in the public sphere have labeled us as an evolutionary problem and have posited the “unnatural” or “inauthentic” status of our bodies, sexualities, and relationships. Phelan (1998) notes this sentiment when she argues that the homosexual body is frequently rendered as a kind of “body in disguise.” She argues, “The body is routinely made ‘normative’ – consistent and whole, the property of one person who has one gender, one proper name, one self – by virtue of becoming anti-theatrical” (81, italics in original). Writing from the perspective of a theater scholar, she asserts that the association of acting with homosexuality emerges “because mainstream modern Western acting is about the creation of a double body,” the actor’s body performing the “being” of a character or an “inauthentic” self (89, italics in original).

The “inauthentic” queer body maintains a currency in part due to the aural nature of gay self-identification and the opinion, often even embraced by “liberal” advocates, that gender and race are “written on the body,” and are “therefore visible in a way that sexual identities and activities are not” (Fraser, 1999, 109).Implicitly building a bridge to Butler’s “performativity as citationality,” Miriam Fraser argues that a GLBT “narrative identity is often only grudgingly conferred when, to quote Paul Ricoeur’s theory of narrative identity, ‘a certain constancy of...dispositions’ and a ‘kind of fidelity to the self’ (Ricoeur, 1991:192) can be demonstrated throughout the course of a lifetime” (110). This argument may well resonate with many gay men and lesbians. It seems that all of us are presumed to be straight until proven otherwise. But even when we make a declaration outing ourselves as gay, many, especially friends and family, may continually ask if we are sure that we are gay, denying the aural declaration of identity until visible evidence of a repetitive performance of homosexuality has been made accessible to their gaze. Fraser stresses the importance of such visibility: “Indeed, the account of agency offered by Butler’s theory of performativity appears to lend itself to an accent on the visible queer body” (114).

Visibly queer bodies, however, are also abjected bodies. Christine L. Harold (1999) posits that the invasion of abject bodies into the public sphere disturbs the status quo, “not by creating a space outside of it, but by conspicuously inhabiting it” (73). Bodies also provide an ethical function: “Since bodies do not adhere to reason, they require one to make ethical responses without the safety-net of a moral map of guidance” (74). In this way, the irrationality of corporeal performativity opens the door for a more serious examination of diversity and difference. Harold notes, “The body, long seen as irrational and unruly, violates the logic of

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38 Harold analyzes the prevalence of heroin chic in fashion photography during the early 1990s. Harold argues that these photographs and the look of heroin chic itself call attention to the constructed nature of what we perceive as healthy, fit, and “normal” bodies. Harold argues that a logocentric tradition of argumentation and rhetorical studies “has tended to ignore the physical body’s epistemic force that articulates itself not through traditional rational argument but through a kind of corporeal performativity” (66). In the case of Harold’s analysis, heroin chic calls attention to the constructed nature of beauty and the violence done by the fashion industry to and on people’s bodies; indeed, while many may find heroin chic grotesque and disgusting, some photographers have argued that the traditionally beautiful supermodels and fashion magazine covers are equally grotesque and “deformed” (70).
rationalism. But in doing so, bodies invite us to take seriously difference, impermanence, and connection because they do not conform, stagnate, or exist in isolation” (75). \(^3\)

In order to demonstrate how abjected gay bodies call attention to and disrupt heterosexuality’s juridical force, Lauren Berlant (1997) examines Queer Nation and queer fanzines to see how same-sex desire is articulated and reworked. Berlant notes that Queer Nation’s rhetorical tactics include “exploiting the structures of identification and the embodied and disembodied scenes of erotic contact, substitution, publicity, and exchange” that are “so central to the allure of nationalism and capitalism” (148). Berlant makes the point that reworking the signifier of queer, at least for this grass-roots activist group, occurs by manipulating the body in the discourses of nationalism and capitalism. Performance becomes one way to demonstrate how equal and how unequal we are: “Parody and camp thus become the measure of proximity to the national promise, as well as the distance from access to its fulfillment” (172).

While gay men as a group are abjected minorities, we cannot ignore intra-community abjection. Berlant is also quick to warn, “Even in their most periodic manifestations, gestures of sexual and national intelligibility – both oppressive and emancipatory – are part of a process of making norms” (172). Berlant warns us that while we know that normative behavior reifies hegemonic norms, we must be cognizant of the fact that “transgressive” performatives form rules of conduct over what challenges hegemonic norms; in short, transgressive performatives may institute norms governing the rules of behavior in and among subcultures. Berlant ends her discussion on “queer nationality” by pointing out a positive implication regarding queer fanzines, an observation that also demonstrates the potentiality of using abjection as a rallying cry for gay men and lesbians: “They (queer fanzines) suggest a space of politics in which to be ‘out’ in public would not be to consent parodically to the forms of the political public sphere but rather to be out beyond the censoring imaginary of the state and the information culture that consolidates the rule of its names” (172-3, italics in original). But can everyone in a subaltern group achieve that promise?

The obvious answer is no. Turning a critical lens to the way in which the terrain of gender and identity are navigated in *The Crying Game*, Susan Lurie (1999) argues that the “attribution of denaturalizing acts” is used “to subordinate subjects in order to counter and contain the emancipatory potential in the fact that identity is performative and open to change” (52). The film, which deals with an IRA kidnapper/assassin developing a romance with the girlfriend (who turns out to a transvestite) of the man he killed, can be read as simply reinscribing oppressive discourses, but Lurie asserts that this observation ignores the larger “pervasive ideological mechanism,” that subaltern groups and identities are given visibility and representation in order to limit the parameters of their expression and constrain the agency of all of society’s members (52). Lurie elaborates further on class and race as limitations on performativity:

> These kinds of liberatory interventions in received identities, critics have observed, are far more accessible for privileged subjects than for disadvantaged ones. Indeed, many

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39 Writing about performance artist Annie Sprinkle’s in-your-face show *Post Porn Modernism*, Rebecca Schneider (1997) asks: “Might we consider Sprinkle’s performativity as perspectivalism on the flip? A rupture provoked by the refusal of occlusion, the view from the blind spot – a chiasmatic twist by which a blind site sighted becomes a blind site sighted?” (65, italics in original) Together, Harold’s analysis and Schneider’s word play argue that enabling vision from the blind spots of our culture may in fact bring a disenfranchised population into a position not necessarily of subjectivity, but at least close enough to survey and critique the politics of subjectivity.
have stressed the frequency with which the transformations available to privileged subjects rely precisely on denying such transformations to disadvantaged others (52). While gay men of color and gay men who fall outside the lines of middle class income brackets often cannot achieve the full promise of the abject, even white gay men with economic resources are caught in a tug of war between the liberating potentiality of the abject and dominant society’s attempts to contain and/or erase any room for resistance. Cindy Patton’s (1995) examination of AIDS discourses demonstrates this tug of war. Through an investigation of the discourses of epidemiology and tropical medicine and the construction of political and medical policies on AIDS, Patton illustrates how the bodies of People with AIDS (PWAs) are treated in space. On one level, “the infected site – cell or body – is the object of scrutiny, the ‘public’ space whose policing is presumed to keep disease from going elsewhere” (188). Turning to an interrogation of an article by Gina Kolata, she explores a link between geography and community. Patton finds that community undergoes a serious permutation from a group of people seeking common advancement and equality to a “colony” in need of surveillance and regulation. She states, “Gay men are not so much other in relation to a self that nominates them, as they are simply self-identical to a space that is already set apart” (190). In this way, gay men are not defined by their self-identification as gay; rather, they are defined by their physical behavior in a specified location (urban gay ghettoes). They are defined by the behavior of their bodies in a space that has already been physically marginalized in geographic space. While not specifically utilizing the term the abject, Patton does seem to use the idea in her analysis when she states:

The insistence on the primacy of Othering fails to recognize that the body is often already ‘in place’ before it becomes self or other, and that, in fact, these placings are often constitutive of those bodies’ first legibility. This is not an argument for a prediscursive body, but for a body placed extra discursively, prior to its inscriptions through or legibility in discourse” (177, italics in original).

In Patton’s work, gay bodies’ potential to resist dominant sex roles runs directly up against an ideology that labels AIDS as the singular problem of gay urban zip codes. The gay ghetto’s physical locality and its position in heterosexist discourses as the epicenter of contagion limit the potential advocacy of queer identities. But exclusions even within the severely limited confines of the gay ghetto lead to gay movements’ reduced efficacy in redefining sexual practice and disrupting gender norms.

Abjected effeminacy in contemporary gay discourses serves as one of these exclusions. Increasingly, effeminacy is both demonized and ignored in gay discourses. Part of this is likely due to the stereotypical and often incorrect social assumption that effeminate men are the

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40 Christian A. Gregory (1998) launches a critique of positionality regarding the Jennie Livingston’s film Paris is Burning. Gregory writes that Butler’s goal seems to be significant alternations in the symbolic order, “which, she says, will only be possible if homosexuality resists normalization in the process of becoming part of the symbolic domain” (26). Later, Gregory illustrates the complexity of the performatives enacted by the men in Paris is Burning:

While the other performers understand that ‘class’ is a set of signifiers ready to be put to work in the production of gender, race, and/or professional categories, only Octavia St. Laurent and Willi Ninja understand the performance of gender and race to be a displacement of the more binding and totalizing category of class; instead of simply performing ‘class,’ each of them mobilizes the other categories to the end of achieving it (31-2).

