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## The Channel for Gay America? A Cultural Criticism of *The Logo Channel's* Commercial Success on American Cable Television

Michael Johnson Jr.  
*University of South Florida*

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The Channel for Gay America? A Cultural Criticism of *The Logo Channel's* Commercial  
Success on American Cable Television

by

Michael Johnson Jr.

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

Major Professor: Elizabeth Bell, Ph.D.  
David Johnson, Ph.D.  
Sara Crawley, Ph.D.

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## Table of Contents

Table of Contents .....	i
List of Tables .....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Chapter One: Introducing <i>Logo</i> -“The Channel for Gay America” .....	1
Rationale of this Study.....	3
Literature Review: The Scholarly Conversation.....	4
The Television Industry .....	5
<i>Logo</i> ’s Programming .....	5
<i>Logo</i> ’s Advertisement.....	6
Methodology: A Queer Reading.....	7
Purpose of This Study.....	8
Chapter Outline.....	10
Chapter Two: The Television Industry & Another Lost Opportunity .....	12
Business Model: Follow the Money .....	14
Costs and Benefits: Television’s Technological Steps and Growth .....	15
Niche-Marketing: Smaller is Better .....	17
Representation Model: Follow the Images .....	20
LGBT Visibility: At What Costs? .....	22
Social Justice, LGBT Activism, and <i>Logo</i> .....	25
Business and Social Justice: A Match Made in Hell?.....	28
<i>Logo</i> ’s Self Description: This is Social Movement? .....	30
<i>Logo</i> ’s Lost Opportunity in the Television Industry.....	35
Chapter Three: <i>Logo</i> Programming - Like Taking Candy From A Baby.....	37
<i>Logo</i> ’s Lessons Well-Learned .....	37
<i>Noah</i> ’s Arc .....	40
Ethnicity and <i>Noah</i> ’s Arc: Searching for Black Authenticity.....	41
Refusing to Deal with Lived Experience of Blackness .....	44
Dealing with Sex.....	48
Masculinity and its Many Performances.....	49
<i>Noah</i> ’s Arc’s Contradictions.....	51

<i>Can't Get A Date</i> .....	54
Broken "Promises" and the Gay Male Aesthetic .....	57
What's Real about "Gay" Reality TV?: Therapy and Surveillance.....	59
<i>Round Trip Ticket</i> .....	64
Empty Appeals to Kinship and Action: The Cairns, Australia Episode' ..	65
Languaging Commodities and Selling Travel .....	67
Bottom Economic Line: <i>Round Trip Ticket</i> to Nowhere .....	68
Chapter Four: <i>Logo</i> Advertisement - Easy as Shooting Fish in a Barrel.....	71
A Brief History of Television Advertising .....	73
<i>Logo's</i> Advertising Revenues: Risks and Benefits? .....	75
Gay & Lesbian Advertisement History.....	77
Alienation vs. Financial Reward.....	78
Who Is <i>Logo's</i> Target Market?: an Ideal Consumer Demographic .....	79
The DINK Demographic.....	81
Vanity Ads and Selling Stereotypes .....	82
Reaching the LGBT Market: Cashing in on Liberalism.....	84
Three Exemplars: Selling to/Constructing an Audience.....	86
Brand Loyalty and Pink Dollars: Dangerous Results .....	94
Chapter Five: Conclusion .....	98
Where We Started vs. Where We're Headed?.....	99
Cultural Criticism of <i>Logo</i> with an African-American Queer Eye.....	100
Why Is Any of This Important Now? .....	103
What Does the Future Hold?.....	103
Bibliography .....	105

## **List of Tables**

Table 1, <i>Logo</i> Viewer Activities .....	80
Table 2, Subaru “Shadow” Segmentation.....	87
Table 3, Levi Strauss & Co. “Change” Segmentation .....	91
Table 4, Pfizer “Fashion Victims” Segmentation.....	93

The Channel for Gay America? A Cultural Criticism of *The Logo Channel's* Commercial Success on American Cable Television

Michael Johnson Jr.

**ABSTRACT**

*Logo* currently holds a self-described monopoly as the “Gay Channel for America.” *Logo* stands alone as the single most concentrated national-level vehicle of LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered) visibility in the post millennial television era. *The Logo Channel* has reaped financial rewards from its strategy as a business entity, as LGBT American television viewers embraced its presence as a signifier to America that gays and lesbians have finally “made it”.

First, any claim to a monopoly deserves critical attention for its place in mainstream television, for its business practices, and for the power it holds in representing and targeting LGBT audiences. Second, *Logo's* construction of its audience is an extremely important window into current perceptions of LGBT identity, history, and progress. Third, *Logo's* ability to capitalize on gay and lesbian visibility in American culture and the rhetoric of “inclusiveness” are important historical and cultural moments to explore the political costs and benefits of these strategies—in business practices, programming content, and advertisements.

In this study, I argue that *Logo* does not capitalize on its television presence to participate in LGBT political, economic, and social equality. Despite its significant visibility and messages of “inclusiveness” in American popular culture, *Logo* contributes

to the perpetuation of negative and narrow stereotypes of consumerist gay culture, as it marginalizes ethnic minorities and women, through a variety of conformist, self-serving practices that undermine the liberatory opportunity it holds for its LGBT viewers.

Chapter Two “Another Lost Opportunity” examines a brief history of the cable television industry, the television business model and the representations of gays and lesbians on television to draw a parallel social history centered on visibility. Chapter Three “Like Taking Candy from a Baby” examines three reoccurring series on *Logo*: *Noah’s Arc*, *Can’t Get a Date*, and *Round-Trip Ticket*. Chapter Four “Easy as Shooting Fish In a Barrel” examines the histories of 1) television advertising, 2) the risks and benefits of advertising on *Logo*, and 3) the history of gay and lesbian print advertising. This history lays the foundation for 4) exploring contemporary constructions of *Logo*’s target market as the “ideal demographic.”



## Chapter One: Introducing *Logo*: “The Channel for Gay America”

*What is Logo?*

*Logo* is the newest channel from MTV Networks, the force behind channels like VH1, MTV, TV Land and SpikeTV. *Logo* is entertainment programming for lesbians and gays and just about anyone who enjoys a gay point of view. *Logo* is for us, our friends and our family. *Logo* is originals. *Logo* is movies. *Logo* is documentaries. *Logo* is news. *Logo* is specials. *Logo* is the channel for Gay America. Finally.

*Why did you choose the name "Logo"?*

We chose to name the channel "*Logo*" because as the first and only 24/7 channel for the LGBT community, we wanted a name that people could make their own and give it personal meaning. For us, the word "*Logo*" is about identity, about being comfortable in your own skin. It's about being who you are.

--FAQs on [www.logoonline.com](http://www.logoonline.com)

Launched in June of 2005 with 10 million subscribers, *The Logo Channel* is a 24/7, cable television channel that is created, produced and distributed for and by the LGBT community. *The Logo Channel* was envisioned by two marketing executives, Brian Graden (MTV Networks) and Lisa Sherman (Verizon). These two individuals sought to probe the depths of the LGBT market by creating a *historically different* LGBT cable network.

*Logo* is a network that explicitly recognizes its LGBT audience, despite the precarious business implications such a decision embodied. That decision was a calculated risk that overturned 70 years of broadcast standards and practices that ignored, marginalized, or pathologized LGBT individuals in television programming, (Doty 1993) even as Graden and Sherman sought to create and to capture a niche market for advertisers with tremendous potential for financial success. As a cultural moment, the *Logo Channel* represents, in a meaningful way, the progress that LGBT people have

made in society. Many would agree that once someone appears on television, as a re-occurring presence, they have "made it" and have achieved, at a minimum, some degree of legitimacy.

*The Logo Channel* is important not only because its presence on cable television is emblematic of the larger LGBT community's visibility, but also because of how that presence is interpreted in American society. The representation and positive depictions of LGBT people as characters on television have a significant and powerful potential to advance lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people in America towards equal citizenship. As a powerful communicative and persuasive medium, television can paint influential portraits of segments of society, for good and bad; these portraits, in turn, move through the fabric of American society with very real consequences. *The Logo Channel* has an excellent opportunity to leverage that power and ability to the benefit of its LGBT audience, perhaps lessening the stigmatization and discrimination based on their sexual identity and advancing and increasing social justice for all.

The multiple dilemmas inherent in this opportunity—who is this LGBT audience? how does this LGBT audience want to see itself represented on television? What are LGBT interests, goals, and aspirations?—are brilliantly encapsulated by Adam Sternberg in his *New York TV* article, "I Want My Gay TV." Sternberg captures the "buzz" that surrounded *Logo's* launch as depicted on *Will & Grace*.

Last fall, an episode of *Will & Grace* aired in which Will, a gay lawyer, and Jack, his swishy best friend, were invited to a focus group for a new gay-and-lesbian TV channel. Will, the uptight, buttoned-down one, wanted shows that reflected a historical perspective on gay life and chronicled 'our continuing struggles.' Jack, the flighty, fizzy one, wanted 'gay *Jeopardy!*' featuring naked men with buzzers. Will was asked to leave the group. Jack was hired as the junior VP of new programming (Sternberg 2005).

The differences between Will and Jack's visions of an LGBT television channel are one starting place for examining the challenges faced by *Logo*. Whether and how to feature "our continuing struggles" and/or "gay *Jeopardy!*" is at the heart of this study to examine how *The Logo Channel* does, or does not, take advantage of this historical opportunity to capitalize on its television presence to participate in LGBT political, economic, and social equality.

### **Rationale of this Study**

This study is important for three interconnected reasons, all centered on LGBT identity as implicated on *Logo*: monopoly, audience, and community. *Logo* currently holds a monopoly as the "Gay Channel for America." *Logo* stands alone as the single most concentrated vehicle of LGBT visibility in the post millennial television era. *The Logo Channel* has reaped financial rewards from its strategy as a business entity, as LGBT American television viewers embraced its presence as a signifier to America that "we have finally arrived!" (Dempsey 2007). Nielsen ratings on its release revealed a 2.8 rating which translated into being *in the top 10 for that time-slot*, meaning approx. 4.24 million viewers tuned in. Becker (2006) even claims that "*Logo* has really become like a campfire that LGBT people are gravitating towards."

Any claim by *Logo* as a media monopoly deserves critical attention for its place in "mainstream" television, for its business practices, and for the power it holds in representing and targeting LGBT audiences. First, *Logo*'s financial role as a motivator and beneficiary demand close scrutiny in light of its high industry, business, and social profiles. Second, *Logo*'s construction of its audience is an extremely important window into current perceptions of LGBT identity, history, and progress.

Given the monolithic presence that *Logo* holds on American cable television, *Logo* has become a cultural formation that constructs and perpetuates contemporary understandings of LGBT identity in popular American culture. Despite the increased visibility of “mainstream” television programs like *Ellen*, *Will & Grace*, *Queer Eye* and others, there’s never been a single, 24/7 television location to which LGBT people might turn to in order to see themselves. *Logo*’s role in identity formation deserves critical attention for its window into crucial social and political issues: homophobia<sup>1</sup>, racism, classism, misogyny, and heterosexism that create and perpetuate the social stigmatization that LGBT people regularly encounter.

Third, *Logo*’s ability to capitalize on gay and lesbian visibility in American culture and the rhetoric of “inclusiveness” are important historical and cultural moments to explore the political costs and benefits of these strategies—in business practices, programming content, and advertisements. *Logo* actively communicates an inclusive message in on-air segments, online at its website, and in LGBT print media like *The Advocate*, *Genre* and *Out Magazine* that says *Logo* = LGBT community. Any claims of community—for unity, for political movement, and for subjecthood—deserve critical examination.

### **Literature Review: The Scholarly Conversation**

Given the relative newness of *The Logo Channel* to American cable television, no academic scholarship has been conducted on this subject. Nevertheless, substantial primary and secondary sources exist on the three areas of inquiry that I use to conduct my

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<sup>1</sup> Defined as “prejudice against (fear or dislike of) homosexual people and homosexuality” homophobia. Dictionary.com. *WordNet*® 3.0. Princeton University. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/homophobia> (accessed: July 14, 2008).

analysis. I consult a variety of sources to situate *Logo* in midst of these three areas which include (1) Television Industry/Business, (2) Programming, and (3) Advertisement.

### **The Television Industry**

Research has shown sufficient scholarship exists to support a review and analysis of *The Logo Channel's* profitability, against peer competitors within the cable TV industry (Bloomberg.com 2006). A number of scholars all call for more attention to LGBT audiences, the potential revenues that they might generate, and LGBT purchasing power that supports legitimacy as a business entity (Chris and Freitas 2007, Albiniaak 2005). Valuable literature is available on a variety of aspects including financial data (The Economist 2005), industry position/reputation (Walters 2003) and long-term forecasting models of profitability (Desmond 2005). My argument builds upon some of the scholarship about LGBT visibility in American popular culture through television (Walters 2003), and the theoretical foundations on which LGBT identities exist to the benefit of *Logo's* business model (Hennessy 2000). *The Logo Channel*, outside financial circles and industry venues, has yet to be intellectually acknowledged, much less directly critiqued in a meaningful way.

### ***Logo's* Programming**

There is significant scholarship on the subject of LGBT content in film (Summers 2005), especially with the popularity of *Brokeback Mountain* (Herring 2006) and other “mainstream” television shows (Dow 2001). This field of scholarship, however, remains limited to a few select shows like *Will and Grace* (Battles 2001, Cooper 2003), and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (Clarkson 2005, Kylo-Patrick 2004, Westerfelhaus 2006). Fischer (2007) claims these two exemplars do not reflect the rapidly changing dynamics of today's cable television audience. These analyses tend to be cultural critiques of

images of queerness, rather than related to specific demographics, target markets, or overall programming choices for networks (Martin 2007).

More helpful are foundational scholarly arguments which revolve around the communication, depiction (Herdt 1992), and interpretations of LGBT identities (Bergling 2005) within popular American culture through television (R. Becker 2006, Fonseca 2005). I apply these scholarly works about LGBT constructed identity and popularity (Peele 2007, Shugart 2003) to three wildly popular *Logo Channel* productions (*Noah's Arc*, *Round Trip Ticket* and *Can't Get A Date*) and in so doing extend their arguments to *today's* LGBT television programming (R. Becker 2006) in a constructive critique utilizing some primary queer theoretical resources.

### ***Logo's Advertisement***

Preliminary and ongoing research has shown little scholarship on same-sex *television* advertisements versus *print* media advertisements (Brachik 2007), despite a wealth of information on opposite sex television commercials (Hampp 2007). However, significant scholarship is available regarding audience, consumerism, and the "gay market" (Chasin 2000) which is directly applicable to this research. Using current research on LGBT consumerism (Howard 2006), I situate my argument upon research about "successful" communication theories and same-sex imagery (Oakenfull 2002) with an emphasis on the commodification of LGBT "identities" through advertisement (Sender 2005). This literature, and observed commercial analysis combined with a comparison against print media advertisements, yields valuable insights for this study.

### **Methodology: A Queer Reading**

I use queer theory as a basis for examining the three areas of this thesis: industry, programming, and advertising, to explore and to evaluate *Logo*'s relationship to LGBT political, economic, and social equality.

Queer theory originated through both feminist studies and gay and lesbian studies, which initially were heavily influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler and of other postmodern thinkers (critics of the modern world order of the nations, states, bureaucracies, and rationalism) who built on the feminist theoretical tradition. The term "queer theory" refers to both a theoretical position and an approach to the discourse of sexual identity. The position of queer theorists is that sexual identity is a socially constructed concept, whereas essentialist theorists advocate that sexual identity is an innate and biological concept, which is also judged by the "eternal standards" of morality. The queer theoretical approach seeks to deconstruct normative social ideals by applying a political critique to sexual acts, behaviors, and interpretations concerning gender and sexual identity.

Queer theorists utilize textual analysis as a methodology to criticize cultural notions that imply hetero-normative ideals. Initially queer theory was associated with radical gay and lesbian political movements that espoused a separatist, non-assimilationist political agenda. However because queer theory rejects a biological basis of sexual identity, some lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender/transsexual (LGBT) social advocacy organizations have exhibited animosity and open hostility with toward academicians espousing this view. Although Queer theory critiques the construction of all identities based on sexual difference, this does not prohibit efforts by LGBT individuals and organizations to pursue an agenda of social empowerment. Indeed, social advocacy

efforts that rely upon what normally would be theoretically unsupportable sexual categories (LGBT), does not mean that those categories are not useful as a means of organizing. This is especially true when the social advocacy efforts seek to dismantle the hierarchies which produce the appearance of validity for the LGBT subjectivities. Nevertheless, queer theory remains an important theoretical position to critique the discourses of sexuality and sexual identity.

This theory lends itself to an analysis of the disciplinary and regulatory regimes that create, perpetuate and disseminate messages about sexual identity. The combination of queer theory's utilitarian purpose as a method of criticism is inherently valuable because it appropriately contextualizes the observations created in both commercial advertisements and programming content that is the objective of this thesis' efforts. And the use of queer theory is especially prudent as a means to interpret the communication of westernized queer identities in American popular culture, with the *Logo* channel as the center of this inquiry. Models for this use of queer theory include Foucault's *History of Sexuality* and its discussion of the social construction of sexual identities, along with Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*, and its critique of the regulatory regimes associated with gender, combined with Lisa Duggan's *Sex Wars* and its critique of homonormativity<sup>2</sup>.