Gregory’s observation of the intricate relationship between race, class, gender, and sexuality shows the difficulty of finding the potentiality of the abject when one finds oneself outside the mainstream on so many levels.
receptive partners in anal intercourse. Catherine Waldby (1995) states, “…It is very easy to do sexual violence to men’s bodies because any form of penetration, or even the threat of penetration, hits up against a clearly defined and absolute boundary, crosses a property line” (269). Later, she stresses how the conception of masculinity as active subject and looker creates a situation in which the male body’s reception of the gaze does violence to the male psyche because this situation attempts to feminize him. Waldby writes, “There is also an injunction against narcissism, an enjoyment of being looked at, which is associated with the passive feminine. Above all there is the injunction against what Sartre called ‘men’s secret femininity,’ receptive anal eroticism” (271-2). Waldby reads anal sex as the ultimate form of violence to traditional notions of masculinity: “Anal erotics in the male body amount to a surrender to the other, to a taking of pleasure in being destroyed rather than being the destroyer” (272). In this way, a man’s reconstitution as a sexual object results in a kind of social/psychological death, an unforgivable transgression of hegemonic masculinity. While Waldby’s ideas critique the man=subject paradigm, they also show the danger of performing gay male desire, for in this situation, anal sex is constructed as a form of violence on a man’s very idea of himself.41 With effeminacy equated so often with anal receptivity both actual and desired, effeminacy in gay men is rendered abject in an effort to preserve an “authentic” masculine identity.

George Chauncey (1994) speaks of a reiterative revision of the masculine-feminine binary in his historical account of the emergence of gay male culture in New York City from 1890-1940. Men who embodied in their dress and mannerisms the stereotypical traits of the homosexual were labeled with the terms "fairy" and "queen." But the term “trade” became an appellation for men that embodied “the aggressive masculine ideal.” Chauncey notes, “The centrality of effeminacy to the definition of the fairy in the dominant culture enabled trade to have sex with both the queers” (men who felt they didn’t belong in either the category of fairy/queen or trade) “and fairies without risking being labeled queer themselves, so long as they maintained a masculine demeanor and sexual role” (16).42 Thus, in the beginnings of a separate “gay world,” a sharp divide existed between men who were effeminate and men who embodied the traditional masculine ideal. Marked effeminacy limited the expression of sexual desire.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993) interrogates prevailing literature on gay and lesbian youth to find that most psychiatric and psychoanalytic accounts dealing with queerness deal only with the specificities of gay male existence. But Sedgwick finds that many of these texts aiming to remove the stigma of homosexuality reinscribe abjection. She argues that these texts posit the healthy homosexual as an adult that always “acts masculine” (156). But while the possibility of effeminate behavior in a man is constructed as the abject in a community defined itself by its abjection, erasing gay adolescents negates the very history of possible effeminacy and youth, thus further reifying effeminacy in gay men as unspeakable. She writes:

In this case the eclipse of the effeminate boy from adult gay discourse would represent more than a damaging theoretical gap; it would represent a node of annihilating homophobic, gynephobic and pedophobic hatred internalized and made central to gay-

41 While her statements demonstrate the arbitrary nature of condemning significant forms of male eroticism, they also dangerously posit a connection between gay sex and violence, a dangerous connection when the idea that homosexuality is “criminal” still has significant ideological force in our world.

42 But while gay men may in some ways employ the binary, the butch-femme relationship is also a substantive revision of masculine and feminine roles.
affirmative analysis. The effeminate boy would come to function as the discrediting open secret of many politicized adult gay men (158).

Perhaps by erasing gay youth and the possibility of discussing the history of effeminacy in adult gay men, the “straight acting” masculine gay male solidifies its position as the epitome of a “positive” representation of gay men. But perhaps even more worrisome, Sedgwick’s findings might make one wonder if any artifact dealing with gay and lesbian visibility can avoid rendering some segment of the gay “community” invisible.

Butler (1999) warns, “Just as metaphors lose their metaphoricity as they congeal through time into concepts, so subversive performances always run the risk of becoming deadening clichés through their repetition, and, most importantly, through their repetition within commodity culture where ‘subversion’ carries market value” (xxi). Later, she exhorts, “Given that normative heterosexuality is clearly not the only regulatory regime operative in the production of bodily contours or setting the limits to bodily intelligibility, it makes sense to ask what other regimes of regulatory production contour the materiality of bodies” (1993, 17). While commodity culture is inextricably tied to the system of compulsory heterosexuality, it may be of special use to zoom a critical lens in on the specific machinations of one forum of “regulatory production”; by examining these gay specific advertisements, an understanding of how gay bodies are put into commodity culture and rendered commodities themselves will help draw some light on how these texts do or do not put into dispute concepts such as “authenticity” and “positive images.”

If the performative has been historically linked with theatricality and by extension queerness, do representations of the performativity of same-sex desire that have been sponsored by commodity culture seek to de-emphasize the “theatricality” of these performances? Is there an attempt in these advertisements to de-emphasize effeminate behavior that has long been mocked in gay men, or an attempt to overplay the masculinity of these bodies in space? All too often, homosexual relations are reduced to a “who does what to whom” paradigm, where gay men are locked in (by society, other gay men, and themselves) into “top,” “bottom,” or “versatile” roles. Do these advertisements lock gay men into particular performances of homosexuality, or do they expose the constructedness of such roles? The next chapter aims to answer these questions.

In part due to the writings of John Berger (1972) and Laura Mulvey (1992), the idea that men (in most situations) are active lookers and that women are passive receptors of the gaze has become an accepted tenet in feminist analyses as well as a site of contesting dominant constructions of how we understand and perform gender. However, when dealing with texts focusing of same-sex desire, the relationship between desire and the desired becomes much more difficult to predict. In visual images depicting gay and lesbian desire, must one party be held up as embodying or standing in for the masculine and one for the feminine? Or do both parties take part in a kind of gender performance resulting from the dialectical tension between femininity and masculinity?
Chapter Three
Analysis

In this chapter, I read the way the two Miller Lite advertisements emerge as a kind of proscenium stage on which a particular vision of homosexuality and same-sex desire is articulated. I examine the way in which these bodies are physically positioned in space, in relation to each other, and in relation to the Commodities to which these bodies’ sexual performances are linked. I locate these bodies as potential rhetors, looking for how these bodies’ sexual performances instantiate and reify norms and conventions governing the expression of gay male sexuality. How do these bodies communicate/argue sexual desire? How do they designate and assign physical portrayals of homosexuality to a subaltern population that desperately wants to not only claim homosexuality as an identity category, but also wants to perform and interrogate that category?

I briefly consider the industrial and cultural milieu in which these texts emerged before demonstrating how these texts reify oppressive discourses which engender and reinforce homosexuality’s unequal status in the homosexual-heterosexual binary. However, from the ad industry’s point-of-view, these advertisements occur at a time when the general public feels more comfortable with images of gay desire. The Commercial Closet, whose web site hosts a collection of gay advertisements along with commentary, argues these advertisements are “the most progressive print effort from Miller to date,” a progressiveness enabled (The Commercial Closet claims) by test audiences’ increased comfort levels with gay imagery:

‘We showed them models first, and they liked the young, attractive, multi-cultural trendy people with a ‘going out’ look and feel,’ says Mike Geiger. ‘We’re seeing more and more couples in ads today but we came out with something that’s got a lot more sexuality than everybody else but we’re still tasteful.’ Focus groups reported that there’s ‘no need to tiptoe around the sexuality’ (Commercial Closet, “Twist one off,” accessed 08/10/03). One danger these ads embody is the feeling shared by the ads’ creators that they have created texts that celebrate our difference and depict our sexuality on equal terms with heterosexuality. Ron Becker’s (1998) observation that gayness has been tapped by the culture industries as a way to reach affluent, upwardly mobile, and urban white commodity audiences has an echo in the advertising industry’s gay as chic paradigm. However, these texts reinscribe gay sexuality in the urban world of the gay ghetto, reinforce body fascism and ageism that already run rampant in many gay communities, and erase millions of gay bodies as a consequence of the increased visibility of ad-sponsored images of gay men.

Traditionally, advertising images of men delimit masculine behaviors to compulsory heterosexuality and stereotypical “guy” activities such as athletics. Gregory Woods (1995) argues that on occasions when two or more men appear in catalog and print advertisements, masculine bodies become the subject of much surveillance, with elaborate conventions policing the ways in which men pose, move, and touch. He argues manly sporting activities are one way that the boundary between homosociality and homosexuality is policed. The bonding rituals of sport, where “one man may place his fist, or less often his open palm, on the nearside shoulder, or less often the far shoulder of his friend,” are acceptable as long as no inference of homosexuality can be made. To preclude any such inferences, the look is further policed: “Ideally, they should look into the distance rather than at each other. Only very rarely do you see them looking into each other’s eyes” (150). By policing how male bodies may move, what they

44 Becker deals with the rise of gay programming in the 1990s.
may do, and where masculine eyes may wander, advertising images embrace a compulsory heterosexuality even as they introduce new subject relationships. Perhaps an incorporation of homosociality leads to an increased policing of masculine gender performance.

However, the Miller Lite ads challenge Woods’ enumeration of conventions surrounding male images in advertising. In these two ads, the men do not look out in the distance or at the horizon across some distant plain. Instead, each man takes in the other as an object of erotic desire; the look has seemingly been queered. The men in each advertisement touch each other in ways that definitely precludes reading these moments of physical contact as interaction between straight buddies; homosociality has seemingly been queered.

While these images queer some of the conventions governing male images in advertising, they simultaneously bolster the regulatory force of compulsory heterosexuality and its accompanying denigration of gay desire. These advertisements embrace some acts of same-sex desire, while they simultaneously avoid depictions of the gay kiss, holding hands, or a host of other psychosexual/spiritual/emotional performances that might exhibit a greater polysemy than the primarily sexual performances these ads embrace. These ads’ silence on the gay kiss echoes the silence chronicled by Alan McKee, who argues that in American televisual discourse, the gay kiss is not only impossible, but also that this impossibility becomes the focus of the narrative: “The moments in which men don’t kiss men in American television programs work very hard to keep kissing and homosexuality apart” (1996, 69). Frank Bruni (1999) states the same-sex kiss creates a situation in which same-sex desire does not need to be speculated about; rather, the gay kiss serves as a self-evident demonstration of gay desire. Little wonder then that when Bruni discusses “liberal” straight people who are okay with homosexuality but hate to see gay men “flaunt” their sexuality in public, he observes it is the kiss that often becomes equated with the act of flaunting one’s sexuality. In America, only “faggots” kiss other men “like that,” and seeing two men kiss “like that” makes it impossible to deny who these men are. Thus, the absence of the gay kiss, even in these supposedly liberatory texts, evidences a cultural anxiety surrounding the gay kiss. While the men can engage in embraces of sorts and can feel each other up, kissing is prohibited. McKee observes that kissing is powerful, because it is such a loaded signifier; kissing need not be a purely sexual performative, and kissing can easily be linked to deep feelings of love and affection (51-2). By denying these men the opportunity to kiss, these advertisements allow for “trivial” sexual encounters but preclude the deepest “semiotic acts” and “performances ripe with meaning” (52). Homosexuality’s potential as an identity category, an organizing principle for resistance, an oppositional culture, and the potential for queerness to substantively revise gender and sexual roles are eviscerated. These ads become complicit in a denial of the complexities of queer lives precisely because those complex and multilayered gay performances are rendered invisible. These ads only show us in a sexual light, contributing to the idea that sex is all there is to us. To many, we’re not complex; we just fuck.

These advertisements define us as just gay. It is as if the expression of gay sexuality erases all other elements of our personality. As a fiction of identity, we could construct a priority list of what parts of our selves are most central to our conception of who we are. For many of us, being gay would be high on the list, but it would by no means be the centrality of our identity, the top of the list. But it seems that when we as gay men are rendered visible in popular culture, regardless of the quality or effect of our representation, we are constituted as subjects on the sole

45 Perhaps this is the reason behind the kiss-ins sponsored by Queer Nation in the early 1990s and echoed in protests and demonstrations sponsored by university GLBT organizations.
basis of our gayness. We have been rendered visible as sexual beings (almost always incompletely), but are forbidden from being complete beings. We are always gay men, and never men that are gay. The adjective gay precedes our work, our identity, and countless other descriptions of our bodies, selves, and accomplishments. In countless ways, the word gay precedes the noun, as if the word gay is a buffer zone word designed to say, “Look here, this doesn’t mean all writers/poets/composers/architects are like this.” This works to demean our accomplishments and who we are. Constantly including gay as the introducing adjective renders the performance of identity as less important, less successful than other performances, and less respected than the unmarked performances of heterosexual men who are our colleagues and coworkers.

This inability to grapple with the complex ways gay men negotiate and perform their identities is further evidenced by the dismissal of gay fashion and style as a social and political act. Shaun Cole (2000) notes that historically, dress has been extremely important to many gay men, as it has been one way of communicating sexual desire and identity in a world that has been inhospitable to open declarations of homosexuality. Cole states, “…Clothing, along with adornment and demeanor, has been a primary method of identification for and of gay men” (1). Cole goes on to assert, “Apparel and adornment had provided an implication of homosexuality or a tendency toward same-sex sexual activity since the seventeenth century” (2).

The fashion in these advertisements is extremely urban and seems to encode the attire of men in gay bars and clubs as the attire that is able to be marked “gay fashion.” The clothes seem to be rendered singularly as objects enabling the expression of sexual attraction. There is a “dress to get laid” quality that denies any sort of deeper aesthetics to clothing choices. Rather than the clothes making the man, enabling a conclusion of some type regarding interiority, the clothes reinforce the notion that these advertisements are all about the exteriority of the men in the ads, rendering the performance of identity to the order of casual sex. The clothes in the two ads bring to mind the crowds of shirtless gay men and men in tight black T-shirts or form-fitting sleeveless tops closely associated with the oppressive meat market atmosphere of many gay clubs. These ads therefore fix gay fashion and dress as club fashion. By reducing fashion in these ads to a dress to get laid proposition exemplified by club wear, these texts demean the importance of style and fashion as a technique of gay men identifying themselves to each other in a homophobic culture and as a way of embodying an oppositional culture. The texts trivialize and attempt to displace/erase a historical narrative of fashion as a set of gay semiotics, coded responses of resistance to gay invisibility in the “proper” public sphere, while they equate gay style and culture with the urban gay ghetto.

These advertisements take the style and culture embraced by many who live in the gay ghettos of major American cities and posit these performances of gay identity as dominant performances of gayness. Frank Browning (1993) states, “The country’s major cities may be the places where gay issues and fashions are defined, where gay men congregate for reassurance and celebration, but they often present a suffocatingly narrow, even racist, vision of gay life” (190). While gay men living in urban areas may see images that remind them of themselves, those of us who live our lives outside of and want to explore the world beyond the boundaries of Chelsea, the Castro, Montrose, Dupont Circle and Belmont feel alienated. From Will and Grace to these advertisements, we gay men who feel ill at ease with significant portions of gay culture(s) are rendered the abject, even in the pages of the magazines designed to serve our community. These advertisements posit a flow of communication in the gay community from urban centers and the gay ghettos to the rest of us, constructing the gay ghettos as center and the rest of us as the
periphery, with all the value distinctions implied by the center-periphery binary. If “gay culture” is decided on from on high in the urban gay ghettoes, there is little opportunity to resist or modify the languages and semiotic codes that are used to communicate sexual desire. Thus, gay men who find themselves geographically and psychologically outside of the gay ghetto are rendered invisible and irrelevant.

Perhaps the anxiety over showcasing complicated gay performances contributes to the slight way in which these advertisements visually mark same-sex desire. In both advertisements, the presence of one hand, the left hand, touching the other man’s body, is the only gesture that seems to be encoded as specific to same-sex desire. If one were to cover up or erase the actions of the left hands in the advertisements, the relationships between the two men in each advertisement would become much more ambiguous. Without the gesture of the left hand, one might be able to read the advertisements as mere camaraderie between straight buddies, or possibly an impending fight in “Twist one off.” Same-sex desire has been encoded into the image, but it is barely represented. Gay expression is visibly there, but it is barely there.

Same-sex desire is barely there only because of alcohol’s placement as an enabler of homosexual expression. Both advertisements inextricably link alcohol to the performance of same-sex desire. In “Threesome,” at both points of the physical contact between the two men, the advertised commodity has been strategically placed. The man on the left’s arm is wrapped around his companion’s back while his hand holds a beer bottle draping over his companion’s shoulder, while the companion’s hand reaches down to the man on the left’s hip, in the direction of the glass of Miller Lite at the bottom of the ad. While the man on the left touches his companion with the beer bottle on the shoulder, the man on the right is reaching out to his companion’s body in a parallel motion to the glass, a motion that has been arrested in time by the photograph before he can hold the glass in his hand. In the advertisement “Twist one off,” the man in the sleeveless shirt is reaching up the stomach of his companion, with his hand in the background of the glass of beer. Here, touching is rendered as dual: touching the beer and touching the body.

Alcohol is posited as the catalyst for the performance of same-sex desire in these advertisements. While alcohol is used in concert with sexual desire in heterosexual beer ads, these ads do not posit alcohol as the enabling force for the expression of heterosexual desire. In these advertisements, that which has been rendered invisible, the abject in the visual frame, is rendered visible because of its connection with alcohol. In the advertisement “Threesome,” alcohol is the catalyst for the performance of same-sex desire; moreover, it is constructed as a sexual party. Here, that which does not even possess a physical body, the inanimate object of a glass or bottle of beer, becomes endowed with a sexual subjectivity, placed in equal relation and weight in the ad copy to the bodies of the two men. Putting the beer on the same level as the body devalues the bodies and any physical expression of desire between the two men.

These liquor advertisements targeted to gay consumers represent the signifier of liquor as the center of the gay world. William Leiss, Stephen Kline, and Sut Jhally’s (1990) discussion of totemism notes that “the things represented as totems are thought to stand in some intrinsic

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46 One cannot disregard the fact that alcohol and cigarette advertisements have historically been the largest advertisers in the gay press, due to the fact that negative PR stemming from advertising to the gay community doesn’t seem to have much of an adverse impact on commodities that are already considered to be “sinful” in certain respects. But when that which is considered “sinful” establishes at least an implicit link to the communication and expression of homosexual desire, the danger is that same-sex desire’s “unnatural” and “sinful” status will be reified all in the name of liberatory emancipation.
relation to each other, and, as emblems for interrelationships, they can be ‘read’ for what they signify about social interactions among those who are divided by and grouped under them” (344). They further note, “Today’s totems (product images) themselves are badges of group membership, which also entails self-administered codes of authority for dress, appearance, popular entertainment, customary places of assembly, behavior rituals, and role stereotyping (for example, ‘macho’ versus ‘non-macho’ subgroups)” (344). Coupled with the historical emergence of dominant strands of American gay identities in bars (for one, Stonewall’s iconic place in the American gay imagination), advertisements like these reify the links between gay identities and alcohol.