### **Purpose of This Study**

This study is an analysis of the *Logo* Channel's business practices, its programming content, and its advertisements to understand the intricate and complex dynamics of monopoly, audience, and community that operate in and through *Logo*, the

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<sup>2</sup> Is a term that "...is used to describe situations wherein variations from homosexual orientation are marginalized, ignored or persecuted by social practices, beliefs or policies." This also includes "...a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (Materializing Democracy, 179). Duggan, Lisa *The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism*



Channel for Gay America. In this study, I argue that *Logo* does not capitalize on its television presence to participate in LGBT political, economic, and social equality. Despite its significant visibility and messages of “inclusiveness” in American popular culture, *Logo* contributes to the perpetuation of negative and narrow stereotypes of consumerist gay culture, as it marginalizes ethnic minorities and women, through a variety of conformist, self-serving practices that undermine the liberatory opportunity it holds for its LGBT viewers.

The chapters in this study argue that *Logo*'s business model is an extremely successful one, benefiting not only from monopoly, but from the dearth of positive images of gays and lesbians on television. Capitalizing on the new “gay visibility,” *Logo*'s LGBT audience loses a tremendous opportunity to queer visibility politics that questions consumerism as the route to consolidate LGBT identity through consumption. Under the guise of creating community, *Logo* petitions LGBT America with a strategic appeal to communitarian ideals of LGBT kinship, unity, and homogeneity.

*Logo* continues this rhetoric with the subtly implicit suggestion that its viewers can exert their agency through active consumption of its content. This rhetoric of personal investment continues in *Logo*'s programming and commercials that conveniently target, produce, package and market their messages to an exclusively Caucasian, male, affluent, two-partner demographic that consequently excludes a variety of LGBT constituencies. These programs and commercials reproduce the very discrimination practices LGBT individuals suffer from; this hypocrisy is couched within a superficially appearing message that embraces LGBT equality and individuality.

## Chapter Outline

Chapter Two, “The Television Industry and Another Lost Opportunity” examines a brief history of the cable television industry, the television business model and the representations of gays and lesbians on television to draw a parallel social history centered on visibility. I extrapolate conclusions drawn through these observations and argue that *Logo*’s financial success comes at a cost to its LGBT viewers/customers. *Logo*’s success is centered on heteronormativity<sup>3</sup>, consumerism, and visibility that constrain and support, rather than empower and deconstruct, a discriminatory paradigm which equates LGBT identity with social inferiority.

Chapter Three “*Logo* Programming: Like Taking Candy from a Baby” examines three reoccurring series on *Logo*: *Noah’s Arc*, *Can’t Get a Date*, and *Round-Trip Ticket*. Chapter three argues that these shows communicate complicated and contradictory messages of consumerist capitalism, homonormativity, and ethnicity to *Logo*’s LGBT audience that ultimately undermines *Logo*’s opportunity for social activism. To accomplish this I analyze each reoccurring series for the specific ways in which ethnicity, homonormativity, and consumerism are enacted.

Chapter Four “*Logo* Advertising: Easy as Shooting Fish In a Barrel” examines the histories of 1) television advertising, 2) the risks and benefits of advertising on *Logo*, and 3) the history of gay and lesbian print advertising. This history lays the foundation for 4) exploring contemporary constructions of *Logo*’s target market as the “ideal

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<sup>3</sup> Is best defined as “A pervasive and institutionalized ideological system that naturalizes heterosexuality as universal; it must continually reproduce itself to maintain hegemony over other non-normative sexualities and ways of identity construction” *The Urban Dictionary*, [http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=heteronormativity+\(heteronormative\)](http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=heteronormativity+(heteronormative)) (accessed: July 14, 2008).

demographic.” To accomplish this, I analyze three commercials that enjoy primetime slots on *Logo* to demonstrate how the rhetorics of inclusiveness and visibility operate to the exclusion and invisibility of a wider demographic. Chapter Four argues that a strong and destructive relationship exists between brand loyalty and the “pink dollar” that’s complicated by constructions of an ideal demographic which adopts a homonormative, consumer capitalist approach to revenue investment.

## Chapter Two: The Television Industry & Another Lost Opportunity

I can't even say the word. Why can't I say the word? I mean, I can't just say... I mean, what is wrong... I mean why can't I just say the truth, I mean be who I am. I'm 35 years old. I'm so afraid to tell people, I mean I just... Susan, I'm gay (Dow 2001, 126).

Those words, uttered by Ellen DeGeneres to a record television audience on April 20, 1997, ushered in a new era of television in American popular culture. All the critics and commentators agreed that DeGeneres' coming out "changed the face of television;" "...the success of the NBC sitcom *Will and Grace*... was made possible by the path that Ellen had blazed" (Dow 2001, 124). Despite testimonies to Ellen's trailblazing, *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* was cancelled just a year later in the spring of 1998 by ABC due to lackluster ratings. The plunge in the show's ratings, some argue, was based on an unreceptive audience to the show's LGBT messages about sexual identity that increasingly became the focus of its final season's plot:

The Friday night sitcom has averaged a meager 4.28 household rating and share and 2.2 rating among adults 18-49 since it debuted on Sept. 24... 'She's a creative comedian, and CBS wants a long-term relationship with her. But should it not grow its audience any more this year, it's not likely that the show will have another year,' says John Rash, senior vice president (White 2001 ).

The business of the television industry continues to dictate who, what, when and where programs are aired—despite the work of trailblazing performers, activists, and advocates for social justice movements. Television is *more than* just a vehicle of entertainment or communication; it is an *industry* whose goal is to *make money*. Since television's purpose is first and foremost to be financially profitable, this objective stands in stark

opposition to the goals held by social movements that seek to empower and remedy social inequities. Sender accurately points out that,

gays and lesbians are now considered a sufficiently large and profitable group to warrant marketer's attention...media executives have been careful to circumscribe these developments within a discursive framework of sound business practices...LGBT marketers have actively produced the gay market from a mutually dependent but not necessarily civil union between the business imperatives and political stakes of the marketing (2005, 2).

Consequently, *Logo's* ability to act as an agent of LGBT cultural movement (whether unknowingly or knowingly) is constrained by the very "business imperatives and political states of...marketing" which give it life through financial profitability.

In this chapter, I will argue that *Logo's* unparalleled financial success has been purchased at very high costs to the LGBT community; these costs center on heteronormativity, consumerism, and visibility. First, *The Logo Channel* appropriates heteronormative cultural attitudes of difference based on sexual identity that have been embraced by the "mainstream" cable TV industry. These cultural attitudes, simply stated, expressly define all non-exclusively performing heterosexuals as "Other" marking them as different and treating those individuals as a group whose primary characteristic is that difference (e.g. LGBT sexual identities).

Second, *Logo* has not marginalized or criminalized, but has participated in the commodification of LGBT identity by casting difference as a very narrow consumer market-niche. Difference is now marked through economics as perceived affluence, disposable income, its associated *elitism*, and sexual identity consolidated through purchasing. Third, the *Logo Channel* has expertly used this tactic commercially against the consumerist impulses of its LGBT viewers, by capitalizing on "new gay visibility"

and exploiting the hopes of many LGBT viewers for positive and diverse representations of themselves through the popular medium of television.

The hopes for visibility, for unity, and for subject-hood are woven into the fabric of American popular culture upon which social change occurs. *Logo*'s self-description as "the channel for Gay America," its profit-driven strategies, and its failure to problematize sexual identity, is at odds with an opportunity for that social change.

This chapter begins with a brief history of the cable television industry to explain *Logo*'s financial success within a business model that operates through risk/benefit calculations and niche-marketing. The chapter then surveys representations of gays and lesbians on television to draw a parallel social history centered on visibility. Next, the chapter outlines the tremendously high costs of this televised visibility—for homophobia, meaningful social change, reinforcement of social relations and social meanings, and for notions of power. Finally, the chapter analyzes *Logo*'s self-description, "What is *Logo*?" for echoes of a social justice mission. *Logo*'s current financial success, the increased visibility of gay characters on television, and the tempestuous relationship between consumerism and activism, forces the question: just what are *Logo*'s espoused goals as a channel? And are these goals compatible with, even productive of, social justice goals? Sadly, the answer to this question is no.

### **Business Model: Follow the Money**

"Is your TV set gay?" – Entertainment Weekly, 11/6/2000

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 (Hennessy 2000, 112).

The recent proliferation of LGBT visibility on television belies the historical invisibility and marginalization of LGBT viewers. From the beginning of television

history, the television industry was for the consumption of and marketing to a white, middle-class, heterosexually-identified audience (Eastman 2002). Any move away from attention to this audience—in programming, advertising, and industry standards—risked alienating this “mainstream” audience, their capitalist dollars, and television’s advertisement revenue. Money—finding it, keeping it, growing it—is the short-hand history of television.

This section briefly traces the development of cable television in the United States to better understand how “*money, not liberation*, is the “bottom line” for the *Logo* Channel. I have approached this history as a confluence of consumer- and owner-centered costs and benefits and as a lucrative move to niche-marketing.

### **Costs and Benefits: Television’s Technological Steps and Growth**

From the inception of the television to its popular adoption, the industry’s objective has always been a careful negotiation and trade-off between costs vs. benefits. That same dynamic operated in television’s predecessor, radio. The radio industry saw a slow, but perpetual decline in listeners that was directly attributable to the arrival of television and its increasing popularity. From 1945 to 1952, almost all broadcast stations were affiliated with one or more networks, only four competitors existed during this period. Sterling notes that

As with radio but to a greater degree, the networks initially cost money, but even individually owned-and-operated stations earned too little to cover the massive capital expenditures, but were operated with the expectation of future profits...It was clear as early as 1941 that owners of profitable radio networks would undertake the formation of television networks (Sterling 2002, 287).

While owners saw the potential for making money, consumers saw television as a marker of progressive social status. Despite the significant financial investment associated with a TV purchase, this technology marked those with television as being

socially elite; those unable to purchase a television soon began installing external antennas to outcompete their neighbors. The television industry capitalized upon this frenzy of consumer interest with increasing technological steps, which included the expansion of television screen size to 10 inches by 1950. This change was soon adopted as the industry-wide standard. By 1952, television audiences increased from zero to 1/3 of the nation's homes. This growth is significant especially in light of its costs: a 5" to 7" television cost from \$375-\$500, in addition to installation fees ranging from \$45-\$300 depending on antenna requirements (Sterling 2002, 316) .

The popularity of television saw market forces drive down the price of television sets to half their 1948 selling price; installation charges were eliminated or drastically reduced. In spite of these reductions, the revenue from these changes served as a powerful incentive to meet consumer demand, so much so that the receiver soon dominated the early American home:

It usually went into the living room, relegating radio to another room, and became the center of attention for the family, and their non-television-owning friends... In a very short time, television replaced most radio, reading, and weekend movies—to the detriment of the other media. Television's expansion was much faster than radios: radio had taken a decade to reach a 33% penetration, but television managed it in only seven years (Sterling 2002, 318).

The increasing popularity of television continued in the following decades and saw an explosion of interest resulting from still more improvements in technology—color broadcasting and pay-per-view channels. The cable television industry again seized this opportunity to capitalize on escalating consumer interest. Cable "penetration" (a percentage of television viewers) went from under 18% in 1977 to more than 52% in 1988, due in large part to changing viewing preferences in programming available exclusively through cable television (Sterling 2002, 505).



From owner profitability to consumer advances, the consolidation of ownership during the 1970s and 80s, was a further cost/benefit step in the history of television. Ownership consolidation was initially popular because it was an easy solution to a difficult financial problem. Significant initial capital investment was required of cable system owners due to the initial technological equipment requirements of new operators and consolidation was an easy way to remedy this dilemma. Even more important, *lenders* saw larger cable system owners as more attractive, thereby creating a financial incentive for the conglomeration of media ownership that continues to today (Baughman 2007, 305).

Every aspect of cable television involves cost expenditures as well as potential income. The decision to carry a new channel is calculated through a cost-benefit analysis which determines whether the revenue will outweigh the expenses. Revenues are derived from monthly subscriber fees, advertising, and promotional support.

The history of the development of cable television is about financial risks and benefits: who spends money? who makes money? who lends money? To date, the financial risks have paid off, especially for media conglomerates. Increased profit margins, reduction of overhead expenses, an enhanced ability to seize "market share" (a percentage of cable television viewers in a given geographic area) from competitors, are all financial benefits reaped by MTV, the *Logo* Channel's parent company.

### **Niche-Marketing: Smaller is Better**

The risk/benefit business model coupled with the new trend of "niche-marketing" (L. Cohen 2003) For 70 years, a central rule of the broadcasting industry was to prize large audiences above all others. With the arrival of cable television, small audiences could also be profit generators—especially if the new channels were alternative and

inventive. Baughman notes that "... some regular cable outlets like Comedy Central and MTV, because they'd reached largely young audiences, considered themselves free to ignore some long-held standards" (2007, 505).

"Pay per View" is a niche-marketing strategy that overturns "mainstream" programming standards. Pay-per-view was initially researched as a means to distribute movie content, but this technology was expanded in large part due to consumer demand. PPV's popularity for LGBT viewers revolved around the relaxation of moral standards that encourage an air of permissiveness "...about nudity and the use of obscenity" in programming targeted to that audience's perceived preference for "mature" content. When speaking about MTV, *Logo's* parent company, Frank Rich of the *New York Times* observed that "Entertainment built on violence and sex isn't going away as long as Americans lap it up" (Baughman 2007, 309). This same consumer capitalist engine drives "niche programming" channels like *Logo*.

From subscriber fees, "local avails", promotional assistance, merchandising to website promotion, *The Logo Channel* operates in an industry milieu that successfully weighs risks/benefits and utilizes niche marketing to generate revenue and to cover industry-wide expenses. These expenses, like copyright payments, "churn, or audience turnover and program services" or paying for its content (Eastman 2002, 249), are all typical of the television business. *Logo's* success was also forged by the careful use of anti-competitive practices in collaboration with major financial backers. Anti-competitive practices included preemptive purchases of "local avails" at unbeatable prices, monopolization of scheduling for some programs, and creating financial disincentives for competitors to air programs during similar time slots.

Sender accurately points out that the success of niche-marketing *for marketers*: “gays and lesbians are now considered a sufficiently large and profitable group to warrant marketer’s attention.” She also accurately comments on the need for this niche-marketing to be profitable: “media executives have been careful to circumscribe these developments within a discursive framework of sound business practices.”

*The Logo Channel* has adopted “sound business practices” to generate its revenue and construct its niche-market. *The Logo Channel*’s business model is a financial success story, like its precursor MTV (Seabrook 1994), which capitalized upon perceived audience interest as a means to achieve financial longevity and, in turn, industry recognition and market share.

Aligning the business practices of MTV (Jones 2005) and *The Logo Channel*, however, reveals how complicated comparisons between “niche markets” can be; clearly, not all audiences, marketing strategies, and the powers of branding are the same. John Seabrook, writing in a 1994 *New Yorker* piece on MTV, explains:

The promotions department is often said to be the core of MTV. Everything on MTV is a promotion for something, and the promo department’s mission, in a sense, is to promote that. One of the reasons that MTV is a landmark in the history of media is that the boundary between entertainment and advertising has completely disappeared. This is also one of the things that occasionally make you feel weary in the soul when you are watching it. MTV uses youth, which is beautiful and pure, to sell music, clothes, skin cream, and, of course, MTV. The exact nature of the MTV commodity is difficult to define. Once, I tried to get McGrath to do it. She said, ‘You’re selling a feeling about what it means to be...’ She paused for a few seconds, and then said, ‘God, I don’t know.’ (Downey 2006)

The question for the *Logo Channel* becomes, what is the *Logo Channel* promoting, and how to define the *Logo Channel* commodity? A simple substitution might read: “*The Logo Channel* uses GLBT identity, which is beautiful and pure, to sell music, clothes, skin cream, and, of course, the *Logo Channel*.” Every phrase in that new sentence is

intensely complicated, historically and currently politically charged, and open to debate. Is *The Logo Channel* “selling a feeling about what it means to be” . . . LGBT?

To answer this question, it is first necessary to complement the business model with a model that looks at, not finances, but changes in images and representations of gays and lesbians on television. By following the images, a parallel social history of representation is necessary to understand what’s at stake for the GLBT community when we see ourselves on *Logo*.

### **Representation Model: Follow the Images**

Amidst the changing financial landscape of the cable television industry that birthed *Logo*, a simultaneous and equally significant change occurred in representational images of African Americans, women, and gays and lesbians on television. No doubt spurred by the civil rights movement, the women’s movement, and the gay movement, representations on television carry tremendous political weight for advancing or staunching social change. While it is not fair or realistic to argue that television can remedy racial and gender inequity, the power of images is substantial and social movements have both attacked and harnessed those images.

In 1964, Betty Friedan claimed that “television has represented the American Woman as a stupid, unattractive, insecure little household drudge who spends her martyred, mindless, boring days dreaming of love—and plotting nasty revenge against her husband.” With the sexual revolution of the 1970s came changes in the portrayal of women and minorities. As Susan Faludi suggested, “The practices and programming of network television in the 1980s were an attempt to get back to those earlier stereotypes of women. Through television, even the most homebound women can experience parts of our culture once considered primarily male—sports, war, business, medicine, law and

politics” (Faludi 1991) Political organizations like the National Organization for Women (NOW) targeted television due to its powerful communicative ability to transmit “derogatory stereotypes of woman on television” (Friedan 1963, 15).

Images of gay characters on television have a different history. Walters maintains that while much early television was “innovative on any number of levels,” television “avoided the subject of homosexuality as much as it embraced the image of domestic womanhood of a la June Cleaver... gays were generally played for giggles or pathos...” Television also occasionally utilized gay characters (such as in one episode of *All in the Family*) to make a point about anti-gay bigotry (Walters 2003, 60-61).

When early television shows sporadically featured gay characters, they strictly adhered to formulaic plots which pathologized those characters as sick or demented. From 1972 to 1980, gay characters appear sporadically in many television series as either victims or villains, most often with AIDS, including *Alice*, *Three’s Company*, *WKRP in Cincinnati*, *Taxi*, *Kate & Allie*, *Cheers*, *Hawaii 5-0*, and *The Golden Girls*. The 1980s are well known as the “*Dynasty* years” with its leading gay character named Steven Carrington who evolves from a “... tortured closet case, to cured heterosexual husband, and finally to a gay approximation of gay and proud” (Walters 2003, 64). And while not all portrayals were negative, the vast majority of depictions of gay men and lesbians during this era could not be characterized as empowering the LGBT audience that viewed these stereotypical characters.

And while television has historically broadcast messages about same-sex desire in consistently negative terms, recent developments in “mainstream” television have tentatively begun to reveal a new trajectory toward social progressiveness in

incrementally fumbling, and halting steps. On March 1, 1994 a truly groundbreaking moment in American television history occurred on the show *Roseanne*, in an episode entitled "*Don't Ask Don't Tell*", where she (Roseanne) kisses another woman. The episode aired over the objection of ABC network executives under pressure by right wing groups. Roseanne publicly declared she would switch networks rather than edit or cancel the episode.

Looking back on 1994 at Roseanne or to Ellen DeGeneres 1997 “coming out” episode, seems almost quaint given the current popularity of not just gay characters, but gay television shows like *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, *The L Word*, and *Will and Grace*. Perhaps remembering that this is television, and not film, is an important issue: "There's less risk on TV, so you have more freedom... a gay character in 22 hours (a TV) is not as important as a gay character in a two-hour movie. You aren't risking your entire box office by having a gay character" (Walters 2003, 28).

*Logo*, the “channel for Gay America,” is posed on the brink of a myriad of new possibilities—for new images, for new programs, for new visions of social justice—without the attendant risk of alienating a “mainstream” market and with the opportunity to shape images and representations of GLBT individuals that do justice to real lives, experiences, and desires. Standing on this brink, however, means looking much more closely at the high costs of buying GLBT visibility on television.

### **LGBT Visibility: At What Costs?**

The new LGBT visibility achieved in American television has brought with it a panoply of sociopolitical baggage. On one hand, visibility is part of the trajectory of any movement for inclusion in social change, and television is the vehicle for that "cultural meeting place" to see each other represented. The costs of this visibility, however, are

tremendously high in homophobia, meaningful social change, reinforcement of social relations and social meanings, and for notions of power.

This visibility has created new forms of homophobia: the perpetuation of the marriage-loving or sexless gay, versus the bad liberationist, promiscuous gay, that lends itself to a false and dangerous substitution of cultural visibility for inclusive citizenship. "In many ways, this movement provides us with a picture of society readily embracing the *images* of gay life but still all too reluctant to embrace the *realities* of gay identities and practices in all their messy and challenging confusion" (Walters 2003, 10).

Visibility does not bring with it security and may create a deceptively smooth path which can derail the search for meaningful social change. And while discourses about visibility circulate around a distinct LGBT identity "the marketers invested in a gay and lesbian niche discovered that sameness and difference amounted to the same thing: profit...."capitalism accelerated the process by which initially countercultural forms were appropriated until counterculture itself became the prime commodity" (Chasin 2000, 50).

The representations embodied in LGBT characters do not promote socio-political equality. Television historically acted to the superficial benefit of LGBT individuals by making them valid targets for inclusive marketing, yet simultaneously condemned that presumptively lucrative market for its difference from the heteronormative ideal. "By 2000, American business defined sexuality by a host of non-sexual characteristics: disposable income, product preferences, propensity for disease, taste in wine, shoes, etc. Hence, changes in representation show the imbedding of sexuality within social relations" (Ragusa 2005, 671).

These social relations—heteronormativity and homonormativity—are privileged stereotypes of visibility. Examples of this are seen in the frequently cited and much applauded receptivity of LGBT shows occurring on "mainstream" cable television. However, those same television shows are in actuality employed negatively, despite the presence of superficially libristory LGBT plots or characters in shows like *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (Bravo, 2003-2007), *Will and Grace* (NBC, 1998-2006), *Gay, Straight, or Taken* (Lifetime, 2007), and *"Playing It Straight"* (Fox, 2004).

These examples reveal that, despite their ostensibly inclusive visibility, such shows support the heteronormative and homonormative regimes of power that regulate sexual identity. These shows, rather than queering sexual identity, actually reinforce the rigid boundaries between heterosexual and gay for the explicit consumerist reward that respectively results in "total makeovers" for the benefit of heterosexual men at the expense of gay stereotypes; gay individuality and social legitimacy, predicated on female companionship, occurring with the homonormative, yet sexless (Will) or stereotypically effeminate (Jack) gay caricatures (Linnerman 2007); and, all expense paid vacations and cash rewards, ultimately for the benefit of the heterosexual winner(s).

The representation (or its early palpable absence) of LGBT identities as a consumable commodity reflects the power with which television rewards its viewers but masks the stratified society in which those representations are produced. Arguments which perpetuate the importance of circulating money within an exclusively LGBT market (presumptively for the benefit of the LGBT "community") fail to address how exchanges of capital, far from preserving and communicating identity, actually launder the social meanings out of money. "Visibility in commodity culture is in this sense a



limited victory for gays who are welcome to be visible as consumer subjects but not as social subjects” (Hennessy 2000, 201). Indeed, one of the byproducts of this visibility in television is the consolidation of inaccurate, stereotypical representations of LGBT identities that become fixed and unchangeable in the minds of some demographics. This is especially true with homonormative representations that are internalized by LGBT viewers.

Most important, LGBT visibility does not equal power. Peggy Phelan writes, “If representational visibility equals power, then almost-naked young white women should be running Western culture” (1993, 10). Phelan’s critique of representational visibility is aimed at cultural activists who advocated “identity politics” of the early 1990s. Still relevant today, however, is Phelan’s claim about the relationship between visibility and capitalism:

Visibility politics are compatible with capitalism’s relentless appetite for new markets and the most self-satisfying ideologies of the United States: you are welcome here as long as you are productive. The production and reproduction of visibility are part of the labor of the reproduction of capitalism (Phelan 1993).

LGBT visibility on television is not a simple, unfettered, or unilaterally advantageous social and political goal. But visibility is also a word that appears frequently paired with social justice and social movements. If visibility has tremendous baggage for representations on television, what is the relationship between visibility and the GLBT movement for social justice? While *Logo* certainly makes gays and lesbians visible on television, does it also utilize this visibility to further social justice goals?

### **Social Justice, LGBT Activism, and *Logo***

In the context of LGBT activism, social justice is a two-fold, interpretive concept: first, social justice points to heterosexism and transphobia as accounts of LGBT

marginalization in society; second, social justice does not advocate predetermined positions, but acknowledges the need to study a given phenomenon—like homophobia and its resulting discriminatory effects—in society.

Implicit in the concept of social justice is the objective that justice can and will be achieved throughout *all* areas of society rather than achieved only in certain areas through the strict administration of law. Social justice conceives of a world in which all individuals receive fair treatment and an impartial share of society's benefits as well as an equal distribution of social disadvantages. The best example of this phenomenon is the civil rights movement (Leadership Conference on Civil Rights 2008), which employed a variety of tactics and active engagements to achieve racial equality through social, political, economic, and legal means.

LGBT activism has largely modeled itself on the civil rights movement and fits within the parameters of social justice accounts, advocacies, tactics, and objectives (Phelan 1997; Vaid 1995; D'Emilio 2002). A lengthy history exists for such activism, which began with the formation of the Mattachine Society, The Daughters of Bilitis (Jagose 1997) among others, and continues today in such organizations as The Human Rights Campaign, The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Lambda Legal. The objective of these organizations is to remedy a perceived disparity in the social hierarchy for its LGBT constituencies. These organizations approach this objective by advancing a variety of theories of oppression and privilege with differing strategies, spanning the resistance spectrum from civil disobedience to coalition building and boycotting. One organization which differs from most of the others is GLADD (Gay & Lesbian Alliance

Against Defamation), because it serves as the only social advocacy organization that critiques representations of LGBT individuals in mass media.

This organization is important because of its similarities to and differences from other “mainstream” LGBT activist organizations. GLAAD describes its mission as being “dedicated to promoting and ensuring fair, accurate and inclusive representation of people and events in the media as a means of eliminating homophobia and discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation”.<sup>4</sup> In many respects GLAAD differs little from other mainstream LGBT social advocacy organizations; a cursory examination of its hierarchy, staffing, management and funding mechanisms are remarkably similar. But what makes it particularly interesting is its unique focus on mass media representations of LGBT people and the methodology that the organization uses to pursue its agenda. Many other LGBT organizations mimic the civil rights model that appeals to political and legal avenues for redress of social inequities suffered by their LGBT members. GLAAD does not do this; in fact, GLAAD uses an innovative method to achieve its results – publicity. The use of publicity as a motivator and punishment has a lengthy history (Garcia and Parker 2006), and GLAAD’s “Red Carpet” events employ this strategy effectively.

Comprehensive data suggest that GLAAD’s success is related to its ability to efficiently deploy verbally combative rhetoric that challenges homophobia, transphobia, and the social hierarchies which produce these phenomena through Hollywood film stars, producers, theatres and other entertainment industry entities. Through news reports, interviews and website publications, GLAAD critiques both Television/Film Management and the Commercial Advertisers businesses who contribute to those projects, thereby effectively doubling their potential social impact.

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<sup>4</sup> GLAAD Website, <http://www.glaad.org/about/index.php> (Accessed: July 14th, 2008)

This is important because when power possesses power absolutely, how can anyone expect television networks to behave admirably? Indeed, the very opposite is true. Lack of publicity for an organization or business's discriminatory practices or behaviors is the anesthetizing fog which blinds LGBT viewers to extensive libratory opportunities.

### **Business and Social Justice: A Match Made in Hell?**

Sender points out, "the division of business from politics disavows the extent to which all economic activity has political effects..." (2005), and this is also true for the "business" of television. By separating business from politics, marketers appeal to a liberal, utilitarian economic model in which financial decisions can be made free of political motivations or ramifications. In turn, marketers then reach new consumers and generate increased profits independently of any impact this activity might have on *social* relations or cultural politics.

At the national level, the gay community is not a pre-existing entity but is a construction of an imagined community. This community is constructed, for example, in its highly visible political activism. "High visibility," however, depends on an increasingly sophisticated and commercially supported national media that gives these political actions "airtime" (Chasin 2000). Marketing in commercial television media has been instrumental in the formation, construction, and visibility of these politically motivated LGBT groups.

Visibility is at the heart of both marketing to LGBT audiences and achieving the social justice missions of LGBT organizations. "The 'Battle for acceptance' is fought within the national imagination, through media images and legal debates, but it is also fought within corporations themselves" (Sender 2005, 7). And "corporations," like the

*Logo Channel's* parent company, Viacom, are particularly sensitive and acutely aware of the role they play in this process, especially as it affects their bottom line. For Walters, "... niche marketing becomes yet another sign of the thin and exploitative nature of the new gay visibility, using gay 'difference' to sell products without evidencing any substantive engagement in the movement for gay rights" (Walters 2003, 239).

This complex interaction among media, activism, and LGBT audiences reveals an interconnected process whereby LGBT consumerism reproduces its own identity. Consumption practices and actions can be effectively employed for and against businesses, turning "private acts of consumption" into political acts of social legitimacy. The impact of LGBT buying habits, boycotts, and negative media reports have been influential on corporate America's hiring practices, adoption of nondiscriminatory statements and domestic partner health benefits. "Purchasing" social justice indirectly through direct non-consumption is one advantageous strategy of the LGBT community.

But what disadvantaged is this community purchasing? Sender points out that "...aligning gay consumption with a specifically domesticated, monogamous model of gay relationships increases at the respectability of those relationships, because straight neighbors see gay consuming couples as 'just like them'" (Sender 2005, 7). This assimilationist result can pose a direct threat to the efficacy of gay political activist efforts.

*Logo's* current financial success, the increased visibility of gay characters on television, and the tempestuous relationship between consumerism and activism, forces the question: just what are *Logo's* espoused goals as a channel? And are these goals compatible with, even productive of, social justice goals? Early in this chapter, I asked

the question, is the *Logo Channel* “selling a feeling about what it means to be” . . .

LGBT? And is this “feeling” in any way related to social justice? It’s time to answer that question.

### ***Logo’s Self Description: This is Social Movement?***

*The LGBT world has a place all its own with Logo, the new lesbian & gay network from MTV Networks...Logo is entertainment programming for lesbians and gays and just about anyone who enjoys a gay point of view. Logo is for us, our friends and our family. Logo is originals. Logo is movies. Logo is documentaries. Logo is news. Logo is specials. Logo is the channel for Gay America. Finally.*

We chose to name the channel "Logo" because as the first and only 24/7 channel for the LGBT community, we wanted a *name that people could make their own and give it personal meaning*. For us, the word "Logo" is *about identity, about being comfortable in your own skin*. It's about being who you are.<sup>5</sup>

*Logo’s self-description on its FAQ web-page acknowledges the historical absence of LGBT’s “place” on television and remedies this absence for “the LGBT world.” “Finally.” Moreover, this place is populated with “us, our friends and our family” and “just about anyone who enjoys a gay point of view.” This world is full of enjoyable entertainment, visible gays and lesbians who are “comfortable in [their] own skin[s];” Logo is a community where “identity” is about choice, agency, and “being who you are.” A “gay point of view” is seamless, effortless, and apolitical. Finally. Left unspoken, but lurking, are all binaries traditionally associated with each of those descriptors: the closet in a heterosexual world; painful discrimination and rejection by friends and family; a majoritarian viewpoint of homophobia and heteronormativity; the marginalization and social oppression that continues to criminalize and to pathologize much of the LGBT community.*

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<sup>5</sup> *Welcome to Logo*, <http://www.logoonline.com/about/> June 28, 2008

*Logo's* answer to the question, "What is *Logo*?" is invitational rhetoric; that is, this passage invites subscribers to join the "channel for Gay America" and paints a necessarily ideal portrait of *Logo's* world. *Logo's* answer also suggests that it's a channel that's for Gay America, but not necessarily LGBT America. This rhetoric exposes the assimilationist problem that effectively silences lesbians, bisexuals and the transgendered by equating them with gay men, thereby perhaps making *Logo* **only** for gay men. But this world's idealization, for all its unmentionables, also recalls similarly unspoken social justice concepts: Social justice conceives of a world in which all individuals receive fair treatment and an impartial share of society's benefits as well as an equal distribution of social disadvantages.

The rhetoric of choosing the name *Logo* does echo a social justice mission for LGBTs (and perhaps only for some of these constituencies)—to name ourselves, for ourselves, investing political actions with personal meaning—with "a name that people could make their own and give it personal meaning. For us, the word "*Logo*" is about identity, about being comfortable in your own skin. It's about being who you are."<sup>6</sup>

This rosy picture of *Logo* is not a mission statement for the *Logo Channel*. Mission statements are most often internal documents that are tools for organizational members.<sup>7</sup> A mission statement paints a picture of a set of *aspirations*; that is, what does this organization want to be? And how will it do this? John Seabrook's *New Yorker* essay gives us a peak into MTV's internal mission statement. It reads in part: "Because it believes in rock and roll, MTV today is television's most powerful source of freedom,

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<sup>6</sup> *Welcome to Logo*, <http://www.logoonline.com/about/> June 28, 2008

<sup>7</sup> The College of Arts and Sciences at The University of South Florida, a public institution, does publish its mission statement on the USF website.

liberation, personal creativity, unbridled fun and hope for a radically better future. MTV keeps you plugged in."

It's terribly ironic that MTV's mission statement is more politically potent, engaged, activist-oriented, and radically hopeful than the self-description of the *Logo* Channel. Indeed, *Logo* has capitalized on its own monopoly on the LGBT audience to solidify its industry position by exploiting its LGBT audience's dependency. The national LGBT community has come into being as an imagined comradeship of gay men and lesbian women watching an increasingly commercial television industry in which *Logo* is "the *only* Gay Channel for America."

Here I unpack *Logo*'s self-description for three interrelated themes that foreshadow the analytic and critical work that will occur in the next chapters. For now, my analysis of *Logo*'s self-description hinges on its construction of audience as consumers, for its dismissals of struggle in and through consumption, and for its homogenization and apolitization of sexual difference.

First, *Logo*'s self-description communicates implicit messages about LGBT nationalism that solidifies rather than destroys divisions of gender, race, and class. "Gay America" is really about white, affluent, male couples; "...a gay nation that, like all nations, *appears* to bring together highly diverse and geographically disparate group of people under a false unity" (Chasin 2000, 98). This empty appeal to unity reproduces rather than eliminates both the structure and inequalities found in the social hierarchy of American society. And *Logo* begs the very question about this "Gay America's" hopes, dreams, and lives by suggesting there is a single, unified, and unproblematic "gay point of view."



Next, *Logo's* self description suggests that the struggle for social equality need not be a struggle; in the event that it *was* a struggle, it's now over. "Finally." *Logo's* emphasis on "being you" reduces LGBT cultural distinctiveness to style choices and comfort—no doubt, addressed by purchasing products. "Being you" invites the LGBT audience to become subscribers who are presumably more concerned with their next purchase than with civil rights progress. *Logo's* role in the shifting balance of power over who has control over LGBT cultural definitions and who reaps the profits is related to the perpetuation of a fantasy of assimilation and upward mobility. *Logo* fails to disrupt consumer culture contexts for its audience specifically because it relies on its viewer's vicarious identification with a consumption ethic, through their strict dependence on and confidence in *Logo's* portrayals of LGBT visibility, the product of which is their reification as a sexual minority.