Walters (2001) notes that liquor advertisements like these illustrate a dialectical tension between rendering gayness visible and rendering it unnatural: “The direct address works best for selling booze-induced homolove. The...ad...plays on gay knowledge and insider language...These ads aim to access both multicultural and gay hipness (such as they are), flattering the gay consumer by refusing coded vagueness and instead encoding gay identity. Direct address, yes, but only in gay publications” (260). While the specificities of gay male experience are supposedly acknowledged, gay experiences are only acknowledged in niche publications. Too, the ties these advertisements promote between alcohol and gay sexuality connote same-sex desire as something that is only expressed, affection that is only initiated, when one is under the influence. Homosexuality is treated as something that is only talked about, only claimed, and definitely only acted upon when one’s inhibitions have been lessened, when one’s guard is let down. Homosexuality’s unnaturalness is perpetuated by the implicit argument in these two advertisements that alcohol is needed to render same-sex desire visible, mocking the performance of same-sex desire as a choice that only someone under the influence would make.

The status of alcohol as the enabler of same-sex desire is echoed in an advertisement for Chandon California wine. In the ad, a belt of the wine label encircling them frames the embrace and possibly near kiss of the two men. What brings the two men together seems to be the constricting force of the wine label, on which is written an expression of same-sex desire, which intimates that the desire of the heart is something that can be achieved through the consumption of the wine. This ad adds more fuel to the fire claiming that alcohol is not posited as something that makes the expression of same-sex desire easier or more intelligible; it is the catalyst that renders the abject visible or the agent that allows unspeakable desire to be performed.

In addition to the way these advertisements’ use of images shows the naturalization-denaturalization dichotomy regarding gay visibility, linguistic markers also demonstrate an ambivalence regarding our presence in popular culture. Particularly ambiguous is the warning in the upper right corner of each advertisement. The admonition to live responsibly accompanied by the Miller logo could be read as simply a warning about safe drinking practices, or a coded message to drink responsibly and avoid drinking and driving. But its placement in this stage of gender performance causes one to read this warning as something more pernicious. In the world of AIDS and the continued perception in the minds of many that gay sex/homosexuality=AIDS=death⁴⁷ (evidenced by such offensive signs as “AIDS Kills Fags” at

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⁴⁷ On the one hand, these advertisements do address us specifically as gay men. But it is more important to understand what kind of gay men these advertisements, and other gay specific advertisements, engage in a direct address. The infantilization of gay men that occurs through the Miller Lite advertisements is also profoundly negatively communicated in other marketing strategies. While many marketers do attempt to communicate different
protests sponsored by the Reverend Fred Phelps at Matthew Shepard’s funeral in Wyoming), this warning has meaning beyond a simple Mothers Against Drunk Driving kind of public service announcement (Spindler, 2000, 48). This warning emerges as fundamentally ambiguous, because the vague exhortation to “Live Responsibly” seems to apply both to safe drinking practices and to the expression of same-sex desire. Such an admonition need not necessarily be thought of as denigrating to gay men, but in this case, the warning infantilizes gay men, arguing that gay men are ill equipped and unable to care effectively for their sexual health.

The implicit disrespect given to the expressions of gay desire is further evidenced by the “More Than Friends” tagline at the bottom of the advertisements. I remember being at the mall with my mother, shortly after I had come out to her, when she spotted what she perceived to be a gay male couple. She turned to me and said, “I think they’re special friends.” The refusal to give an explicit name, and instead the choice of a euphemistic but stunningly condescending term for a gay relationship, demonstrated not only my mother’s discomfort with gay sexuality, but also an adamant refusal to admit to the “authenticity” or the intricacies of a romantic relationship between two men. The language at the bottom of the ad does not read boyfriend, partner, husband or any other more specific and loaded name for the relationship or connection that the image depicts.

This lack of specificity in dealing with the relationship posited in the ad is caused in part by a sense of disgust by dominant society over the performance of the gay male body. Shildrick and Price note the devalued body is often constituted as a source of fear (3). Brian L. Ott and Eric Aoki assert, “Prejudice and discrimination against GLBT persons have been historically connected to the stigmatization of the body as different or abnormal” (2002, 494). They talk about the connection of the body to statements that the gay body is effeminate, “dirty and unclean,” and a source of fear (e.g., child molestation). Indeed, these sentiments of somatophobia have even been inscribed into the discourse of law. Evan Thomas notes in his Newsweek article on the Lawrence v. Texas decision the sentiments of Kevin Cathcart, executive director for the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund: “In the past, he had to deal with what he called the ‘ick factor’ – the revulsion some heterosexuals feel about homosexual acts. ‘The Kennedy opinion not only does not have an ick factor,’ says Cathcart, ‘but is almost an apology for the ick factor 17 years ago” (2003, 42-3). While the Lawrence v. Texas decision

advertising messages to straight and gay men, the images and stereotypes that direct address perpetuates about homosexuality are often as pernicious as the images of us that are promoted by the religious right.

Take for example the advertisements for testosterone replacement therapy. When this ad appears in Men’s Health, ad copy reads: “An estimated 4-5 million American men have a medical condition called hypogonadism, or low testosterone. As some men grow older, their testosterone levels decline. Low testosterone (hypogonadism) can cause low sex drive, fatigue, and depression among other problems.” But consider how gay men are addressed when the ad appears in the pages of The Advocate: “For men living with HIV, both the disease and the treatments can cause a medical condition called hypogonadism, or low testosterone levels. In fact, 30-50% of HIV+ males have low testosterone levels (hypogonadism), which can cause depression, fatigue, and low sex drive as well as other problems.”

The marketers of testosterone replacement therapies address heterosexual men with the prospect of aging; this product, for straight men, is a way to recapture the vigor of youth, and the marketing strategy implicates the “natural” biology of aging. In contrast, the prospect of aging is pointedly refused as a marketing strategy to gay men. Instead, the ad offensively essentializes gay men and equates homosexuality with HIV. At its worst, the ad can be read as making the argument that addressing gay men with a strategy based in the biology of aging is fruitless, since HIV will ensure that most gay men won’t reach an age where the strategy used to sell this product to heterosexual men would make sense.
may (at least temporarily) help smoothe over the discomfort the law has had with gay male bodies, popular culture still wants to think about our sexuality in the abstract, and the vaguer and more asexual terms that can be used to describe our relationships, the better. Instead of any specific naming of gay desire, the appellation “more than friends” is intentionally ambiguous, reifying oppressive discourses that regard the specificities of gay life as unspeakable. Straight relationships are accorded the respect of boyfriend and girlfriend or husband and wife. At best, in these ads, we are “more than friends.”

These Miller Lite advertisements use vague terms to describe relationships between partners of the same-sex, and this vagueness evidences the discomfort dominant society feels about addressing the particularities of gay experience. This language game operates in the very way that our sexual desire is nominated. Often, those who speak against gay equality, frame our sexual desire as a preference. This leads to a view of homosexuality that argues one day we woke up and decided we were sexually attracted to people of the same sex, a view of performativity that Butler explicitly rebukes. Sexual object choice is reduced to the kind of choice we would make when deciding what flavor of ice cream to buy at Baskin Robbins.

On the other hand, we are nominated (by both well-meaning liberals and ourselves) as having a different sexual orientation. While preference connotes a frivolity and flightiness to sexual activity that demeans sexual performances, orientation connotes steadfastness, a static and unchanging quality that denies us a sense of agency by precluding the possibility of evolution and change. Sexuality is not a static given; rather, like so many other parts of a person’s subjectivity, it is molded both by experience and time. We cannot freeze frame sexual desire, even if we would want to, in the same way that we don’t perform our sexuality with the same casual nonchalance as we might when deciding between Junior Mints and Milk Duds at the movies. But when describing our sexuality, we are stuck between these two poles, between being rendered in language as fickle choosers of our sexuality or sexual time capsules. In this Scylla and Charybdis, we cannot adequately name or talk about our sexuality.

Additionally, the language game of vagueness demonstrates that dominant society will accept us as long as we can stomach our relationships being described in euphemistic terms. Take for example the debate between civil unions and gay marriage. In a 2003 poll, more Americans favored civil unions (49%) than gay marriage (39%). According to the Gallup poll, “the exclusion of the word ‘marriage’ - considered by many to carry religious overtones that the phrase ‘civil union’ does not – may explain the lower favorability rating” for the question of gay marriage (“Poll: Americans favor civil unions over gay marriage,” accessed 07/22/03). While we may not want to adopt marriage as a term for describing long-term gay relationships (resulting in inscribing even more heterosexual rules and mores onto gay relationships), the term civil union should be anathema to us as well. The term itself disavows any sense of the spiritual and the emotional. The term sounds strange and foreign, and is more acceptable than marriage precisely because it renders a gay relationship as a contract; instead of a value-laden term like marriage, civil union sounds like a term of bureaucracy and the law. In this way, gay men and lesbians are stuck again in the language game; many of us want more than civil union status, but we don’t want to be stuck to the traditional connotations of marriage either.

Tim Miller points out how difficult it is for gay men to decide what to name our relationships: “To some people, the word boyfriend is far too casual; to others, too intimate. There are other words, of course. Lover. Too illicit. Partner. Too businesslike. Significant other. Too long. Husband. Too bourgeois” (1997, 256, italics in original). We can’t choose not to name our relationships and our commitments. While “special friends” or “more than friends”
are obviously offensive, it becomes difficult to ascertain just what linguistic term (if any) could give voice to the uniqueness and specificity of the gay relationship without delegitimizing it in some way.