Third, *Logo's* self-description homogenizes and renders apolitical "both the constructedness of sexuality and the specificity of LGBT difference." Indeed, *Logo* does not exhibit any resistance to the normalizing tendencies of the gay market, in either its programming or advertisements. "... the ideal gay consumer is in part a product of the norms of marketing in which people of color, older people, poor and working-class people, and a host of other less privileged sectors of society are underrepresented or invisible... the narrow image of the gay consumers also is a product of the history of gay visibility" (Hennessy 2000, 238). The superficial inclusion of the transgendered, lesbians and ethnic minorities in its programming does little to remedy the power inequities between these groups when examined against the frequency of their appearance in

reoccurring series, much less through its advertising which requires that LGBT people be desexualized.

In short, *Logo's* self-description is a lost opportunity to aspire to bigger and better things—for problematizing gay unity, for producing social subjects—not just consumers, and for enlarging its very construction of the LGBT community in and through sexual difference. As the only LGBT channel, *Logo* could re-territorialize television's public space as a vehicle to challenge the construction of meanings associated with sexual identity by potentially "...understanding visibility that acknowledges both the local situations in which sexuality is made intelligible and the ties that bind knowledge and power to commodity production, consumption, and exchange" (Hennessy 2000, 142).

Profit and social movement do not have to be mutually exclusive endeavors—but only if both concepts are queered. As Sender persuasively points out "I would not worry so much about an ad that dramatizes the idea that assimilation is a cause of liberation and enfranchisement an effect of consumption, if I did not see these ideas at work in the movement." Indeed, some LGBT social movements, like Gay Shame, have identified and criticized the consumption ethic that's associated with the socially progressive companies that support "mainstream" LGBT movements and their presumptively heteronormative agenda. Gay shame articulates a resistance to what they consider to be the commodification of the LGBT identity (Weiss 2008). "Gay Shame is an outgrowth of a younger generation disgusted with over-commercialized pride celebrations as more about corporate sponsorships, celebrity grand marshals, and consumerism, than about the radicalism that gave birth to our post-Stonewall gay liberation movement" (Sender 2005). Nowhere does *The Logo Channel* exhibit a similarly queered initiative.

## ***Logo's Lost Opportunity in the Television Industry***

This chapter began by tracing the development of the cable television industry and the business model of operations to account for the *Logo* Channel's financial successes. *Logo's* wholesale adoption of this business model, despite its rhetoric of difference reveals a widely held, industry-proven business strategy whose goal is financial success *at all costs*.

This chapter then moved to a brief history of the representations of gays and lesbians on television to foreground the importance of visibility to political and social movements toward equality. The costs of this visibility, for LGBT identity and movement, have been tremendously high. *Logo's* "sound business practices" have capitalized on visibility, exploited their monopoly on an LGBT audience, and invited subscribers into an LGBT world characterized by fabricated unity, lack of struggle, consumptive practices, and a thoroughly unproblematized concept of sexual difference.

Visibility alone is insufficient to achieve the goals of social equality for sexual minorities, particularly when that visibility occurs at the *expense* of accurate, nonnormative, presentations of underrepresented constituencies like the transgendered, women, and ethnic minorities. Moreover, *Logo* seems to benefit from, and predicate its survival on, the reactionary efforts that inspire its superficially transgressive-appearing programming and advertisements, that stem from a historical denial of moral respectability that characterizes the legacy of its LGBT audience.

*The Logo Channel* occupies a position of presence in the cable television industry and therefore may appear as if it's exercising socio-political power through its communicative ability, it's a power that's distributed as equally as the market permits. That *The Logo Channel* pursues this avenue of illusory socio-political empowerment

under the guise of progress, with its rhetoric of personal investment in the LGBT community, is disingenuous at best. Considering *Logo's* financially competitive industry position and the *lucrative* capitalist opportunities *Logo* exploits through its monopoly on audience, *Logo* has lost a tremendous opportunity to participate in permanent and effective social change.

### **Chapter Three: *Logo* Programming - Like Taking Candy From A Baby**

In this chapter I examine three reoccurring series on *Logo*: *Noah's Arc*, *Can't Get a Date*, and *Round-Trip Ticket*. I argue that these three shows communicate complicated and contradictory messages of consumerist capitalism, homonormativity, and ethnicity to *Logo*'s LGBT audience that ultimately undermine *Logo*'s opportunity for social activism. In pursuit of this examination, I begin with an overview of *Logo*'s programming successes and the challenge of analyzing and meeting the needs of its audience. I then analyze each reoccurring series for the specific ways in which ethnicity, homonormativity, and consumerism are enacted. While *Noah's Arc* is a valiant attempt to complexify the realities of gay African American men's lives, *Can't Get a Date* and *Round Trip Ticket* reinforce harmful and constricting boundaries of GLBT identity, undermining the very audience *Logo* seeks to attract.

#### ***Logo*'s Lessons Well-Learned**

*Logo*'s success as a cable channel can be directly attributed to lessons learned from its predecessors: the failures of *Q Television Network* (USA) and *PrideVision TV* (Canada) and the achievements of *Here!* (USA) and *OutTV* (Canada). The failures experienced by *Q*. and *PrideVision TV* were numerous, but chief among them were the inclusion of "adult" programming, and airing of that programming during early evening hours; an inability to create, solicit and maintain an audience; weakness in programming variety; disputes about distribution revenue with local operators; and, finally, financial mismanagement. Salamon points out that:

It took more time than anticipated to sell the channel... if the channel had started in February, the original debut date, it would have been available to only two or 3 million viewers; now it will be available to 10 million. Unlike Q. and Here, a video-on-demand service for the gay market, *Logo* is offered on basic cable systems and subject to the general operating principles for those services... (2005)

*The Logo Channel's* President, Brian Graden, further acknowledged that "We have come at this from the consumer point of view, not from a standards point of view or a political point of view but from a branding point of view... as a business opportunity people get it" (Salamon 2005). But the unsuccessful predecessors of *The Logo Channel* have been very important to its success. Why? Because, *The Logo Channel* successfully avoided the failures of *Q Television Network* (USA), *PrideVision TV* (Canada) while simultaneously capitalizing on strategies that did work for *Here!* (USA) and *OutTV* (Canada).

From its inception, *The Logo Channel* identified and capitalized on strategies that worked. These strategies included purposely subjecting itself to industry accepted, advertisement-based revenue, along with its profitability and its precarious volatility; extensive and diverse programming with reoccurring series; strategic scheduling of "adult" programs; inclusion of binding, long-term, re-negotiable contracts with local operators; and the use of MTV network's resources for its management and demographic experience.

*The Logo Channel's* financial success is indisputable. *Logo* has grown by 5 million subscribers since its launch after just four months. At 18 million, it's almost halfway to its total available digital capacity of 40 million homes, says Lisa Sherman, the channel's senior VP/General Manager. Both its predecessors and *Logo's* failures and success have hinged on programming. The programming engine of these networks drove

the economic success or failures because of its centrality to garnering advertisers, building and maintaining an audience, and generating income for local operators.

*Logo* has successfully navigated these programming waters through strategic inclusion and timing of “adult” programs, the careful development of high viewership shows, serializing those shows where warranted, and carefully matching advertisers to program content while maximizing revenue from those sources. Brown reports that *Logo* “...continues to program a strong mix of docs, reality, drama and sitcoms that reflect the diversity of the channel's audience...” (2006). But this diversity fails to include some demographics (ethnic minorities, women, etc.) at the expense of inclusion of others (gay men). Eileen Opatut, Senior Vice President of Programming for *Logo*, states that the key to successful programming is to be authentic and inclusive.

Eileen Opatut also grudgingly acknowledges that “I can't say we've been happy with all of the pitches we've received” because “misconceptions and stereotypes . . . are all too common.” Because programming and advertising go hand in hand in the construction of audience/target market, programming decisions are often based on market research. OpusComm, a TV marketing giant, is hugely influential in constructing audience. Brown (2006) claims, “OpusComm's research reveals that 60% of GLBTs identify more strongly with their sexual orientation than their ethnicity... the common denominator is sexual orientation, so you have a wider audience - *you don't have to slice and dice as much*. As long as you're unilaterally sensitive to the GLBT, [sic] you're in good shape.”

*The Logo Channel's* programming reflects a strong reliance upon research data, produced by major, industry-supported companies like OpusComm responsible for

researching the highly challenging LGBT viewer markets. Traditional marketing research regularly asks questions about age, gender, ethnicity, income, interests, and buying habits in surveys and data collection. Marketers have not found workable solutions that ask the question, “Are you gay?” in a political climate of hostility and backlash that makes both asking the question and offering an honest answer not only dangerous, but impossible. Given the unreliability of data for this demographic, *Logo’s* programming decisions possess the appearance of validity, but in actuality reflect decisions made about audience desires devoid of substantive information (Hester 2007). My analyses of *Noah’s Arc*, *Can’t Get a Date*, and *Round Trip Ticket* are attempts to complicate the intersection of programming choices and audience desires. Indeed, do these shows paint complex, helpful, and libratory portraits of the GLBT community?

### *Noah’s Arc*

*Logo’s* Senior Vice President and General Manager, Lisa Sherman, was asked by *TV Week*: Is there one piece of programming from *Logo* that really sticks out as outstanding?” Sherman responded:

The program I’m most proud of is *Noah’s Arc* .We launched our very first scripted series about four African American gay men. That is a story that just doesn't get told. And I will tell you that the audience just flipped over "Noah." They had a Web write-in campaign trying to advocate for a green light for season two. We were flooded with e-mails and phone calls. For our first time out for a scripted show, we were thrilled. (Lisotta 2006)

*Logo* describes *Noah’s Arc* in the following passage from its website:

Experience the lives and loves of four African-American gay men looking for love and signs of intelligent life in West Hollywood, Los Angeles. This one-of-a-kind groundbreaking original series tells the story of Noah, Chance, Alex and Ricky as they deal with boyfriends, struggle to build careers, and search for Mr. Right. It's *Sex & The City* meets *Soul Food*-but gay, of course.



While the show can reasonably be described as a "one-of-a-kind groundbreaking original series" because of its gritty, superficially realistic presentation of gay African-American male lives, it also fails to acknowledge the sometimes contradictory messages embodied in its characters and plot about ethnicity, same-sex male desire, and masculinity.

I approach the analysis of this show through three categories of the experiences of its characters that illustrate the unique challenges implicated through their ethnic minority status. Drawing from the above description, I've isolated three verbs: deal, struggle, and search as operative terms for gay African-American men's lives. These categories include how they (1) "deal" with their relationships and sex, (2) how they "struggle" within their economic confines of their professional lives, and their (3) "search" for potential partners. And to accomplish this, I look at how black authenticity, lived experience, sex and masculinity interact as areas of inquiry.

I selected *Noah's Arc* because of its pivotal role, both for *The Logo Channel* and for the larger television industry, in the representation of gay African-American men. Its failures and successes, are subjects for scholarship in the complexly intertwined issues of African-American authenticity, masculinity, and sexual identity within the context of American popular culture. By employing a queer theoretical approach, which emphasizes that sexual identities do not function independently of other forms of racial differences, *Noah's Arc* serves as an excellent example through which these differences are articulated against each other in a complex and sometimes contradictory negotiation of lived experiences in the "public space" of *The Logo Channel*.

### **Ethnicity and *Noah's Arc*: Searching for Black Authenticity**

A critique of Season 1 of *Noah's Arc* reveals a positive and revolutionary approach to the subject of African-American ethnicity in the context of gay male

relationships. Throughout the first season, all four central characters represent various iterations of African American identity. Extensive scholarship suggests that Black masculinity iterations have historically evolved beginning with the slavery Era which saw the socially constructed 'Black Sambo' or 'Coon' personas. These personas evolved over time to encompass a wide range of (mis)characterizations from the obedient Sambo, Jim Crow era's 'boy,' 'cool cats' who vary from the non-threatening, middle class Black 'sidekick' or effeminate 'sissy' to the working class, hyper-sexualized Black male rapist, thug, or pimp. These representations have historically contributed to one-dimensional understandings of Black masculinity:

Th[ese] narrow depictions of Black men only serves to reinforce negative stereotypes about this heterogeneous community. Moreover, because Black men's sense of authenticity is often constructed within a heteronormative socio-historical framework, gay and bisexual Black men often remain invisible within the discourse on Black masculinity. (Ford 2008, 1104)

Wade easily represents the "strong black man" image: his muscularity, physically domineering posturing, taciturn and hesitant dialogue, "street" clothing, and Afrocentric hairstyles which range from cornrows to fades. But Wade also reveals an emotional sensitivity, physical tenderness, and unapologetic erotic attraction to Noah that serves to blur the lines that demarcate male hegemonic, African-American identity.

The same juxtaposition between emotional sensitivity and stereotypical Black masculinity is true for Chance who exposes the constructedness of ethnicity with his alternating adoption of conservative, subdued clothing, intellectualized dialogue, and Stepford-Wives-like home decorating that embraces a historically white, affluent, "high society" ambiance. From his elbow-patched suede jackets, earth toned color palettes of his craftsman-style home, Crate & Barrel furniture, and carefully self-censored lexicon, Chance communicates a constructed image that constantly vacillates between his

physically identifiable African-American ethnicity to non-Afrocentric, "mainstream" influences.

In Episode 3, for example, Chance confronts an unfaithful Eddie who reveals a sexual desire for "thugs." Chance then abandons his articulate and gentle persona for the hyper masculinized street thug. And his adoption of this façade necessarily means that his complexity as a gay African-American man is reduced to a cultural stereotype of what constitutes an "authentic" black identity.

Chance is trapped in the exquisitely painful confines of heterosexist society's making. His education and professional career mark him as upper-class and this complicates his identification as an authentic black man, given the stereotypical value attributed to working-class masculinities. And he also can't be a "thug" because it's a cultural stereotype that serves to illustrate the socially constructed nature of "authentic" blackness. Spearman discusses episode 3 in which Chance

...seems to think he *likes it more street* and he decides to take *thug* lessons...and there were some great moments when Chance had to say things like 'would you like me to break you off some cheddar'" that indicate an appeal to the one-dimensional stereotypical "brothas" previously mentioned, albeit to highlight the contrast between authentic "blackness" and superficial "blackness" for laughs.

And although, as Yep poignantly observes, Chance's "African-American garb and mannerisms imbue him with real, authentic blackness. Particular kinds of clothing worn in particular ways and the various mannerisms and gestures signify the kinds of class trappings that are closely associated with authentic blackness" (2007,33). Chance still is forced to negotiate the precarious confines of his identity through a socially constructed minefield rife with "dangerous" outcomes. Although the episode ends on a positive note that reveals Eddie's appreciation for Chance's flexibility to fulfill his sexual desires, the criticism this reveals is powerfully valuable.

The series makes great inroads into these types of complicated negotiations and concessions by its characters and evidence of exceptionally high viewership reveals an appreciation for those efforts. The series first season concludes with a record number of emails soliciting *Logo* to continue *Noah's Arc* for a second season, and thereby solidifies its success as a reoccurring series on the network. In its second season, *Noah's Arc* continues to build upon this successful framework that complicates tropes of authenticity and the boundaries of prevailing iterations of African-American ethnicity.

*Noah's Arc* sees Chance increasingly adopt Afrocentric artwork, jewelry, and home furnishings in his attempt to “reconnect” to his African heritage during a trip to Kenya. Noah also increasingly appears with changing Afrocentric hairstyles and furnishings in a new apartment that conveys an unambiguous message of African American ethnicity. These things serve to connote an adopted identity that he constructs for himself through a personal search of his ethnic heritage. Searching for authenticity is just that: a search. *Noah's Arc* does not present frozen, static images of African-American masculinity, but reveals in its characterizations a continual, difficult, and self-reflexive quest for authenticity—even when notions of authenticity themselves are double-binds.

### **Refusing to Deal with Lived Experience of Blackness**

The lived experiences of African Americans are as diverse as the population, but some theoretical consistencies do exist through which individuals negotiate their lives that tenaciously hold true despite resistance efforts by socially progressive movements. The parameters of this discourse are defined by class and its intersectionality with African American identification of black authenticity: “The romanticized view of working class as authentic renders middle-class, educated blacks as assimilated,

capitulated and inauthentic. Furthermore an inner city lifestyle is associated with black authenticity” (Yep, 32). This association creates a romanticized and monolithic view of ghetto life without recognizing and recounting the harsh material realities of such experiences. In the process, it continues to divide middle class suburban blacks from their working class counterparts.

If *Noah’s Arc* successfully negotiates black authenticity, it has been less successful at incorporating the lived experience of black people—experiences that include exclusion and discrimination, stereotyping, lack of critical recognition, and homogenization. Muting or ignoring these lived experiences dilutes the capacity of *Noah’s Arc* to complexify the meaning of black lives as represented on *Logo*.

Unfortunately, during the entirety of the series’ first season, there isn’t a single episode which explicitly speaks to racial discrimination, exclusion, or any other problem which stems from racial marginalization. This only occurs in the second season, which begs the question -why the delay?

A variety of anecdotal evidence also suggests that the decision to include an episode in the second season that focused on African-American ethnicity was a reaction to ongoing controversies associated with the show’s cancellation and lack of recognition. The controversy surrounding the abrupt cancellation of *Noah’s Ark* after only 17 episodes (after its second season ending 2006) reveals questionable judgment about *Logo’s* utility as a vehicle for ethnic visibility. Terrell accurately observes that “feature film(s) like *Brokeback Mountain* and television shows like *Will & Grace* and *Queer as Folk* have been a boon to gay visibility, but their almost entirely white casts have left people of color behind” (2007).