At the very least, what these advertisements do begins bridging the gap between the aural/linguistic marker and the performance of identity. One cannot ignore the fact that the linguistic declaration of desire is inextricably linked to the performance of desire, and indeed, the performance of sexuality, so the conservative belief that calling ourselves gay is acceptable as long as we are not gay becomes an arbitrary distinction designed to put a cloak of tolerance on the rankest homophobia. I argue these advertisements posit both the body and the word as speakers of desire, and that regardless of how desire is expressed, a “homosexual act” has occurred in the process, rendering the conservative artificial distinction useless.

The two Miller Lite advertisements play up the theatricality and the constructedness of the performatives that are enacted. They take a sexuality that has already been marked as “deviant,” and in the name of empowering gay men with increased visibility, reify the construction of gay male sexuality as “unnatural.” It is particularly distressing that much of this inequality is written on the body, a form of psychological violence-terrorism done in the name of rendering gay male sexuality visible in popular and commodity culture. It is also distressing that this violence takes place in the pages of gay and lesbian niche media, using media targeted to us to show us our inequality.

While this thesis does not aim to thoroughly investigate the way queer spectators read gay-specific advertisements, it is interesting to note what images these advertisements may be interpreted as echoes of. For this viewer, the half-clothed men bear a resemblance to the representations of gay men and lesbians in soundbite clips on local news broadcasts of gay pride parades. Dan Savage (2002) satirically notes that these images of pride parades fuel the disgust and repulsion that many heterosexuals feel about gay life, and that these images discredit the

48 In the history of visual media, particularly mainstream American television, a tension between allowing characters to claim alternative sexualities and allowing them to perform these sexualities has been the subject of much criticism. Alan McKee (1996) asserts that most gay men are allowed to express the aural declaration of their identity, but that the performance of sexuality is either completely erased from the visual frame or shown, only for the small screen to focus on how straight people feel about us. We should wonder why this seems to be an either/or proposition regarding our representation.

49 Dominant strains of Christianity have perpetuated the logic of “hate the sin, love the sinner” that fractures a person’s subjectivity from their behavior and perpetuates the body/soul dichotomy. For example, Senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania echoes the fragmentation of identity from the performance of identity:

I have no problem with homosexuality. I have a problem with homosexual acts. I have nothing, absolutely nothing against anyone who’s homosexual. If that’s there orientation, then I accept that. And I have no problem with someone who has other orientations. The question is, Do you act upon those orientations? So it’s not the person, it’s the person’s actions. And you have to separate the person from their actions... (“No Apology expected from Santorum, accessed 4/3/03)

50 This denigration of gay male sexuality continues in an ad promoting Florida’s Key West as a gay tourist destination. The ad contains the tagline, “You’re among friends,” and shows two identical plastic male dolls lying side by side on a beach backdrop. The ad substitutes plastic dolls for real gay bodies, which may seem harmless and playful at first. But this ad can easily be read as turning the gay male body, and the image of possible same-sex desire, into something that can easily be demeaned. This ad renders the gay male body a physical plaything, a doll, easily used and discarded, a plastic doll empty of interiority and a sense of the spiritual.

51 John Fiske (1988) asserts: “When I watch television, I precede any program the box can offer me: my social history which has constructed me as the discursive and ideological mélange that I am has been working to form my moment of consciousness in front of the screen for far longer and far more insistently than any ‘influence’ the screen can exert over me” (246).
more serious parts of a gay liberationist message. In the same way that these ads reinforce Goffman’s (1979) idea of being “saved from seriousness,” they also remind the viewer of all the historical antecedents of this image that have denied the importance and the respect of our message demanding social justice (vii). These historical antecedents add fire to the disgust a queer spectator may have regarding these advertisements, where our sexuality and identity are constructed once again as less than straight identity.

It is possible these images could be read as capturing a still image of the process where homosociality (Sedgwick, 1985) begins to metamorphose into homosexuality. It might make these images more subversive if they were read in this way. Such a reading would put traditional performances of male bonding into question; if homosociality potentially opens up the avenues for same-sex desire to be expressed, heterosexual male bonding becomes tainted with the potential threat of gayness. However, I personally doubt that many viewers engage in this kind of critical viewing of the ad, given the level of decoding work needed to obtain an oppositional reading from a text.

Having demonstrated how these advertising texts reinscribe gay inequality while increasing gay visibility in commodity culture, in the next chapter I account for some potential effects of these representations of same-sex desire. Most importantly, I attempt to address how these ads reawaken us to the importance of the body and how apprehending the importance of interrogating how our bodies are made legible can help create productive coalitions between feminism and queer activism. I also seek to problematize how we come to define ourselves as queer by asking if gayness can be a corporeal performative or if it must be an aural/linguistic performative as well.
Chapter 4
Conclusions and Implications

David M. Skover and Kellye Y. Testy write, “Though LesBiGays can struggle to resist or reform their commodified identity, they cannot naively pretend that it is not there or merely insist that it is not ‘them’” (2002, 254). While we can attempt to resist the way in which our subaltern group has been constructed in commodity culture, we will still be subject to judgment on the basis of those portrayals. Patricia Williams (1991) writes of a speech that she gave at a law conference that was blatantly misrepresented in newspaper clippings that described her speech as anti-affirmative action:

I clipped out the article and put it in my journal. In the margin there is a note to myself: eventually, it says, I should try to pull all these threads together into yet another law-review article. The problem, of course, will be that in the hierarchy of law-review citation, the article in the newspaper will have more authoritative weight about me, as a so-called ‘primary resource,’ than I will have; it will take precedence over my own citation of the unverifiable testimony of my speech (50).

Butler’s writings assert that the act of citing something in the “authorship” of a performative enhances that citation’s power. But refusing to cite a text in the “enactment” of a corporeal performative may have negligible effect on that text’s power. The text and the arguments it creates about our bodies will still trump alternative and contestatory performances.

Butler’s writings seem to demonstrate ambivalence about social movement activism, preferring to invest greater hope in the subversive and resistant actions of individuals. However, the fact that Williams’ speech will be trumped by texts about her, that our performances of sexuality will be trumped by representations of our sexuality in commodity culture, beg the question of whether resistant individual actions will ever accumulate the force or visibility to counter mass-mediated images. Bearing in mind the critical importance of mass media images of sexual minorities, this chapter begins to chart the implications of texts like those analyzed in chapter 3.

The previous chapter analyzed how the Miller Lite advertisements, as one example of the trend of national companies’ increased presence in the Advocate, frame homosexuality and same-sex desire in ways that denigrate same-sex desire and delegitimize queer sexual performances. In this chapter, I investigate the possible implications of these texts. I argue that these texts reify the dominance of the urban gay ghetto over gay culture while they erase spatial and personal politics. I posit that the discursive construction of gayness in these ads endorses a language of gay life that splits homosexual identity from homosexual acts and locks gay men into a politically regressive language game. Noting our nomination as gay subjects, I note how gay speech is allowed as long as it is confined to the queer margins. Examining the metrosexual trend, I question whether our already delimited speech will further be marginalized and displaced by straight male co-optation of queer culture. At the end of the chapter, I re-connect these texts to the political, social, and economic contexts outlined in the first chapter. Making a potential link with feminism and other identity-based social movements, I conclude the chapter by showing how these advertisements alert us to discourses that both structure our vision of our own and others’ bodies; understanding the ways these structuring discourses have effects on various bodies, this awareness lays the groundwork for plotting linkages and coalitions between seemingly discrete movements.

These advertisements take the style and culture embraced by many who live in the gay ghettos of major American cities and posit these performances of gay identity as dominant
performances of gayness, the only performances of gay identity that are capable of crossing the boundary from abjectness to widespread visibility. Frank Browning (1993) states, “The country’s major cities may be the places where gay issues and fashions are defined, where gay men congregate for reassurance and celebration, but they often present a suffocatingly narrow, even racist, vision of gay life” (190). These advertisements posit a flow of communication in the gay community from urban centers and the gay ghettos to the rest of us.

However, while these advertisements fetishize dominant elements of urban gay culture, they erase the materiality of gay physical spaces (the bar, the neighborhood, etc.) as they deny any spatiality to queer performances and preclude political definitions of queer culture. These advertisements show performances of gayness, but these performances are isolated from any sense of space and any idea of the public sphere. The “performers” are isolated from any sense of community. Helene A. Shugart (2003) analyzes the flurry of gay man-straight woman dyads in recent television and film texts and finds that the isolation of gay men is a major theme. Shugart writes, “That most of these gay men are not depicted as part of a larger gay community – and Robert [in the Madonna-Rupert Everett film The Next Best Thing], the one who is, is contrasted sharply with a very narrow depiction of that community – further enhances this function” (80). Alfred P. Kielwasser and Michelle A. Wolf state, “In every case, gay men are disconnected from any larger culture or communities of lesbians and gays” (1992, 362). Not only are the bodies of the men in the Miller Lite ads suspended in limbo, the ads show gay desire as a “private” act between two people, negating the potential promise of community. The promise of the gay “community” is that the performance of gay sexuality can be used as a rallying cry, but our sex cannot be used as a cry of resistance without having sexual practice and the performance of identity emerging in the public sphere. Representations of our sexuality like these ads preclude this promise from ever being portrayed in the visual frame; these ads make it more difficult to imagine what form or shape this promise could take.