And while there have recently been a few complex gay African-American characters on television, such as “Keith” on *Six Feet Under* and “Omar” on *The Wire* (both on HBO) the majority of roles, “...still fall under one-dimensional stereotypes: “Mandingo objects of sexual desire, sissies sashaying in the hair salon, and down-low ‘brothas’ spreading HIV” (Terrell 2007). To add insult to injury, *Noah’s Arc* failed to be recognized by GLAAD in its 2005 Media Awards ceremony.

...the interracial gay relationship in "Six Feet Under" also helped that show win a new nomination. But for the black LGBT community, the big television news of 2005 was *Noah’s Arc* on *Logo*... I understand GLAAD's decision but I think it's a mistake. For the first time ever, we get a new black gay TV series and new black gay movies and they don't get recognized...So neither the black groups nor the gay groups will directly recognize some of the seminal achievements in black LGBT media during the past year (Boykin 2006).

Yet despite this controversy, during its brief lifespan the groundbreaking role of *Noah’s Arc* as a vehicle for gay African-American visibility is widely respected. Keith Boykin cogently observes that “Before *Noah’s Arc*, there were no gay black TV shows. So if nothing else, it created the possibility in the minds of the public and the industry that this is something that can happen and be supported” (Terrell 2007). That recognition, particularly in light of controversies which challenge the series value for social progress, is important to any critique about its role in American pop culture.

When describing what the series is about, a variety of voices reveal a wide spectrum of views on how *Noah’s Arc* fits within the larger television industry and the social fabric of American popular culture. Many of these voices typify exclusionary rhetoric as a lived experience of black people. And while Vincent Christian, who plays Ricky in the series, states that “(The show) humanizes a group of ethnic men,”<sup>8</sup> the

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<sup>8</sup> Bonus Video, Episode 2, Season 2

unasked question is: why do these ethnic men *need* to be humanized? This implies that humans are white; “ethnic men” are not. The inclusionary rhetoric of “love” also mutes black experience and gay experience. Heterosexual actor Jensen Atwood who plays Wade grossly oversimplifies racial and sexual specificity, couched in terms of acceptance. “The notion of family is greatly expanding and *everybody can fit...love is what it is, its love, it's not necessarily gay love it's just you know, two people sharing their feelings for each other.*”<sup>9</sup> Superficially this statement seems only to serve as an affirmation that promotes *Noah's Arc's* central position in the rhetoric of communitarian ideals of shared kinship, even as it refuses to deal with blackness.

And that rhetoric is premised on a shared kinship amongst gay African-Americans that may or may not exist. Moreover comments like, “it's not necessarily **gay** love” by an actor central to the series, suggests a thinly veiled heteronormative attempt to homogenize and diminish same-sex attraction, at the expense of the series marketability. Comments by Lisa Sherman, Sr. Vice President and General Manager of *Logo* blithely states “I don't see it as a story about a black gay community, I say that it's a story about a family and community...” reveal an amazing indifference to the centrality that ethnicity plays in the series. This indifference is reminiscent of the unsuccessful attempts at colorblindness used as a liberal attempt to remedy racial discrimination. (West n.d.)

With a cast of 14 major reoccurring characters, 13 of which are African-American, *Noah's Arc* exists on *Logo* as the only show with an overwhelmingly ethnic minority cast, whose African-American creator describes it to be a “...somewhat realistic view of these characters' lives and ummm, real life is both fun and dramatic...”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Patrik Ian Polk, Bonus Video, Episode 2, Season 2

African-American lived experiences of discrimination and exclusion are not represented on *Noah's Arc*; empty appeals to inclusion and harmful claims that homogenize the realities of these lived experiences.

### **Dealing with Sex**

In terms of sex, *Noah's Arc* has a contradictory record. There are substantial differences between both seasons of the show, in its portrayal of gay sexual activity. *Noah's Arc's* first season reveals an interesting complexity in its treatment of African-American sexuality that's alternately mediated by appeals to same-sex marriage, in the case of Chance and Eddie, and the rejection of monogamy by the stereotypically promiscuous Ricky in his relationship with Juanito. Notably the issue of same-sex marriage arises amidst the developing relationship between Chance and Eddie, but also because of the financial savings that the combined purchase of a new home would provide (Shales 2005).

Realistic depictions of sex are also curiously absent for the promiscuous Ricky. Ricky's sexual encounters are brief, rarely nude and extensively dialogued, perhaps in an attempt to support preventative measures about HIV/AIDS transmission. But these sexual encounters do not accurately reflect the wide spectrum and variety of activities embraced by gay African-Americans (Miller 2005) with the platonic, "vanilla" sex acts found in Season 1.

One almost never sees any of its character's even partially unclothed, much less engaging in simulated fellatio or anal sex. The relatively innocuous sex lives of *Noah's Arcs'* characters stand in stark contrast to the graphically accurate, completely nude, fictionalized depictions of gay sex across all seasons of Showtime's *Queer As Folk*. And given *Showtime's* audience is not strictly an LGBT audience this fact is a clear indictment



against *Logo's* depiction of gay sexuality. This dichotomy is tantamount to a capitulation to *The Logo Channel's* need to temper its representations of gay sex to the palatable, by continuing a trend of desexualizing gays.

Only after the series' second season do the major characters attend a Gay Black Pride event<sup>11</sup>, where Wade accidentally catches Noah having sex in a bathroom stall. In many ways this "coincidence" serves as a crucially important critique about gay sexuality and ethnicity. How and why is this fictional moment crucial? In other words, what does it say about African-American sexuality? This moment uses controversial "tearoom" sex acts to vividly illustrate the complexities of real-life sexual experiences and their connectivity to an idealized, sexually potent and perpetually virile, African-American ethnic identity. This scene is poignantly juxtaposed against an event sponsored by "mainstream" social movement organizations (in this case Los Angeles's Gay Black Pride organizing committee). An additional danger implicit in this depiction of black sexuality is the message that same-sex attraction between black males, inevitably results in a sexual encounter.

This serves only to perpetuate false assumptions about the promiscuity of gay men, while obfuscating the sexual lives of these characters for *Noah's Arc's* viewers. Moreover, the reaction and subsequent behavior by Wade in this episode, further illustrates how sexual spontaneity can be misinterpreted, and "morally" coded as wrong, bad, etc. where those sex acts occur in nontraditional locations.

### **Masculinity and its Many Performances**

Episode 8, Season 1 serves to highlight the juxtaposition of ethnic identity and masculinity, with Noah participating in a runway fashion show, complete with knee-high

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<sup>11</sup> Episode 208, Season Two

boots, skirt, make up, feather fan and wig. This episode is reminiscent of the film entitled *Paris Is Burning* that documents gay African-American fashion balls. Additionally, throughout Season 1 and Season 2, the characters Alex (played by Rodney Chester) and Chance (played by Doug Spearman) serve as counterpoints that reveal the wide spectrum of African American masculinities. Rodney Chester describes his character Alex as "...the comic relief of the show...the character Alex is so *on*, like *really, really out there*... everybody knows an Alex; the crazy but fun; just a crazy *outrageous* person. This season you have that other side of you [sic] not that happy person all the time."

Chester uses adjectives like "outrageous" and phrases like "really, really out there" and "on" to supplant meanings about highly feminized, verbose, and flamboyant caricatures of stereotypically gay African-American males. This is not to suggest that Alex does not accurately represent a segment of this demographic, but it does reveal the tacit understanding that there is a potentially negative meaning associated with Alex's femininity. Yet, most of the show's characters do create an idealized self in the gaze of *other fellow gay* characters by relying on external markers of sexual identity like designer clothing labels, vacation destinations, home decorations, etc. appearing in the series that stereotypically associated with gay male identities.

The range of performed masculinities is important because it undermines the potential deconstruction of hegemonic masculinity associated with African-American ethnicity and the framework that construction supports which perpetuates the femininity=gay arithmetic. It's no surprise that Ricky is the owner of a designer clothing shop located on Melrose Avenue. The choice of occupation for one of the main characters for the series reveals how, in this example, *Noah's Arc* relies on how

"...appearance constitutes a primary way of asserting and displaying a lesbian and gay identity... lesbians and gay men use clothing and adornment to create a sense of group identity (separate from the dominant culture)...to signal their sexual identity to the wider world or just to those 'in the know'" (Clark and Turner 2007, 267).

The consequences of nonconformity result in negative feedback in the form of bitchy comments, disapproving looks and being ignored by other characters. This feedback is sometimes unmerited because class affects the "access to credit and capital [which] determines who can wear what, and those who can be what" (Clark and Turner 2007, 271). This assertion is certainly true across all characters in *Noah's Arc* from the economics professor Chance to the struggling writer Noah.

### ***Noah's Arc's Contradictions***

African-American ethnicity, same-sex desire, and masculinity are intricately linked in sometimes detrimental as well as beneficial ways, As Munoz persuasively points out "... queerness is, for the queer of color, always about adjacent antagonisms within the social, including but not limited to, class and race" (2006, 102). *Noah's Arc* is a show that is replete with contradictions, adjacent antagonisms, social subjectivities and markers in a world in which "black homosexuality is viewed as a white disease and a threat...because homosexuality is believed to be a threat to hegemonic black masculinity, it is often dismissed, laughed at, and violently rejected" (Yep, 35). And as such, the show invariably serves as a canvas upon which these issues are dealt with by its characters.

The four main characters present both realistic and unrealistic depictions of African American reality. In terms of ethnicity, *Noah's Arc* initially failed to aggressively pursue any cultural criticism of the challenges associated with its characters racial minority status or to write creatively from the daily life of a minoritarian

viewpoint. The daily lived experiences of African Americans are replete with socially imposed challenges which restrict individual agency and social equality. Extensive studies suggest that from adolescence, African Americans develop and internalize a social hierarchy where heteronormative conformity is privileged. “Within this framework, homophobia, heterosexism, or antigay practices get interpreted as acts of masculinity that allow boys to gain power over other boys and construct themselves as ‘real men’” (Froyumm 2007) These interpretations of black masculinity adopted by both genders possesses distinct and unassailable boundaries. Scholarship reveals that these social challenges begin early in life and are often associated with the classist, socio-economic position of black families, but doesn’t necessarily minimize the prejudices experienced.

Moreover, these challenges continue through adulthood but evolve into increasingly more subtle forms of discriminatory practices that insidiously undermine individualized attempts to escape the effects of racial prejudice.

“Blacks...are seldom safe to roam public places: police and Whites harass them in White spaces and stores, while street violence and drugs infest their own neighborhoods. The public considers their nontraditional and interdependent families to be ‘broken’...” (Froyumm 2007). Additional scholarship argues the role mass media plays in the perpetuation of negative stereotypes with depictions of Black youth as hypersexed, dependent, stupid, lazy, violent, and dangerous (Collins, 2004). Obstacles for this same demographic exist in education where even their teachers treat them as troublemakers (Connolly, 1998; Ferguson, 2000). These obstacles are only some (Froyumm 2007, 619) of the early obstacles faced by this demographic across the lifespan and the trajectory of

social advancement is fraught with a variety of increasingly difficult challenges which range from economic insufficiency to elevated HIV infection rates. Given the plethora of challenges that this constituency faces, the added complication of gay sexuality makes the lived experiences of *Noah's Arcs'* characters especially important and revealing. And while some may argue that its unstated, matter-of-fact approach is indicative of an acceptance of the show's premise, such an argument fails to acknowledge the inherent challenges of daily life for this constituency that *Noah's Arc* purportedly seeks to personify.

But the series redeems itself in its second season with an increasing attentiveness to the unique challenges implicated in American society for gay African-American men. By candidly and realistically dealing with issues like HIV, Afrocentrism, economic inequality and crime, "down-low, same-sex desire," *Noah's Arc* powerfully and persuasively exposes the connections between ethnicity, sexuality and masculinity for African-American males. *Noah's Arc* therefore is extremely valuable as a commentary on the integral and inseparable ways in which signifiers produce a "racialized gender, sexual, and class subjectivity that challenge prevailing conceptions of blackness" (Yep 2007, 37 ).

*Logo's* President, Brian Graden maintains that he "...resent(s) the assumption that it takes more sex to tell my story than it does to tell my brother's or my mother's. It's [those assumptions are] based on outdated notions of what it means to be gay" (Fonseca 2005). It is not, however, an "outdated notion" that our status as a sexual minority revolves around the differences and nonconformity of our sex lives. And *Noah's Arc*

makes an excellent attempt to honestly and convincingly discuss gay sexuality in the lives of African-American men.

### *Can't Get A Date*

Dating can be confusing. So it's good to have a *helping hand*. Find out what to do, what to wear, and where to go by checking out *Can't Get a Date*.

Reality television is increasingly becoming a larger segment of television programming. While there are a variety of reasons behind this trend, one thing remains clear: it's a genre that's here to stay. Reality TV is wildly popular within the 18-32 age demographic (Hill 2005) and illustrates the potentially powerful social impact this medium possesses for some viewers within this constituency. Some of the early reality TV programs utilized a thematic focus that was central to its "brand identity," and these shows exist along a vast spectrum of self-improvement interests. Some examples of these include *Extreme Makeover (Physical Appearance)*, *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition (Home Renovation)*, *Fear Factor (physical competition)*, and *I Love New York (Romance and Dating)*.

Edwards perceptively observes that "If reality TV helps discipline subjects because it encourages them along paths of self-improvement, it does so by mobilizing some specific genre features" (Edwards 2003). Critics have pointed out how the genre generates cheaper content by getting viewers to put themselves on TV, but more importantly, this process also encourages what Burton has called "the growing use of viewers to entertain viewers" (Burton 2000, 159).

And as such, its increasing popularity has spawned a plethora of related shows on broadcast television within the past decade that have extended this success to embrace LGBT cast members and episodic themes. "The dramatic appeal of (gay/lesbian)

representations, intermixing sexual differences with broad humanistic identifications, has solidified gay/lesbian people as a staple of the reality genre" (Bennett 2006). Recent shows include *Boy Meets Boy*, *Playing It Straight*, *Gay Straight Or Taken*, *Gay Weddings*, *Project Runway*, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, *Road Rules* and *The X Effect* all of whom have cast members who self identify as LGBT or make sexual identity central to its theme. *Can't Get a Date*, is a series similar to the foregoing examples of "reality television" and precisely conforms to the parameters of these programs.

*Can't Get a Date*, (herein interchangeably referred to as CGAD) is a series that takes three lesbians and three gay men "off the street" in an attempt to get them a date. To accomplish this, the show's host, also the narrator, systematically examines each individual for "flaws" that they (willingly?) attribute to their inability to "attract potential partners." The host uses a variety of commercial resources to effectuate, what is hoped to be permanent changes that will "help" the cast members "... find romantic and emotional fulfillment through a dramatic transformation of their people skills as well as their physical appearance." The show is described as an "...original series [that] follows a group of people who have trouble with dating and attracting potential partners... Through interactions with the host and the helping hands they encounter along the way, each of the people is offered genuine insight into both their flaws and strengths and gains the chance to use what they learn on their dates."

CGAD reveals an insidious process at work that produces compliance and conformity to homonormative ideals of sexiness (Clarkson 2005), physical attraction (Bergling 2005), clothing value (Clark and Turner 2007) and ultimately, self-worth. Implicit in the premise of the show is the idea that gay and lesbian individuals are not

complete, and live unfulfilled lives absent a partner. This premise articulates a position that valorizes dating amongst lesbian and gay constituencies at the expense of queering pernicious, heteronormative monogamy as the ideal. The show perpetuates the centrality of sexual coupling, and the associated importance of bringing non-familial relationships into the purview of heterosexist society rather than affirming nonnormative gay and lesbian sexual relationships without the attendant trappings of emotional affection or a mutual responsibility.

Thus, *Can't Get a Date* seeks to normalize gay and lesbian sexual relationships through assimilation "into the ideals of domesticated family values- monogamous commitment and partner cohabitation" (Murray-Gorman 2006) that regulates and subverts gay and lesbian sexualities uniqueness. Given current research on the state of lesbian and gay couples which indicate " that between 8% and 21% of lesbian couples and between 18% and 28% of gay couples have lived together 10 or more years, it is clear that gay men and lesbians can and do build durable relationships..." (Kurdek 2005, 253) and that "perhaps what is most impressive about gay and lesbian couples is not that they may be less stable than heterosexual married couples, but rather that they manage to endure without the benefits of institutionalized supports" (Kurdek 2005, 253). Significant questions remain about the necessity of shows like *Can't Get a Date*, whose existence is predicated upon a perceived unmet need.

To accomplish these objectives, the host repeatedly identifies for each guest, the external "flaws" that include negative body image, clothing, accessories, physical characteristics/stature, poor verbal skills, etc. But this brutal examination does not cease with its external criticisms; the examination continues to evaluate internal psychosocial



"flaws" like insecurity and anxiety, indecisiveness, perfectionism, antisocial reclusiveness, etc. The show spans six episodes with one guest per episode that initially aired for one season. *Can't Get a Date* creates and defines homonormative boundaries by which dating is constructed through the use of social surveillance and policing that undermine the very demographic it seeks to empower. To successfully analyze this series, I examine how reality TV surveillance and homonormativity cooperatively operate as the backdrop against which CGAD's messages undermines *Logo's* libratory possibilities as a medium of gay visibility.

### **Broken "Promises" and the Gay Male Aesthetic**

*Can't Get a Date* makes a variety of assumptions about its guests, and then makes "promises" to help its participants actualize their (its) goals for self-improvement. The first assumption is that the willingness of its guest's participation suggests legitimacy for its role in their sexual lives. Admittedly while these individuals voluntarily submitted themselves to the scrutiny, I argue that participant's uninformed decisions reveal a reliance on homonormative ideals, successfully communicated by the show, to their detriment.

An example of this phenomenon is the equation between happiness and dating that is the premise from which the show operates. CGAD extends this interpretation from relationship monogamy to other areas. CGAD capitalizes on homonormative gay male "ideals" in the areas of fashion, style, and especially physical appearance which Hallmark the "gay male aesthetic". Lemon observes that

Makeup, cosmetic surgery, full-body workouts, hormone injections—the age-old tools of beauty have been reclaimed by men Is the gay-male aesthetic to blame? The well-muscled physique has been a fixture of gay-male culture for so

long that it is difficult to imagine a time when we celebrated any other body type as the ideal (Lemon 1997).

This compulsion towards exterior superficial physical perfection that's embodied in the gay male aesthetic is intricately tied to self-worth and self-esteem. As Yelland points out "... gay men (like women) believed their physical appearance was more important to others ... These importance measures may provide an indirect measure of the pressure illustrated by (Atkins 1998) that gay men experience to be attractive and muscular from within their own community" (2003,114).

Recent research reveals that homonormative gay aesthetic ideals influences conformity and that "...strong support has been found that the gay ideal does involve being both thin and muscular, and that gay men actively engage in behaviors aimed at achieving this ideal, making them potentially more vulnerable to" (Yelland 2003) social surveillance and policing.

Within this framework, *Can't Get a Date* pursues an agenda that classifies nonconformity with homonormative ideals of attractiveness and "looking good enough" as a "flaw". Why and how does this happen? There are many reasons why lesbian and gay people, such as those who appear as guests on the show, may subject themselves to this scrutiny. Superficially, the main reason may be their powerful interest in obtaining a date, which subsequently motivates their participation.

Yet that interest may be compelled by a carefully orchestrated strategy deployed to communicate homonormative ideas of commodification to *Logo's* LGBT audience. As Joyrich points out in her discussion about the role of LGBT TV, "...there is no pure space of gay self-disclosure uncontaminated by relations of consumerism and commodification, just as there is no pure space of consumerism uncontaminated by what

we might see as closet relations" (2001). But this is only one explanation for a complex topic that involves economics, class and race, personality and psychology. Equally important is the "how," or the second half of the equation that asks, "How does *Can't Get a Date* undermine the very guests that it purportedly seeks to empower?"

Each episode of the series follows a formulaic process and it's that process that we must examine in order to reveal an answer to this question. Each episode of the series begins with a standard introduction in which the disembodied voice of the narrator states "All these people are talking about dating and *none of them are getting it right.*" That this comment, and indeed all of the criticisms raised by the host/narrator originate from a disembodied voice, immune from similar criticisms about physical appearance, serve to illustrate the hypocrisy implicit in such statements. Writing about the implicit harem mentality of *The Bachelor* reality TV series, Dubrofsky states that "*The Bachelor* tells a very specific story about whiteness, where whiteness is essential to finding a romantic partner" (2006). And in much the same way as race, CGAD tells a very specific story about an *authentic* gay identity as essential to finding a romantic partner. Within the framework of this show, authenticity is defined as a homonormative gay identity conformant with gay male aesthetic ideals.

### **What's Real about "Gay" Reality TV?: Therapy and Surveillance**

(Previews of future episodes with photos of each guest are displayed in quick succession) From the first moment, viewers are informed about the gay and lesbian people being depicted, and their failure to "get it right," which sends an unambiguous and clear message about the importance associated with dating success.

Disembodied voice:

Robert thinks the best way to find a man is to be one.

Robert is uptight, (brief clip of Robert discussing his personality to two female friends) with stiff hair (brief clip of Robert describing how he 'doesn't like people touching my hair' to a female stylist named Tiffany) and some stiff clothes (brief clip of Robert wearing a new pair of jeans, while being critiqued by Paul a stylist)

The show conveniently and quickly makes judgment calls about the sources of its "guests" problems that extend not only to his superficial appearance but also their internal "flaws".

Disembodied voice:

Robert's *finding* that being a perfectionist is the perfect way to be single. But things are about to change. These are *real* people having *real* trouble *needing* *real* advice. The *truth* can be harsh but *dating doesn't have to be... Can't Get a Date? Yes you can.*

Again the presence of this seemingly omniscient, omnipotent disembodied narrator compels viewers to interpret his (the narrator's) comments as irreproachable. Indeed, the narrator's godlike comments originate from behind the homonormative camera lens: only his voice is heard, he is never seen, and on some occasions throughout the episode he offers criticisms in Robert's absence.

In this segment, the narrator reinterprets for Robert his own feelings of inadequacy in such a way as to neatly diagnose his problem. The remedy can only be found with help, and it's help that can only be found through the show's narrator and staff. The narrator innocuously uses the word "finding" to supplant his own reinterpretation for that of Robert's actual opinion that (at this point in the episode) goes unvoiced. The repeated emphasis on "real" suggests three things: first, that Robert, and others like him who appear in successive episodes, is an authentic, actual person rather than an actor; second, Robert's, and other guests' problems, are not manufactured; and finally, the advice, supplied by the show, that will permanently remedy his problems. The

“real” of reality shows centers on the therapeutic. Dubrofsky effectively illustrates the methods by which

Reality-based shows often bring together key conventional elements of the therapeutic: self-reflexive comments in displays of the self and an emphasis on talk and confession. On the shows, these activities are carried out under surveillance: viewers watch participants talk directly to the camera about their experiences and what these have taught them about themselves (2007,268).

And it's through this social surveillance that these self reflexive comments originate, thereby casting grave questions about the legitimacy of Robert's "voluntary" comments. When assessing Roberts clothing for a night out on the town, Robert is stopped for a predate critique, where again the narrator assesses his appearance.

How about a look at your jeans, Robert? Are you ready for the *truth*?  
You look like the kind of guy that gets upset when someone leaves the cap off the toothpaste.

Here the narrator strategically employs the powerfully-loaded word "truth" which operates to immediately convey the message that it's an unassailable "truth" immune to rebuttal, and the narrator is in the position to deliver that "truth". This judgmental rhetoric succinctly and quickly communicates a hierarchy of authority to which Robert is subject, at the very beginning of the episode. Apart from the use of *social* surveillance and policing, *Can't Get a Date* also uses *actual* surveillance with the use of a night-vision lens, and follows him from a distance throughout the night at a local bar while periodically capturing brief glimpses of him engaged in conversation with various men. The next shot is of Robert catching a taxicab during which the narrator makes the following observations:

Robert seems a little uptight. It's a sort of *behavior* that may lead to some very forced interactions when he's trying to meet men. *Robert got nowhere at the bar.* He was pushy, snappy, and a little socially awkward. And as a result, he's *going home to way he always does, alone.*

The narrator engages in a sort of armchair psychoanalysis that, while factually accurate, not once but twice, concludes with a condemnation on Robert's failure to solicit a potential partner. And this condemnation is delivered with a surprisingly vindictive tone that connotes disapproval and disappointment.

Robert is caught in a homonormative "catch 22:" he is condemned for *not picking up* a man at the local bar as a potential date, but then he is also condemned for failing to *take home* a man as a "one-night stand". Consequently, Robert is doubly penalized for his failure to to make a choice in conformity with homonormative demands of coupling.

The next day, Robert is sent to a stylist. Upon his arrival, Robert is confronted with the following criticisms about his clothing, specifically his jacket & jeans combination. Robert's failure to keep his jacket's bottom button unbuttoned is noted by Paul who unbuttons it.

Roberts says "oh that's a mistake" to which the disembodied voice of the narrator says "that's a *flaw* Robert" to which Robert testily retorts "it's a *mistake!*" Then they proceed to comment on his jeans, in which Paul observes that 'They are way too high, they're ill fitted and they make him *look like a girl!*' the narrator then challenges Robert's comfort after this critique by saying, 'Do you think you're *still going to go out with this?*' To which he quickly answers, 'No. Paul briefly describes his interpretation of sexiness and after changing out of his suit into less formal clothing, Roberts' "choices" are affirmed with statements by Paul like 'let's put it this way if I sell you walking down the street wearing this, I say that's a cute boy.' When immediately after, Robert is asked what he thinks about his appearance he responds positively, by saying 'yeah I like it, it feels relaxed.'

From the very moment he enters the room Robert is aggressively criticized about his clothing choices. Indeed, Paul initiates a very heteronormative gender policing in his comments about Robert's jeans. This is quickly capitalized upon by the narrator's challenging question regarding his intention to "go out" in what he previously, was very comfortably wearing. Under this onslaught, Robert quickly capitulates, but even this is insufficient! The criticism continues but in a less adversarial way. Now Robert engages in a "discussion" among himself, Paul, and the narrator that superficially appears to be a negotiation that embraces Roberts own stylistic preferences. In reality, this "discussion" is a highly choreographed process that follows a trajectory with a predefined destination. Along the way, both the narrator and stylist use positive reinforcement to prod Robert into final agreement that is the destination of this "discussion".

This process continues after Robert is sent to a hair stylist, whereupon the narrator observes that "Roberts *only hope* is when *professionals* like Tiffany start to point out why his old style isn't projecting what he wants it to." Here again, the narrator reasserts his superiority by identifying for Robert that he *has hope*, however constrained, rather than leaving that assessment to himself, and that hope is exclusively located with "professionals" of the fashion and beauty industries. It is unsurprising then that the show systematically utilizes these industries, and through their complicity, perpetuates heteronormative ideas of dependency on those industries commodification of gay and lesbian identities.

Unsurprisingly, as a postscript, Robert states that "I've had a lot of time to digest what the show talked about, and aahh, I think *I've incorporated a lot of the things that I learned* during the show..." Immediately before the conclusion of the episode, the

narrator asks Robert's unidentified friend if his love life has improved. She replies that Robert's inability to date did not stem from a lack of interest. To which the narrator tellingly points out, "Well, it's *not called can't get a hookup...*" My question then would be, why not?

*Can't Get a Date* operates on three intertwining principles: the reality TV genre format, social surveillance/policing, and homonormativity. As Dubrofsky pointedly notes, "Current scholarship argues that therapeutic discourse encourages individuals to focus on changing the self rather than cast a critical eye on larger social structures" (2007, 268). CGAD certainly is no different. Indeed, this series inculcates the need for change in its participants, whilst under continual social surveillance through superficial criticisms that are bookended with pseudo-psychological therapeutic rhetoric. Airing and marketing programming that serves only to domesticate lesbian and gay men through these tactics, does little to subvert or challenge the regulatory regimes of homonormative conformity. Indeed, it accomplishes the very opposite and paradoxically undermines the socially progressive opportunity embodied in its visibility on *The Logo Channel*.

### ***Round Trip Ticket***

*Round-Trip Ticket* is a reoccurring travel series that features four hosts who travel the world in 13 episodes per season. *Logo* describes the show as a "a globe-trotting travel magazine series that ditches the usual sites and well-worn paths to seek out the entertaining and little-known alternatives in one international location each week. *Round Trip Ticket* features hosted interviews with some of the gay personalities in each destination, as well as travel tips on each location and profiles of local businesses, artists,



restaurants, clubs and boutique hotels. Featured destinations include Bangkok, Dublin, Tokyo, Rome, Manchester, and Buenos Aires.”

*Round-Trip Ticket* serves as an excellent example to critique programming which communicates messages about gay and lesbians and their collective economic abilities to pursue entertainment. The show’s empty appeals to kinship and social action are complemented with language that valorizes luxurious commodities. The bottom line is without a doubt an economic one: Round Trip Ticket invites its audience to see travel as a libratory practice purchased with their dollars.

### **Empty Appeals to Kinship and Action: The Cairns, Australia Episode<sup>12,13</sup>**

Host Will Winkle begins this episode with the sentence, "We gays and lesbians do love to travel." He continues by saying "the *more we do*, the more we realize that we are part of one big diverse family. This is *Round-Trip Ticket*; your passport to how gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people are living, loving and changing the world... this is where *tomorrow's trends started yesterday*." Communitarian appeals to shared kinship (“one big diverse family”) and social action (“changing the world”) are undermined by the implicit directive to initiate and to follow trends that have much more to do with commodities than with social justice.

We’re introduced to a local by the name of Ron Clifton (who appears later in the episode, and is more extensively interviewed then), and Clifton describes for Winkle the gay and lesbian "climate." After some preliminary discussions about the geography, weather, local history, and available facilities, Winkle precedes to ask specific questions

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<sup>12</sup> Episode 211, Season 2

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that recently, *Round Trip Ticket* added *two domestic* destinations, in what I believe to be an attempt to proactively answer criticisms that I raised herein, about its exclusive focus on *international* travel. Consequently Episode 205 (Portland, Oregon) and Episode 205 (Austin, Texas) have only recently been included in its lineup.

about the presence, distribution, and activities of its gay and lesbian population. Clifton answers with sufficiently persuasive numbers to suggest Cairns is both a popular and minimally tolerant destination for LGBT tourists. Interspersed throughout this discussion are photographs that appear in quick succession of rainbow flags, and other LGBT icons emblazoned across buildings façades interspersed throughout the city streets. Ironically, despite this apparent LGBT presence and activities, there are few same-sex couples photographed and virtually no evidence of same-sex groups of either sex even in the few brief clips shown. Indeed, if Round Trip Ticket purports to show GLBT people “living” and “loving,” these activities are not represented in still images.

Next, Winkle narrates: “I get *whisked away to my very own private little island* and then we are off on a *gay Safari* through the World Heritage listed *Daintree National Park* with Ron Clifton.” This episode is divided into three separate sections. Winkle’s interviews begin with Ron Clifton, Shane Horn, and Craig Stewart. All are Australian citizens who are native to or settled in Cairns. Winkle proceeds to briefly interview Ron Clifton, the owner of a “gay” Safari service that provides guidance through *Daintree National Park* and caters to LGBT tourists. Clifton poignantly observes that: “It was tough because most people considered gay people wouldn't want to go into the forest in a four-wheel drive, and I believed differently, and it's something I enjoy doing...” Of the three interviews, this is the briefest of the three in this episode. Perhaps producers also agreed that audience members “wouldn’t want to go into the forest in a four-wheel drive?” Winkle spends very little time with Clifton at this location. If the show’s representation of Cairns boasted rainbow flags, but no images of GLBT people, then Daintree National Park was empty of both.

## Languageing Commodities and Selling Travel

Winkle then introduces Shane Horn: "Get ready for *pure indulgence* when I hang with Shane Horn on the world-famous Great Barrier Reef on one of Australia's most luxurious motor yachts. *Now, this is living.*" And it's with this introduction that Winkle begins his interview with Horn...

Winkle: Shane, how lucky are you. This is like your normal day?

Shane: Yeah, not every day, not every day.

Winkle: What can someone expect if you take them here?

Shane: We will provide them with all the little nibblies, champagne and all the comforts

Winkle: So if *J-Lo wanted to buy this, could she?*

Shane: No, probably not.

Winkle: *Why? Money buys everything?*

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Winkle: Where can you go?

Shane: There are a lot of new little cafés and clubs popping up all the time.

Winkle: And a lot of people come up here on holiday and just never leave?

Shane: Yeah, that's true.

Shane: I think for the gay market this is your ideal destination...

Quick splash shot graphic-A night for two on the Enterprise (the yacht) approximately \$3500 US.

The third and final part of this episode begins with quick splash shots of Winkle and Craig Stewart, a local who operates a luxury salon, eating *caviar hors d'oeuvres*.

Interspersed between the shots of Winkle and Stewart are shots of countryside scenery, people, and underwater wildlife of exceptional beauty.

Winkle: Tell me a little bit about the gay scene here?

Stewart: The population is just over 5000, but there are 140,000 accommodation rooms, and most of the gay boys work in the tourist industry which is where you'll find [them]

Winkle: Why did you make this place your home?

Stewart: I actually thought of this as home the moment that I drive into Port Douglas<sup>14</sup> lined with all those oil pumps. It's, *it's luxury, it really is.*

Winkle: Why is this place special to you?

Stewart: Where else can you live in the same latitude as Tahiti, get an array of bars, clubs and restaurants?

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<sup>14</sup> A suburb of Cairns

Stewart: Everything is right here!

Winkle: It *is*!

Throughout all three sections of this episode, interspersed commercials are targeted to the audience's travel interests. These commercials address a variety of practical concerns that include air, hotel, rental car and entertainment options, as well as commodities that dovetail with travel, interests like food, wine, and antiques.

The language of these interviews is hyperbolic: "This is living," "How lucky are you," "Everything is right here," "ideal designation." While all travel narration indulges in some degree of hyperbole, *Round Trip Ticket* constantly couples the exaggeration with explicit promises of indulgence—mundane and high end: "bars, clubs, restaurants," "it's luxury," "little nibbles, champagne and all the comforts," "Money buys everything!" Less explicit is the buried claim, "most of the gay boys work in the tourist industry." No doubt, these working boys are unable to afford \$3500 a night on the *Enterprise*.

### **Bottom Economic Line: *Round Trip Ticket* to Nowhere**

*Round Trip Ticket*, like many other travel shows, enables audience members to travel vicariously and at no expense (except, of course, for the cost of subscribing to *Logo*) to themselves. Travel shows marketed to straight audiences, however, make no pretense of constructing travelers as "one big diverse family" that is "living, loving and changing the world." These appeals to kinship and social action are purchased through a rhetoric of luxury and consumerism that constructs a GLBT market based on stereotypic and harmful assumptions.

First, the show presumes an economic ability in its LGBT audience, to travel the globe, which may not exist. And this presumption perpetuates the falsely homogenizing conclusion that all, or the majority of LGBT people, are affluent and interested in travel

as entertainment. While the show includes two episodes with destinations within the continental US , this tacitly implies an economic hierarchy for its viewers: those who can travel internationally and those who cannot.