These advertisements bring into relief the distinction between the appellation of “gay” as a marker of identity and the performativity of a gay existence – a split between identity and desire that makes a nuanced and complete account of queer subjectivity difficult. Beginning with discourses that have been instrumental in oppressing gay men and lesbians, I follow with a consideration of how this identity-desire split gets instantiated in gay activist and scholarly discourses. Dominant strains of Christianity have perpetuated the logic of “hate the sin, love the

52 While gay men living in urban areas may see images that remind them of themselves (this being an assumption I disagree with), those of us who live our lives outside of and want to explore the world beyond the boundaries of Chelsea, the Castro, Montrose, Dupont Circle and Belmont feel alienated. From Will and Grace to these advertisements (and almost all the other texts that could be studied in any project relating to the visibility and representations of gay men), we gay men who feel ill at ease with significant portions of gay culture(s) are still rendered as the abject, even in the pages of the magazines designed to serve our community.

53 These texts ironically reify center-periphery models of communication as they make a minority population visible. It is as if “gay culture” is decided on from on high, and there is little opportunity to resist or modify our cultures or the languages and semiotic codes that are so often used to communicate sexual desire.

54 At the very least, what these advertisements do is bridge the gap between the linguistic marker and the performance of identity. One cannot ignore the fact that the linguistic declaration of desire is inextricably linked to the performance of desire, and indeed, the performance of sexuality, so the conservative belief that calling ourselves gay is acceptable as long as we are not gay becomes an arbitrary distinction designed to put a cloak of tolerance on the rankest homophobia. I argue that these advertisements posit both the body and the word as speakers of desire, and that regardless of how desire is expressed, a “homosexual act” has occurred in the process, rendering the conservative artificial distinction useless.
“sinner” that fractures a person’s subjectivity from their behavior and perpetuates the body/soul dichotomy. Mainstream American television evidences a tension between allowing characters to claim alternative sexualities and allowing them to perform these sexualities. McKee (1996) asserts that most gay men are allowed the aural declaration of their identity, but the performance of sexuality is either completely erased from the visual frame or shown, only for the small screen to focus on how straight people feel about us.

Despite the oppressive discourses these advertisements help to reinstantiate, texts like these that make elements of the performance of same-sex desire more visible have some positive effects. Increased visibility of homosexuality in the public sphere has helped fuel the fire to make gays and lesbians equal under the law. This visibility also brings into stark relief the fact that while gay men and lesbians have been “free” to name their sexuality, performing that sexuality has often brought the condemnation of the law.

Much scholarship regarding gay men and lesbians centers on our self-identification through the coming-out process. The coming-out process has been rendered as the way we not only name our existence, but also become our existence. Is it possible that the coming out paradigm ignores the body, renders it as a dirty secret, or at the very least treats sexual desire and the body as afterthoughts? I posit that the physical performance of homosexuality may be a more substantive form of “coming out,” but to argue this, I believe we must reach a conclusion on whether coming out is a social project that can be achieved through corporeal performatives. Cathy Griggers asks of lesbian identity: “Should we define the lesbian by a specific sexual practice or by the lack thereof? By a history of actual, or virtual, relations? Can she be identified once and for all by the presence of a public, broadcast kiss, by an act of self-proclamation, or by an act of community outing?” (1994, 120)

The pattern of making the gay body visible in the pages of the glossy gay magazines via the discourse of advertising demonstrates a degree of self-internalized somatophobia by gay men that the religious right has latched on to in their campaign to deny us equality. If we rightfully

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55 For example, Senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania echoes the fragmentation of identity from the performance of identity: “I have no problem with homosexuality. I have a problem with homosexual acts...I have nothing, absolutely nothing against anyone who’s homosexual. If that’s their orientation, then I accept that. And I have no problem with someone who has other orientations. The question is, Do you act upon those orientations? So it’s not the person, it’s the person’s actions. And you have to separate the person from their actions...” (“No Apology expected from Santorum, accessed 4/3/03)
56 For example, on May 15, 2002 the state supreme court of Ohio overturned a law which “made it a first-degree misdemeanor to make a sexual advance toward a person of the same sex if the ‘offender knows it is offensive’” (Advocate, 2002, 16). Meghan’s Laws, a flurry of laws in several states designed to protect children from sexual predators by having sex offenders register in their communities, had the unfortunate flaw of describing an overly broad definition of the category of sex offenders that included in some cases gay men and lesbians. And until the summer of 2003, sodomy laws in many states made us all criminals before the law.
57 In terms of visibility in popular culture, the coming out metaphor has been reiterated so many times it has become hackneyed. Gay independent films (as well as most mainstream Hollywood productions) deal well with gay characters as long as they are coming out of the closet, as long as the film can be packaged as a coming out tale/coming of age story, but they tend to falter once that entrance to gay life has been made. Life after the closet has been massively under-explored.
58 It therefore becomes an instance of the constative performative, a performative that performs what it says, as J.L. Austin describes it.
59 “Indeed, homosexual activists actively avoid public discussion of homosexual behavior. In the 1989 book *After the Ball: How America Will Overcome Its Hatred and Fear of Homosexuals in the 90s*, a blueprint for homosexual political power, the authors warn that: ‘The public should not be shocked and repelled by premature exposure to homosexual behavior itself.’ Homosexual activists realize that when people become aware of the common
expect straight America to get over their fear and repulsion of gay bodies and gay sexual intimacy, gay and lesbian activists, advocacy organizations, and gay niche media need to stop treating our sex as a dirty little secret. Bersani states that for various reasons, we prefer to keep certain subjects on the margins of our social visibility: the fact that when we speak of gay rights, we are speaking of rights for men whose primary erotic pleasure is taken from the bodies of other men, and for women whose primary erotic pleasure is taken from the bodies of other women (1995, 58).

We might wonder how we potentially deal with images that are somewhat similar to, but engage in significant departures from the “sex only” Miller Lite images. For this, I will briefly contrast the Miller Lite ads with the July 7, 2003 Newsweek cover. While the Miller Lite images are supposedly progressive because of their demonstration of transgressive sexual performatives, the Newsweek cover may be subversive because of the “normality” the image suggests. I think the juxtaposition of this cover with the Miller Lite ads is an important one, allowing for a brief (and admittedly isolated and specific) consideration of the differences between images of same-sex desire in gay niche versus mass media. Similar to the Miller Lite ads, the Newsweek cover uses the hands as the primary conveyors of same-sex desire.

Both men on the Newsweek cover stand up, straight and assertive. The casual dress of jeans with a tucked in and cleanly pressed oxford shirt connotes a sort of normalcy; these men are just your “average Joes” on the street. In these ads, unlike the Miller Lite advertisements, the men’s eyes are clearly visible, but the men’s gazes stare out at the camera and us as the viewer.

homosexual practices (not to mention the more debased acts), they will see that these behaviors do not merit special protection in the laws” (Garcia and Regier, “Homosexuality is not a civil right,” accessed 8/4/03).

The rhetoric of assimilation won’t work, because we are not just like straight people; our sex is different, and pretending that it isn’t potentially damages a movement for equality, in that once those differences become legible, heterosexuals will once again fall ill with a repulsion of alternative sexual practice.

John Fiske (1988) asserts, “When I watch television, I precede any program the box can offer me: my social history which has constructed me as the discursive and ideological melange that I am has been working to form my moment of consciousness in front of the screen for far longer and far more insistently than any ‘influence’ the screen can exert over me” (246). While this thesis does not aim to thoroughly investigate the way queer spectators read gay-specific advertisements, it is interesting to note what images these advertisements may be interpreted as echoes of. For this viewer, the half-clothed men bear a resemblance to the representations of gay men and lesbians in sound bite clips on local news broadcasts of gay pride parades. Dan Savage (2002) satirically notes that these images of pride parades fuel the disgust and repulsion that many heterosexuals feel about gay life, and that these images discredit the more serious parts of a gay liberationist message. In the same way that these ads reinforce Goffman’s (1979) idea of being “saved from seriousness,” they also remind the viewer of all the historical antecedents of this image that have denied the importance and the respect of our message demanding social justice (vii).

It is possible that these images could be read as capturing a still image of the process where homosociality (Sedgwick, 1985) begins to metamorphose into homosexuality. It might make these images more subversive if they were read in this way. Such a reading would put traditional performances of male bonding into question, for if homosociality potentially opens up the avenues for same-sex desire to be expressed, then heterosexual male bonding becomes tainted with the potential threat of gayness. However, I personally doubt that many viewers engage in this kind of critical viewing of the ad.

If anything, this Newsweek cover is also an advertisement of sorts, a cover image designed to entice consumers to buy this magazine at their local newsstand or grocery store checkout aisle.

It seems that it’s always the hands that encode gay desire. Holding hands in this image though, may help to connote the two men in this image as more active equal than the partners in the Miller Lite ads, but it still shows that demonstrations of same-sex desire are confined to certain parts of the body. We can touch, as long as that touching is initiated with the hands, and as long as if that slight touching were erased, the ambiguity of the image could provide the reader with a totally different conclusion regarding the relationship between the two men.

This gaze may work to demonstrate the controversial nature of gay male relationships in America today, as the two men stare at the viewer, asking for affirmation of their committed relationship and the respect a “real” heterosexual relationship would possess as the bold-faced title of marriage sprawls over their torsos.
Which images do we find to be more subversive? And what problems do both images present regarding gay male visibility? As a viewer, I identify with the Miller Lite ads in the physical, sexual sense, happy to see gay bodies unafraid of touching, while I identify with the Newsweek cover in a more social and “spiritual” sense. There may even be something liberating in the way the Miller Lite ads show two men who are focused more on each other instead of gazing at the viewer for approval or acceptance.  

While the Miller Lite ads seem vapid, there seems to be some sort of constructed interiority in the Newsweek cover. The juxtaposition of these two images illustrates a fundamental question regarding visual representations of gay men. If we rightfully abandon the language of positive and negative images, must we still settle for the bifurcated images evidenced by these two texts, reinstating a permutation of the mind/body split in the representation of our own sexuality? Why can’t we have the physical and the social in the same scene? These images suggest a dialectical tension between our relationships being presented as just sex and as sainted, committed couples (where sex is abjected).

These advertisements define us as just gay, and nothing else. It is as if the expression of gay sexuality erases all other elements of our personality. When we as gay men are rendered visible in popular culture, regardless of the quality or effect of our representation, we are constituted as subjects on the sole basis of our gayness. We have been rendered visible as sexual beings (almost always incompletely), but are forbidden from being complete beings. The adjective “gay” precedes our work, our identity, and countless other descriptions of our bodies, selves, and accomplishments. While this is often done in the spirit of multiculturalism, this labeling often works to continue the marginalization of gay work and gay men’s vocational and social accomplishments. For describing gay men’s efforts as queer evidences a tension between acknowledging difference and the often implicit marking of gayness as different that keeps heterosexuality at the center. This works to demean our accomplishments and who we are. Constantly including “gay” as the introducing adjective may render the performance of identity as less important, less successful than other performances, and less respected than the efforts of unmarked heterosexual men who are our colleagues and coworkers. When coupled with the absence of any politics or the depiction of any queer physical or social spaces, gay men are allowed to only speak about being gay, as evidenced by criticisms that the NGLTF was off topic in voicing its disagreement with Bush policy in Iraq. The difficulty in talking about issues that are not perceived as immediately central to queer identity precludes a wider voice of resistance and makes it hard to create diverse coalitions to broaden civil rights agendas.

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65 The Newsweek cover posits a gaze in the viewer’s eye (a type of authority) as the viewer will decide if this relationship is “real,” if this relationship is worthy of recognition. The location of authority regarding the determination of the status of our relationships in the body of an anonymous viewership, or in the hands of the mass electorate, is eerily haunting.

66 Sadly, this Newsweek cover shows that images of the “spiritual” components of gay male relationships are most easily attributed to gay white men, and especially gay middle and upper class white men, reinforcing the racial hierarchy of gay visibility that is reiterated in the Miller Lite ads as well.

67 As a fiction of identity, we could construct a priority list of what parts of our selves are most central to our conception of who we are. For many of us, being gay would be high on the list, but it would by no means be the centrality of our identity, the top of the list. And it would certainly not be the singular element of our identity.

68 We are confined to “very special” episodes of television programs, to being the gay friend on the side, or the main character who is only interesting because he has been named as queer.

69 In countless ways, the word gay precedes the noun, as if the word gay is a buffer zone word designed to say, “Look here, this doesn’t mean all writers/poets/composers/architects are like this.”
Concurrent with the use of gay male sexuality to sell commodities and the increased visibility of gay men in popular culture, some stereotypical gay traits are now beginning to become more accepted in straight men and in advertising directed towards heterosexuals. This can be seen in the new term “metrosexual” banded about by advertising executives and style magazines. Metrosexual men have been described as men “who are on easy terms with both feminine and masculine ways” (Oliviero, 2003, F1); “men who have embraced their feminine sides while maintaining healthy hetero sex drives and have earned a new moniker as a result” (Gordon, 2003, K07); “a description for straight guys who want to feel pretty” (Masters, accessed 7/21/03). Daphne Gordon writes that other terms for “metrosexual” are “hybrids” and “‘SSSGs,’ an acronym that means straight guys who seem gay” (2003, K07). Andrew Essex states that metrosexuals are “definitely familiar with the things that might have been once associated with a gay man” (Flipside, 5/26/03 broadcast). Writers such as Pamela Klaffke (2003) and Beth Teittel (2003) point out that many have lambasted this “feminization” of men, accusing metrosexuality of taking a toll on traditional masculinity. What is clear from the new advertising term being banded about in the popular press is that metrosexual men are usually heterosexual men that assume the stereotypical trappings of gayness.

While many argue that metrosexuality has the potential to break up the mythology that all gay men act a certain way or that certain behaviors have a necessarily queer bent, metrosexuality also works to displace gay voices and erase gay male visibility. Since the most frequent manner in which we are rendered visible is through the deployment of stereotypical clichés such as our alleged good fashion sense or our mythological status as arbiters of style, visibility will be even more difficult to achieve if straight men have co-opted the very behaviors that have marked us as visible in popular culture. While recognizing that representations of gay men that portray us as arbiters of style and chic trendsetters are articulated fictions, I want to argue that the metrosexual trend works to sever or make invisible the articulation between “gay” traits and queerness without rearticulating queer subjectivities. Metrosexuality may work to reify gay invisibility by disarticulating performance from identity, refusing to replace the historical articulation of gayness with a new, affirmative one. Faced with a choice between stereotypical representation and a vacuum of representation, will metrosexuality force us to accept offensive depiction in order to stay visible?

The term metrosexual implicitly connotes straight men raiding gay culture to make their own experiences of sexuality more interesting, using the trappings of gayness to make straight men more attractive to heterosexual women. Take for example the series, “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy,” aired on Bravo. While stereotypical performances of gayness emerge in the program, these performances are used singularly to re-create the heterosexual man into a more attractive, sophisticated, and perhaps even more sensitive romantic partner for his girlfriend/spouse who has often requested the makeover. This television program parallels the Miller Lite advertisements in that both use a seemingly progressive affinity with gay sexuality in order to subtly posit performances of gayness that work to prop up the regulatory regime of compulsory heterosexuality.

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70 Chuck Shepherd states, “Many pundits have adopted the term ‘metrosexual’ for such a man, and point to English soccer star David Beckham (who’s posed for the cover of a gay lifestyle magazine, and who sometimes paints his nails pink or wears his wife’s panties) as an iconic example” (2003).

71 Warren St. John notes that Mark Simpson originally coined the term metrosexual, using “the word to satirize what he saw as consumerisms toll on traditional masculinity” (2003, sec. 9, 1).
Skover and Testy (2002) criticize much legal scholarship dealing with gay rights for ignoring the impact of pop culture images and messages about sexual minorities. They assert that messages about GLBT persons that are embedded into entertainment media and commodity culture inform public policy and that failing to put entertainment messages in some sort of dialectical tension with legal precedents leaves us with only part of the picture of how GLBT persons are doing in America today. While it is important for legal scholarship to realize that the law does not exist in some vacuum, but is constantly in dialogue with cultural trends and social mores, it is also vital that critics and audiences realize that mass media texts have potential effects on policy. It should come as no surprise to us that the religious right’s hot button issue of the summer of 2004, and in the 2004 presidential election, was what they perceive to be “special rights” for gays. With Will and Grace on NBC, Boy Meets Boy and Queer Eye for the Straight Guy on Bravo, the Lawrence versus Texas decision, and Canada’s acceptance of same-sex marriage, the legibility of the gay body and its visibility has elicited an extraordinarily well-planned and well-funded assault against equality.

Being addressed as a distinct minority has brought with it a backlash against our quest for legislative and judicial equality. We must realize that the increased visibility of our bodies in space and any gains we may make socially and legally have resulted in the adoption of a “war” mentality in the religious right which will stop at nothing to demean our social existences and our bodies as well. Even if the texts presenting performances of gayness were “authentic,”

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72 The conservative belief in putting rights in the court of public opinion makes texts dealing with gay and lesbian visibility all the more important. According to a press release from the Family Research Council, “Time and time again, in states like California and Hawaii, when the people of this country have voted on the issue of creating same-sex marriage, the answer has been a resounding ‘No.’ The Massachusetts Supreme Court must refrain from overriding the will of the people and should base its forthcoming decision solely on the Constitution” (“FRC Ready to Respond to ‘Gay Marriage’ Decision in Massachusetts, accessed 8/4/03). Interestingly, this call for legal scholarship to be more open to theory and history outside of the law was taken up by the majority opinion of the Supreme Court in Lawrence v. Texas (2003). There, the Court directly cited historians such as Jonathan Ned Katz, in order to illustrate the historical situation of sodomy laws and the criminalization of same-sex sexual activity. But the decision’s affinity with scholarship in the humanities may also make it more vulnerable to conservative assault, as evidenced by Antonin Scalia’s dissenting opinion that focused solely on the law (and mainly on court precedents on polygamy), as if the law has ever existed in a vacuum, separated from the social and the political.

74 The importance of homosexuality as a political issue for conservatives can be seen from debates over a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage and the overwhelming passage of eleven state referenda banning gay marriage. For example, Mississippi approved the change to its state constitution with over 86% of voters supporting a ban.

75 Pat Robertson and The 700 Club initiated “Operation Supreme Court Freedom,” where they asserted that since most of the changes in American culture have been made by an “unelected” and “unaccountable” court, 700 Club viewers should pray to God for a change in the Court. Humorously, Operation Supreme Court Freedom sounds like Robertson wants his viewers to pray that God knocks off a few of the liberal judges, preferably with the old-fashioned bolt of lightning, if possible.

76 As Andrea Lafferty of the Traditional Values Coalition said of Bravo’s gay dating show, Boy Meets Boy: “Clearly, they’ve sunk to a new low. What’s next? Boy Meets Sheep?” (CBS News, accessed 8/10/03) This mentality of the “culture war” (a term interestingly used most frequently by social conservatives), embraces a metaphor of violence and militarism; the issue here is violence to our identities, our bodies, and our status as Americans.