Second, the language of economic hyperbole, like "indulgence", "luxury," "this is living" and "Money buys everything," is an invitation to accept uncritically the values of purchasing these amenities and to conform with prevailing trends of gay/lesbian commodification. When travel destinations are language as "trends" and LGBT travelers are "trend setters—yesterday," audiences are too easily invited to see travel as liberatory practices.

This dangerous proposition does nothing to free *Logo's* gay and lesbian audience. Indeed, it does the direct opposite by slavishly reconstituting false assumptions about economic privileges in this constituency. But more importantly for purposes of social equality, this conception of gay/lesbian affluence and wealth reinforces capitalist objectives, reproducing the commodification of gay/lesbian identities. In short, *Round Trip Ticket* informs the audience about gay friendly travel destinations which validates the acceptance of the LGBT community and their sexual nonconformity. Such validation and acceptance, however, are purchased by their dollars.

How and what does this mean for *Logo's* programming overall? At the beginning of this chapter, my objective was to expose how (1) ethnicity, (2) homonormativity and (3) capitalist consumerism are embodied and communicated in *The Logo Channel's* programming, through three specific shows. My analysis and its conclusions suggest that with regard to these three examples, *The Logo Channel* communicates ideas that on their

surface appear to convey positive, inclusive and empowering messages but in actuality communicate contradictory, dual, self-serving and undermining messages.

Admittedly, these three shows are *not* adequately representative of *The Logo Channel's* broadcasting content, but they *are* reasonably representative of its standard programming schedule, and therefore suggest that more study should be conducted across its programming lineup, in order to refute or confirm the conclusions drawn here.

## Chapter Four: *Logo* Advertisement - Easy as Shooting Fish in a Barrel

They (*Logo*'s gay/lesbian viewers) *like that there are commercials* - it makes them feel supported. They tell us they go out of their way to support the companies that support our channel. – Eileen Opatut, Senior VP of Original Programming, *Logo* (Brown 2006)

The gay community has a lot of money. – Chris Auburn, Marketing Executive, Miller Brewing

Lisa Fortini-Campbell's *Hitting the Sweet Spot: How Consumer Insights Can Inspire Better Marketing and Advertising* is a classic in college advertising classes. Fortini-Campbell uses the terminology from racket sports to argue that the "sweet spot" is that magical moment when *consumer needs* meet *product benefits*. This magical moment, however, only comes after extensive research on a target demographic: what are the needs of an individual consumer in a target market? And, how to match the needs of that market to the features and benefits of a specific product?

Opatut and Auburn's quotations above certainly complicate the "sweet spot" strategy. If LGBT audiences do "go out of their way" to support companies that communicate supportive messages, then product features or benefits have little to do with marketing and salesmanship. And if "the gay community has a lot of money," then advertising on *Logo* is the financial equivalent of shooting fish in a barrel.

This chapter seeks to complicate the LGBT audience as a target demographic for the *Logo* channel, for advertisers, for consumers, and for American society in general. *The Logo Channel's* ongoing presence and financial success represents a dramatic and

powerful change in advertisement trends which, no doubt, reflect a concomitant change in American society's views towards the LGBT community.

Historically, television advertising, like the television industry in general, carefully policed issues of sex, race, and morality—by excluding minority groups and viewpoints—from constructions of “mainstream” programming, advertising, and consumers. With the increased visibility and acceptance of the LGBT community in and through *The Logo Channel*, commercial advertisers no longer have to walk the fine line between alienating mainstream audiences and garnering financial rewards. *Logo* made that line meaningless, where television ads are aired on networks with a predominantly LGBT audience, thus eliminating any risk they might previously have incurred when viewed on "mainstream" television networks.

At the same time, LGBT marketing perpetuates the ideas of chic style and "lifestyle" that are crucial markers of social value and identity upon and through which LGBT individuals collectively create an audience. This narrow construction of the LGBT target demographic as DINK (dual income, no kids) cashes in on LGBT “pink dollars” through the rhetorical strategies of inclusiveness and visibility—to the exclusion and invisibility of a wider construction of the LGBT community.

To make this case, I briefly trace the histories of 1) television advertising, 2) the risks and benefits of advertising on *Logo*, and 3) the history of gay and lesbian print advertising. This history lays the foundation for 4) exploring contemporary constructions of *Logo*'s target market as the “ideal demographic.” The fifth section is my analysis of three commercials that enjoy primetime slots on *Logo* to demonstrate how the rhetorics of inclusiveness and visibility operate to the exclusion and invisibility of a wider



demographic. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the relationship between brand loyalty and the “pink dollar” to demonstrate how *The Logo Channel* adopts a homonormative, consumer capitalist approach to revenue investment.

### **A Brief History of Television Advertising**

Stagnant advertisement budgets during the Great Depression and the Second World War came to an end, created in part by a new generation of consumers whose income increased by 37.7% and whose home ownership rose from 40 to 60%. This increase in home ownership, along with its *increased space* for household goods, saw a subsequently dramatic rise in mass consumption. Baughman persuasively argues that advertisement agencies capitalized on this "mass consumption ethic." Baughman explains that "Postwar advertising...involved more than hyping brands of toothpaste: to some degree it assured the nation's economic growth and political stability. Mass consumption had to be encouraged, maintained...in the 1940s to prevent another Great Depression and avoid worsening labor relations."

Commercial advertisers met this demand by "providing the selling force to galvanize our economy into another explosion upward" (Baughman 2007). Commercial advertisement has long been the single most lucrative source of revenue in the television industry and has its roots in its precursor, the radio. Television had a powerful attraction for advertisers because of its ability to represent goods visually. As one advertiser mentions, "We sell by demonstration" (Baughman 2007, 194), Commercial advertisers use a variety of techniques to limit the production costs of shows on which they appeared while maximizing product receptivity.

The use of multiple underwriters for a single show was the result of this approach. *I Love Lucy*, for example, lost its original sponsor, Philip Morris, because of concerns

about Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz's refusal to smoke on air. Despite its high ratings, the sponsor decided its promotional budget was best spent elsewhere. This decision almost canceled the wildly popular show. Fortunately, *I Love Lucy* successfully encouraged multiple sponsors to underwrite the series.

Still another adaptation to maximize profitability is the use of the "magazine concept" of advertising: underwriting for television programs is sold in the fashion of mass circulation periodicals. This tactic was an advantage for the networks to control *when* a program appeared on the schedule; networks did not have to base decisions on maximum audience appeal for single sponsor. This dynamic of underwriter sponsorship by commercial advertisers also invited "brand" protection. This could affect *what* a company sponsored. S. C. Johnson, the manufacturer of household cleaning supplies declined to sponsor crime shows: "A Johnson image is desired, an executive remarked, and programs must be good, clean, and for the family" (Baughman 2007, 205).

While not all advertisers closely monitor their productions, the "temptation to tamper with a TV property could be enormous. A sponsor's exclusive patronage of the program fostered a gratitude factor, but also brought with it the risk of generating ill will." Thus, the influential relationship between commercial advertisers and television programming content created a dynamic that placed television networks at advertiser's mercy given its reliance on the financial revenue that advertisement generated.

Fears about Communists, alcoholics, and racial prejudice are reflected in the early years of television's advertisement history. "Blacks rarely appeared in commercials; as late as 1960-61, studies indicated that black performers constituted 2% of the cast of commercials... and *The Nate King Cole* show left the air after a year's run... 'The only

prejudice I have found anywhere in TV is in some advertising agencies.' he remarked. Madison Ave. is afraid of the dark" (Baughman 2007, 209). This historically reciprocal and symbiotic dynamic between commercial advertisers and television continues to exist, fundamentally unchanged on today's television networks: "Advertising's dominant role has affected program content and production, widened the differences between the haves and have-nots, and helped establish different roles for today's radio and television" (Sterling 2002, 715).

### ***Logo's Advertising Revenues: Risks and Benefits?***

With the arrival of cable television and its subscription-based revenue, came the perception of increased advertisement opportunity. With each additional new channel came more avenues to market to consumers, yet this also proves to be problematic because each additional channel further divided the audience. And the financial success enjoyed by cable "networks often rose and fell on the results of their selling sufficient advertising time to cover costs..." (Sterling 2002, 525), yet this success has incrementally but consistently diminished over time.

*The Logo Channel* can best be described as any "branded niche or micro-niche network" in which a network airs a single type of program content or is targeted to a predefined demographic population with a mix of program types, e.g. *The Independent Film Channel*, *The Filipino Channel*, etc. Why is this important? Because of the high level of specialization associated with this type of network, the number of subscribers becomes dramatically more important to the financial longevity of the network.

Thus, with the potential reduction in subscription-based revenue that's anticipated in the future (Eastman 2002), the profile of commercial *advertisements becomes increasingly more important* for these networks.

Cable prices have risen 77% since 1996, roughly double the rate of inflation, the bureau of labor statistics reported this month...The producers of cable television content shared \$15 billion - \$20 billion a year in fees from cable subscribers, *roughly equal to the \$20 billion they receive in advertising revenue...* without those fees, the cable companies say prices would go up (Richtell 2008).

If each channel depended on individual consumers electing to pay individually for those channels, the resulting diminishment of viewers potentially would hurt the ability of most channels to attract advertisers. And subsequently, lost commercial advertisement revenue would have to be replaced by higher subscription and license fees.

*Logo* exists within this competitive financial environment, with the *distinct disadvantage* of being branded with a potentially controversial label; due to its LGBT oriented programming and its associated social stigma. And yet, *Logo* continues to enjoy significant financial success and longevity, as result of its commercial advertisement revenue. Why?

One potential reason that explains *The Logo Channel's* financial success originates from history. *Logo* built upon a successful strategy which originated in gay/lesbian print advertisement, and *Logo* expanded upon this through strategic marketing that utilized television commercial advertisements. How and why did this happen? To answer the question why *Logos'* network executives chose to employ this strategy requires a small measure of clairvoyance. We can potentially ascertain their motives by interpreting the historical success of gay and lesbian print advertisement and extrapolate that interpretation to arrive at a reasonable conclusion that might shed light on this question.

## Gay & Lesbian Advertisement History

The history of gay male images and print advertising began during the 1920s, but *positive* depiction of same-sex couples or "gay images" did not truly begin until the 1990s. According to Clark, this history traverses four stages through which minorities are presented in the media, and they are (1) non-recognition, (2) ridicule, (3) regulation, and finally (4) respect.<sup>15</sup> It's not until the 1970s that mainstream media began to discuss the "gay community" in economic terms and this progressed through the 1980s because of perceptions about fashion, style, and cultural sensibility (Branchik 2007, 38). Throughout the 1980s, there is an increasing trend among advertisers to same-sex couples in very specific target markets.

These ads typically but not exclusively, appeared in LGBT publications like *The Advocate* and embraced a wide variety of commercial interests which included *Samsonite* luggage, *Benetton* clothing, and even *7Up* soda. And as Branchik explains, "Given the targeted readership of the publication and the increasing openness gay men felt following the 1969 Stonewall Riot...advertisers were using clearly more blatant images" (2007,44). This interest in pursuing this "underserved" segment of society quickly escalated so much so that, "by the mid-1990s gay male images appear with increasing frequency, primarily in gay targeted magazines... but in mainstream publications as well... although eroticized images can still be found in fashion ads, everyman-type male models begin to emerge as the central objects of these ads" (Branchik 2007, 47).

With the arrival of the mid-1990s, these ads entered the fourth and final stage of Clark's framework that continues to today. Images of same-sex kissing and/or caressing,

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<sup>15</sup> Clark's framework originally was used for ethnic minorities, but Branchik persuasively applies his framework to be gay and lesbian context and thus is incorporated here.

what Branchik describes as "aggressive sexuality," become ubiquitous in *Calvin Klein*, *Banana Republic* and *Hyatt* advertisements, but also in ads by *Avis* and in the "Starting a Family" campaign by *Volvo*. The increased adoption of this tactic by commercial advertisers suggests an increasing sensitivity to the growing acceptance by society towards the LGBT "market."

### **Alienation vs. Financial Reward**

Advertisers have capitalized on this trend. Advertisers are acutely aware of the effectiveness of their *print* advertisements and sought to expand their financial success to *television* ads targeted to this "underserved market". The results have proven financially lucrative, especially where lesbian and gay male imagery are positively employed to elicit the highest receptivity of this audience (Oakenfull 2002, 1284).

As Ragusa convincingly points out, corporate interest in gay and lesbians as a "niche market" dramatically increased after 1999 and was fueled in no small part by "a study revealing that 66.8% of LGBTs [sic] subscribed to cable television" (2005,670). Why is this important? This is important because although contradictory evidence suggests that "...advertiser's current practice of using gay male imagery and advertisements when crossing over to mainstream media provides the greatest risk of alienation to heterosexual audiences, regardless of their agenda. That risk increased directly with the level of intimacy depicted in the advertisement" (Oakenfull 2002).

For *Logo*, the fine line that commercial advertisers negotiate between alienation and financial reward becomes completely meaningless, where television ads are aired on networks with a predominantly LGBT audience, thus eliminating any risk they might previously have incurred when viewed on "mainstream" television networks. And the increasing visibility of the LGBT people as "celebrities, athletes and models" (Branchik

2007, 156) in larger society has the unintended result of more easily defining the LGBT market, which increases the financial profitability of commercial advertisements targeted to this constituency.

*The Logo Channel* began with a core group of 80 advertisers, who were willing to back an admittedly risky business endeavor of creating a 24/7 LGBT-oriented cable television network. “Any new channel that wants to launch has a selling job [to advertisers] to do because they’re competing with everyone else out there... We’re ultimately selling a business case, and we have to make a compelling argument for why they should take *Logo* over anyone [other network/channel] else.” (A. Becker 2005)

The initial group quickly expanded to hundreds advertisers over the course of just a few short years. *Logo*’s leading national advertisers include: 20th Century FOX, Absolute Vodka, Intel, Johnson & Johnson, Paramount Pictures, Prudential Real Estate, American Express, Anheuser-Busch, Kodak, Las Vegas Tourism, Lexus, Red Bull, Sears, SONY Electronics, Avis, Lion’s Gate Films, SONY Pictures, Bacardi, Disaronno, Macy’s, Miller Brewing, Miramax, Stoli Vodka, Subaru, Tom Tom, EBay, Motorola, Nivea, Garnier, Olivia Cruises, Warner Brothers, General Motors, Orbitz & Wrigley’s. (Newswire 2004) American Express featured Ellen DeGeneres, and Orbitz has a mock game-show ad in which an affectionate male couple competes for the fastest booking of a trip. A steady increase in the adoption of gay/lesbian themed ads is a direct result of the increased profitability such ads generate.

### **Who Is *Logo*’s Target Market?: an Ideal Consumer Demographic**

But looking more closely, one can see a change not only in the number of advertisers, but also in their composition and the composition of their advertisements.

*Logo*’s programming also conforms and supports a commercial advertisement agenda by

"narrowcasting" (R. Becker 2006, 93) to specific demographics through individual shows:

- Adults 25-54: *Real Momentum, Logo Films, CBS News on Logo, Queer as Folk, The L Word, Bad Girls, The Big Gay Sketch Show, Exes & Ohs* and *Rick & Steve*
- Adults 18-49: *NewNowNext, The Click List, Wisecrack, Round Trip Ticket* (Time Warner Inc. 2008)

The information above reveals how specific ads are targeted to audiences that are subsequently placed to maximize viewer reception Becker also provides information about the top 12 anticipated consumer activities of *Logo* viewers:

<b>Activities <i>Logo</i> viewers are more likely to do</b>	<b>Index to A18+</b>
Took 3+ plan trips for vacation/past year	273
Watched online video/past month	269
Used Wi-Fi or wireless connection outside of home/past month	261
Paid bills online/past month	195
Made a purchase online for personal use/last month	188
Most recent TV purchase had any HDTV capability	178
Obtained financial information online/past month	175
Downloaded music/past month	166
Traveled to other countries for vacation/past year	158
Go to fitness club 2+ times/week	146
Made personal or business travel plans online/last month	140
Attended live music, dance or theater/past year	137
Acquired any banking service/last year	123

**Table 1, *Logo* Viewer Activities**

Unsurprisingly the majority of these activities reflect an affluent, technologically savvy, financially progressive and socially active ideal viewer stereotypically associated with gay men and lesbians.

Within the past three years this trajectory has increasingly evolved from an original emphasis on fashion, entertainment/nightclub interests and sexual activities of gay men to the currently “urban, socially sophisticated” consumer of both genders.

Original advertisements from *Calvin Klein, Hugo Boss, to RSVP and Atlantis’s*



exclusively gay cruise lines; *Stolichnaya* (Howard 2006), *Absolute* and *ID Lube*, *Trojan* and other prophylactics indicate a commercial emphasis on these subjects. Within the last 3 years, advertisements from *Orbitz*, *Avis*, *Intel*, *Motorola*, *Subaru* and *Tom Tom* to *American Express* convey messages that reflect the top categories of travel, technology and financial/investment subjects perceived by advertisers as likely activities for *Logo's* gay and lesbian viewers.

The advertisement industry was acutely aware of the potential advantages and disadvantaged *Logo* presented from its very beginning. "Some advertisers will be reticent, but this network will be judged more on their audience acceptance than on their sexual preference," says John Rash, senior VP/director of broadcast negotiations for ad agency Campbell Mithun. (A. Becker 2005) The prevailing perceptions about gay and lesbian *affluence* created a unique set of circumstances for *The Logo Channel's* financial success. Marketers anxious to uncover untapped markets helped to construct the gay community as an ideal consumer demographic in which statistics (of dubious validity) indicated that "a typical gay male couple earned \$51,600 a year, while the average straight couple earned only \$37,900. The average lesbian couple reportedly earns \$42,800 a year" (R. Becker 2006, 201).