77 While we must put the concept of “authenticity” under erasure, it might be a necessary fiction for social movements. We must ask ourselves as scholars and activists what is to be gained from a concept such as Gayatri Spivak’s “strategic essentialism,” and what role a “strategic essentialism” might play for queer subject formation and for a queer politics.
the backlash that any visual representation of homosexuality receives from the religious right would still be intense. Add to that the fact that the exigence behind these representations is the perceived economic clout of gay men in the marketplace, and it is easy to understand how the religious right arrived at their “special rights” opposition to gay equality.  

Skover and Testy enumerate the various ways in which marketplace terms infiltrate linguistic descriptions of human relationships and how sexuality leaks into marketplace terminology (2002, 238-9). These commerce metaphors come to define both straight and gay relationships. While it may be that gay visibility in commodity culture brings the commercialization of sexuality and codification of sexual desire as an act of consumption into starkest relief, these forms of gay visibility might wake many up to what is increasing happening to sexuality in general. Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres utilize the metaphor of the miner’s canary to hypothesize a new social movement strategy. They assert that while one could label the canary as “diagnostic, signaling the need for more systemic critique,” “the political dimension of the political race project seeks to reconnect individual experiences to democratic faith, to social critique, and to meaningful action that improves the lives of the canary and the miners by ameliorating the air quality in the mines” (2002, 12). To use Guinier’s and Torres’ logic, we could assert that criticizing the legibility of gay bodies in discourse and the legal forces that constrain the performance of gay identity serves a diagnostic function, alerting society to the force of compulsory heterosexuality. But more importantly, we could assert that attempts to redefine marriage and intimate relationships within the law would be an exercise that would benefit us all, regardless of our sexuality. Redefining marriage might open the door to recognizing many now disrespected heterosexual relationships. If we take Guinier and Torres seriously, then we can also criticize the commercialization and denigration of straight sexuality, and potentially live up to the promise of the label “queer” and the connotations of a queer social movement.

Conclusion

Texts such as these Miller Lite advertisements bring our bodies increased visibility, but they tie the performance of homosexuality to commodities that potentially do a great deal of violence to the body. Absolut vodka, considered to be the granddaddy of the advertisers now interpellating gay men, established a trend of alcohol and cigarette manufacturers possessing a majority presence in gay niche media. Ruth Malone remarks, “The tobacco industry has a history of getting on the ground early when a group is identified as a potential growth market, especially if the group is already marginalized and prone to the influence of aggressive advertising’” (Grewal, 2003, C02). Being rendered a part of American commodity discourse may be a social and political plus, but being interpellated as consumers of products that are health hazards militates against the consumption as liberation paradigm.

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78 Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia even pointed out gay wealth as a potential reason why Colorado’s Amendment 2 should be deemed constitutional. In the “film” Gay Rights, Special Rights (1993), the Traditional Values Coalition argues that gays and lesbians are not a true minority because gays and lesbians do not possess immutable characteristics. Part of their critique of the need for civil rights protection is our alleged wealth. Their opinion that homosexuality is a choice tells them that not only are gays and lesbians not deserving of equality, but that protections enshrined in the law for GLBT populations would demean the rights of others.

79 This marketing bears a significant resemblance to advertising unfairly targeting African-Americans for the lottery, menthol cigarettes, and malt liquor.

80 Advertising barrages us with messages that encourage us to engage in self-destructive behaviors, behaviors that potentially shorten both life span and the quality of life.
Equally pernicious is what Phillip Morris (now named Altria in an attempt to distance the conglomerate from its tobacco manufacturing) does with its money (U.S. Newswire, 2003). Julia Malone reports that Phillip Morris ranked as the largest single donor to the Republican Party in the 1998 mid-term elections (1998, K04+). Common Cause puts Phillip Morris in the list of the six top campaign contributors in the nation (Malone, 2001, A1+). With the Republican Party driving moderates away, it doesn’t take a rocket scientist to observe that the money we are spending is being used to reinforce our status as second-class citizens.

These advertisements bring the gay body back into current debates over gay male identity and queer civil liberties. With the an increased awareness of the ways the queer body is being rendered legible in popular and commodity culture, the possibility of apprehending the practical exigencies of intersectionality emerges in regard to body politics. It thus becomes important to understand how the visibility and interpretations of various bodies are linked. Phelan (1993) addresses the potential commonality between gay activists and the feminist movement. Phelan notes the male majority of anti-abortion protesters are deeply troubled by what they see as a revision in the politics of reproduction. These protesters want to place compulsory heterosexuality back on top and erase any room for resistance, be it feminist or queer. This leads her to argue, “Values about reproduction govern ideas about representation and inflect the negative values associated with the nonreproductive and the unrepresentable. Homophobia, for

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81 “Phillip Morris has been the leading overall campaign contributor to Republicans in federal elections since 1989, giving $14,300,228” (PR Newswire, 2002).
82 Grewal notes that Phillip Morris was one of the biggest supporters of former Senator Jesse Helms and is one of the biggest supporters of anti-gay conservative organizations (2003, C02+). According to People for the American Way, the right-wing organization American Legislative Exchange Council, which drafted the first private school voucher legislation and got its start opposing abortion and women’s rights and supporting school prayer, counts Phillip Morris as one of its corporate sponsors (Right Wing Watch, accessed 8/10/03).
83 Sedgwick (1999) writes of her personal experience with cancer: “Probably my own most formative influence from a quite early age has been a viscerally intense, highly speculative (not to say inventive) cross-identification with gay men and gay male cultures as I inferred, imagined, and later came to know them. It wouldn’t have required quite so overdetermined a trajectory, though, for almost any forty year old facing a protracted, life-threatening illness to realize that the people with whom she had perhaps the most in common, and from whom she might well have most to learn, are people living with AIDS, AIDS activists, and others whose lives had been profoundly reorganized by AIDS in the course of the 1980s” (155). For Sedgwick, the experience of the body creates a desire to engage in a dialogue with some gay men (especially AIDS activists in the 1980s) and creates a perceived commonality with some gay men around the concerns of the body in space. This demonstration of how experiences of the body can overlap between various populations becomes a possible catalyst for coalition building between disparate social groups.
example, stems partly from cultural discomfort with a nonreproductive sexuality” (135). She extends this potential commonality between feminism and gay activism in her discussion of the potential implications of the Supreme Court’s 1986 Bowers v. Hardwick decision. She writes

> Bowers is a serious threat to those seeking to assure sexual object choice and reproductive choice. It may well be that the new abortion legislation will be crafted around the precedent against sexual (and by implication, reproductive) privacy established in Bowers v. Hardwick. Conservatives who prefer that the Left remain divided into small and separate constituents benefit from the tendency to see Bowers exclusively as a ‘gay rights bill.’ (137).

Phelan shows how sodomy laws and abortion restrictions both seek to regulate the body and render the body visible so that “immoral” performances of the body can be disciplined through judicial and medical discourses.

These ties between women’s and GLBT bodies are advanced in the Supreme Court’s majority opinion in Lawrence v. Texas (2003). The majority opinion links the decision to invalidate sodomy laws in Texas and overturn Bowers v. Hardwick to fundamental cases in contraception and reproductive rights. Justice Anthony Kennedy writes in the Court’s majority opinion that “the most pertinent beginning point is our decision in Griswold v. Connecticut” (Lawrence v. Texas, accessed 7/9/03). The court goes on to defend its reasoning in Lawrence v. Texas by showing how Griswold, in addition to Eisenstadt v. Baird and Roe v. Wade, demonstrate the importance of a right to privacy over matters of the body and the need to protect the body from state interference. The importance that the Court gives to claims of injustice, to the claim of a right based in the body, has significant importance for both gay and feminist activists. In the first chapter, I noted Vaid’s and Warner’s remarks about the divisions between gay men and lesbians and between feminists and gay men. Perhaps one way to engage in coalition-building is to use the body as a basis for collaboration, and for both sides to realize that the ways in which women’s and gay bodies are rendered legible are linked, to understand the importance of fighting battles for reproductive and sexual object choice in a coordinated fashion. Understanding the body as a speaker of desire and as a warrant for agitating for social change could be something that brings feminists and gay advocacy groups together in a more unified front against the well-coordinated religious right.

These coalitions are now more important than ever, as we seek to make our bodies and relationships legible. As we seek to be full citizens, these coalitions become increasingly vital, to fight the increasing commodification of identity and to resist regulatory discourses that work to erase our speech and the justification for our resistance.

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84 The Court rejects the reasoning of Bowers, stating: “To say that the issue in Bowers was simply the right to engage in certain sexual conduct demeans the claim the individual put forward, just as it would demean a married couple were it to be said marriage is simply about the right to have sexual intercourse.”

85 And the Court is not trivializing the body, but instead is putting the claim of bodily injustice on a plain with the emotional/spiritual.

86 By focusing on the possible connections between feminist and queer social activism, I do not mean to elide critical race theory and activism. Indeed, charting these possible connections remains to be a task for scholars, especially in light of the raced and classed debates on gay marriage. All structuring elements of sexual citizenship must be examined and interrogated.
Butler, Judith. Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York:


Griggers, Cathy. “Lesbian Bodies in the Age of (Post)Mechanical Reproduction.” New


Masters, Kim. “New TV show ‘Queer Eye for the Straight Guy.'” Marketplace
Phelan, Peggy. “Reciting the Citation of Others; or, A Second Introduction.” *Acting*


Wilke, Mike and Michael Applebaum. “Peering out of the closet: armed with new
research, marketers have stepped up efforts to reach gay and lesbian consumers – even adding gay themes to mainstream TV ads. How far is corporate America willing to go?”