### **The DINK Demographic**

Recent scholarship has come to define these perceptions of affluence as the "DINK" phenomenon. This term is defined as "dual-income, no kids" and is repeatedly used to highlight LGBT couple's disposable income. Current press accounts reflect a frenzied approach to soliciting the "pink dollar" associated with this illusory demographic. Moreover, *Logo* willingly grants legitimacy to this unsubstantiated marketing demographic. "As we think about selling, we go to those advertisers first who

already have been in the gay market,” (Sr. Vice President) Lisa Sherman says. “And they are *thrilled* to have the chance to reach 18 million *households* very efficiently when, before, they could only maybe reach 130,000 with the country’s biggest gay magazine” (Albiniak 2005). And of course that reach is not only to attract those households attention but to obtain their dollars as well.

What’s also notable about this media report is the rhetorical choice inherent in Sherman’s statement that speaks volumes about the constructed nature of the DINK demographic. Word choices like “households” implicitly communicate the idea of dual occupancy and of course, dual income. But *Logo’s* management isn’t the only participant complicit in the development and perpetuation of the DINK demographic. Indeed, LGBT people, as well as their purportedly representative media contribute to the problems associated with the creation and application of this capitalist, consumer label.

As Jeffery Weeks poignantly asks, “Isn’t a gay identity little more than a pseudo ethnic identity that is easily accommodated by late capitalist societies, easily succumbing to the pink dollar or pound or euro?” (2008,30) It’s not remarkable then, that *The Logo Channel* had great potential for financial rewards given comments by Chris Auburn, marketing executive for Miller Brewing who theorized that “The gay community has a lot of money”. The use of this label further complicates an already entangled system of consumer knowledge that creates and sustains market attempts that define LGBT identities *for Logo’s* viewers.

### **Vanity Ads and Selling Stereotypes**

The newest trend among advertisers on *Logo* is the use of “vanity” ads, like those from Johnson & Johnson, Merck and other cosmetic and pharmaceutical companies

which appeal to perceived superficial obsessions with beauty and physical perfection that are embodied in gay male stereotypes.

“In the morning it’s all about get in, get out,” begins the commercial that began appearing recently. It shows a young man getting ready for work by shaving, showering, brushing his teeth and, yes, rubbing a dollop of *Rogaine* foam into the crown of his head. Rogaine initially developed by Upjohn, now a division of Pfizer, was bought in 2006 by Johnson & Johnson, which created the product’s new identity around the foam version. This step by Johnson and Johnson is a smart one, as *Out Now* gay market research has revealed gay men to be “above average spenders in the area of personal grooming and toiletries products.”

Both *Propecia* and *Rogaine* have become involved in marketing their hair loss treatments to gay men. *Out Now* has created two gay advertising campaigns for pharmaceutical company *Merck*, the marketers of *Propecia*. The *Out Now* campaign for the Propecia brand used the headline "He Doesn't Believe I'm Over 30", and used imagery of two gay men on a sofa. Such an approach is “a big move away from Rogaine treating a condition, to being part of an everyday grooming routine for men who want to look their best.” These are only two examples of commercial advertisements currently airing on *Logo*, that reflect the changing approach over time by advertisers to pursue the “pink dollar” market(s) represented by the networks audience.

What’s noticeably absent from many of these commercials are the presence of ethnic minorities, visibly identifiable transgendered (if such a thing is possible or conceivable?) and to a lesser extent women. Commercial advertisers have made substantial progress in advertising to lesbian viewers and a commercial by Olivia Cruises

(an all lesbian cruise line) is one example of this change. Despite an increase in commercials aired with same-sex female couples and/or commercials targeting that demographic, the representation of women versus men on *Logo* advertisements remains low (Oakenfull 2002). If *Logo*'s advertisers aren't including ethnic minorities, transgendered, and equal numbers of women, they are cashing in on "liberalism" as a substitute for constructing a wider demographic that more accurately reflects the LGBT community.

### **Reaching the LGBT Market: Cashing in on Liberalism**

From the beginning, advertisers targeting the LGBT demographic have employed the use of careful, deliberative and strategic linguistic constructions. The triumph of salesmanship over substance is exemplified with the use of gay/lesbian-identified colloquialisms and vocabulary. An example of this is also seen in political advertisements, from which this approach originated. "Low negative" words and phrases ("liberal") are then incorporated into attack ads, and "high positive" words ("compassionate") are put to use in slogans and speeches – hence "compassionate conservative."

In an era of increasingly competitive cable TV niche broadcasting, it is not surprising that advertisers and marketers would seize upon an untapped LGBT oriented brand like *Logo* as a vehicle for their collaborative financial efforts. "According to Buford, *Logo* has become an efficient way for advertisers to target the LGBT audience. In the past, they could reach gay viewers by buying commercials on such programs as Bravo's *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* and NBC's *Will and Grace*. But buying ads on those shows was far *more expensive than* buying spots on *Logo*, which reaches a smaller but more targeted audience" (Guenther 2006). This is significant, as studies indicate that

there is a direct correlation between the proximity of a target audience's receptivity to commercial advertisements and the percentage potential of those consumers acting on those messages of consumption, thereby translating to directly proportional increases in revenue. Clearly, this phenomenon explains how *Logo's* successfully competes against its "mainstream" shows like *Will & Grace* and *Queer Eye*.

Why is that important? Because marketers' interest in and repeated reports about gay and lesbian consumers confirm the power of free market capitalism and the validity of "market liberalism" which is defined as encouraging independent individual economic actions motivated by self-interest, that are free from restrictions, will ultimately produce the best "results" (R. Becker 2006, 200). The ongoing battle for market share among cable TV networks created an excellent opportunity for *The Logo Channel* to profit from that liberalism. *The Logo Channel* benefited from a change in social attitudes towards LGBT individuals that preceded its arrival. "...supporting gays and lesbians was still a relatively exceptional marker of just how open-minded one was" (R. Becker 2006, 200). This is the basic negotiation by which television consumers internalize messages communicated to them in a neatly prepared entertainment medium-television. Indeed, the television industry's reliance on this process is the source of their financial security.

Their intimate familiarity with this negotiation of the "private acts" of consumerism by their viewers is the method by which they are then empowered to solicit advertisers, local carriers, and others stakeholders for financial investment. Indeed, Sender observes that "... the gay community, on a national scale at least, is not a pre-existing entity that marketers simply need to appeal to, but is a construction, an imagined community formed not only from political activism but an increasingly sophisticated,

commercially supported, national media...LGBT people are consumers that are increasingly openly recognized, organized, measured, and appealed to..." (2005,200). By encouraging the pursuit of new tastes and sensations as pleasures while concealing the labor that has gone into making those possible, LGBT marketing perpetuates the ideas of chic style and "lifestyle" that are crucial markers of social value and identity upon and through which LGBT individuals collectively create an audience.

### **Three Exemplars: Selling to/Constructing an Audience**

Given the television industry's historical sensitivity over issues of sex, race, and morality, the commercials aired on *Logo* represent a dramatic and powerful change in advertisement trends which, no doubt, reflect a concomitant change in American society's views towards *Logo's* LGBT audience. To better explore and evaluate this shift, I have chosen three commercials that regularly appeared on *Logo* in 2007 and were in heavy rotation during "primetime" hours. My analysis of the visual and verbal texts is my attempt to look past the surface message of selling a product to explore how *inclusiveness and visibility are substituted for political change and social equality*. Indeed, some LGBT audience members are invited to see themselves in these ads as included and visible, but these strategies also render invisible and excluded LGBT identities that do not fall within the gay male aesthetic, vanity advertising, the DINK demographic, and the "celebrities, athletes, models" strategy of advertisement. Together, these ads construct a LGBT audience at the price of the LGBT community's social equality.

*Subaru: Who Will You Take With You?*  
 Subaru "Shadows"  
 Media Outlets: United States television  
 Agency: Moon City Productions  
 Year: 2005

Shot one	shot two	Shot three
Medium Close	Close Up	Medium Close Up
High-speed still photography of actors and digital models of Subaru vehicles, which were then animated and composed with entirely artificial digital environments, crossed the screen.	A splash shot appears with the text "Subaru Outback 2006, with synchronized all-wheel drive standard" above an actual Subaru model that pulls up into a virtual landscape. Immediately two Caucasian men exit the vehicle and stand next to each other against the front side of the car with their backs to the camera.	The Subaru <i>Logo</i> appears with its standard tagline "Think. Feel. Drive."
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do you see yourself?</li> <li>2. What do you see yourself doing?</li> <li>3. Where do you see yourself going?</li> <li>4. How would you get there?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Who would you take with you? (they walk off into towards a sunset in the distance)</li> </ol>	No other text appears. Black screen.
These questions scroll across the screen, with a fade-in and fade-out effect. They appear in quick succession against a digitally superimposed bridge with a moving virtual Subaru.	Again the text appears at the top of the screen, with a fade-in effect, but it solidifies into a permanent header. The text also occurs against other action as indicated above, set to modern music.	Fade-in, with slowly diminishing music volume.

**Table 2, Subaru "Shadow" Segmentation**

With cutting-edge graphics, composite photos and 3-D animation, the Subaru spots have a familiar car-ad look -- until the end. In one, two men get out of the car to share a vista together; in another, a spaghetti of highways turns into same-gender symbols. The campaign's inspiration is Subaru's popular 'gay-vague print' ad featuring gay-themed license plates from 1999.

This term serves to illustrate how the sexual identity of actors in these commercials is not explicitly made clear and left purposefully vague. "As we approached the tenth anniversary of our advertising campaigns, the outlets to reach gay and lesbian

consumers were limited. We were very hamstrung by the general lack of media," says Moon City Productions president John Nash, who has managed Subaru's LGBT marketing efforts from the start. Subaru supported *Logo* at its launch with a mainstream commercial, "but the *novelty of being there* (on *Logo*) wears off for viewers after three months, so we knew we needed custom creative...and Subaru customers who aren't gay *respect its outreach* to gays", notes Nash.

Nash begins by recognizing the limited media outlets targeted exclusively to LGBT audiences and the limitation that placed on Subaru's ability to reach them ("we were hamstrung"). Like many other advertisers, Nash placed a "mainstream" commercial on the *Logo* network that had three effects: 1) Subaru reached a LGBT audience, 2) Subaru garnered "respect" from straight audiences for this reach, and 3) most importantly, Subaru realized it needed to create commercials that specifically addressed and targeted *Logo*'s LGBT consumers; not simply import mainstream commercials to *The Logo Channel*. Hence, the "novelty" of reaching that audience with mainstream commercials and the goodwill it created quickly wore off.

For Nash, an advertising promoter, his comments recognize the need for advertisers to address the emotionally substantive and personally influential message(s) communicated by commercial advertisements that speak to LGBT audiences. His description of the advertisement as a "novelty" suggests that (1) Subaru ads are novel only within a "mainstream" heterosexist context and that (2) *any* appeal to LGBT consumers that superficially appear inclusive is sufficient to command their respect and appreciation while (3) interpreting that respect as being legitimately rewarded to Subaru



by *heterosexuals*, where that marketing strategy (of including positive LGBT imagery) should *already* be standard practice.

When analyzing this ad, the four rhetorical questions seek to stimulate an internal debate within the viewer about the sufficiency of their identity, activity, goals and methods to achieve and answer these questions. These rhetorical devices operate to establish Subaru as the source of the answers to these questions. These strategies are typical of *all* commercials. Indeed, the only change is a substitution of two men for a woman and a man. Such a substitution communicates an “inclusive” message of visibility: attempting to solidify Subaru as *the* car manufacturer of choice for LGBT consumers. This inclusion and visibility, however, also limits and homogenizes the LGBT audience.

The rhetorical question "Who would you take with you?" is already answered in the visuals of the ad. “You,” the purchaser of a Subaru, and “you,” the person along for the ride, are a Caucasian male couple. This perpetuates the idea that "safe" homosexuals are only white, gay men in monogamous relationships, absencing single men, ethnic minority men, and all women.

Moreover, the vista they admire speaks to the travel images, luxuries, and commodification critiqued in the last chapter. If *Round Trip Ticket* excluded images of gay couples, then this Subaru commercial returns a very specific kind of couple to the picture, along with their product. Michael Wilke poignantly observes that “For the *new* TV ads, the car maker had to *double its gay advertising budget* (it does not reveal spending figures), but the opportunity was ripe as competition increased dramatically: Mitsubishi, Volvo, Jaguar, Toyota, Saab, Volkswagen, Cadillac, Scion, Saturn,

Mercedes, and others now seek gay drivers -- compared to just Saab in 1996.” The unfortunate prediction I can make here is that, despite a doubled budget, car ads will not double the kinds of people that appear in the ads nor will it expand the DINK demographic to better account for the lives of all LGBT individuals..

*Levi's: What Will You Wear When You Hook Up?*

Levi Strauss & Co. "Change"

Media Outlets: United States television

Agency: *Bartle, Bogle, & Hegarty*

Year: 2007

Shot one	Medium Close	Fade into a slow pan across the screen moving from left to right of an upscale, minimalist industrial sized loft apartment with sophisticated urban furniture, rugs and accessories as a background to a well groomed Caucasian-esque male with perfectly coiffed jet black hair opening an unseen package and lifting out a pair of jeans.
Shot Two	Close up	The next shot is of his naked legs and feet, with his hands on the jeans as he slowly lifts them over his ankles. Teasingly and seductively he raises the jeans up to mid-calf which point his hands begin to shake and contemporaneously his surroundings begin to reverberate with what appears to be his efforts.
Shot Three	Close up	the young man bend over in a sexually seductive position in a crisp, white V-neck T-shirt looks around with his eyes darting left and right, while frozen in position, trying to discern what's happening to his apartment in the environment around him.
Shot Four	Medium Close	the young man pulls his pants up to mid thigh level, at which point viewers glimpse the tight gray boxer briefs he is wearing. While in the background, we see entire buildings rise in the distance outside the walls of his apartment in conjunction with his efforts to lift his pants up to his waist.
Shot Five	Medium Far	He continues whereupon a telephone booth (when's the last time he seen one of these?) abruptly burst through the floor of his apartment, complete with an attractive blonde haired man with the telephone to the ear, but only partially engaged in his conversation while facing the young man.
Shot Six	Close Up	on the blond man; his face turns to fully inspect a half naked man, and slowly a smile crosses his face and a barely perceptible nod occurs
Shot Seven	Close Up	on the young man; shocked, the young man quickly looks down in bewilderment, then slowly precedes to drop his pants again to the floor while watching the blond man in the telephone booth descend.
Shot Nine	Close Up	the young man is shown buttoning his jeans looking intently into the camera that switches to-

Shot Ten	Extreme Close Up	the blond man hanging up the telephone in a telephone booth, and leaving it with a smile on his face
Shot Eleven	Close Up	on the young man again; with a wide smile on his face, the commercial then switches its focus to-
Shot Twelve	Extreme Close Up	the waists of both men, closed in Levi jeans showing their rears to the camera lens with their arms touching, walking off into the distance in a street scene

**Table 3, Levi Strauss & Co. “Change” Segmentation**

What's most interesting about this commercial is its complete lack of text, sounds, or verbal commentary. This commercial is composed entirely of visual imagery, and thereby both avoids and encourages criticism for its lack of an explicit message as well as its high subjectivity to audience interpretation. The setting for this commercial perpetuates the idea of gay male economic affluence. But surprisingly, given the trend to appeal to the DINK demographic, this commercial does so in a way that doesn't predicate the young man's financial status on a dual income.

The commercial, like many, many clothing ads aimed at straight audiences, regularly uses sexually suggestive shots to generate and maintain viewer interest, but does so in an inventive, albeit implausible way. And this creative device, while amusingly interesting, could easily be interpreted to suggest that the young man's ability to attract a partner is not based in reality. This is particularly true considering his blonde counterpart's instant and intense physical attraction, which inexplicably manifests itself in their immediate, instantaneous pairing and exit. Still another read is that this encounter physically enacts the “earth moving” analogy (or cliché?) of heterosexual romance novels. That a pair of jeans causes the earth to move, capriciously directed by its wearer, imparts a strange kind of omnipotence to the wearer of Levi jeans.

For the LGBT audience, however, the commercial undeniably communicates the capitalist, consumption ethic message that says gay men need to purchase this product as a means to enhance their personal attraction to facilitate *their unfulfilled single lives*. At the same time, the inexplicable “hook up”—without words exchanged—reinforces the false connection between sexual attractiveness and gay male promiscuity (where words need not be expressed to arrive at a mutually understood inevitably successful sexual encounter).

Again, this commercial absences ethnic minorities. The main character does appear to possess some physical characteristics that place him on the periphery of Caucasian phenotypes. His jet-black hair, angular facial features and dark eyes seemed to suggest this, yet these features are only secondary to his safely white skin and perfect teeth. And these subtle physical differences are ultimately remediated by the intense physical attraction expressed in his stereotypically Caucasian, blonde, blue-eyed partner which validates his value as legitimate source of sexual interest.

Another extremely attractive, Caucasian, gay male couple is included and made visible by Levi’s. While Subaru implies that their gay couple are long-term partners enjoying life through Subaru, Levi’s gay couple is hooking up through Levi’s jeans earth-shattering capacity to attract a partner; the attraction, however, works for very attractive, gay Caucasian men, leaving the rest of the LGBT community excluded from the magic.

*Reactine: Sneezing Fashion Victims*  
 Pfizer "Fashion Victims"  
 Brand: Reactine  
 Media Outlets: United States Television  
 Agency: TAXI Advertising & Design  
 Year: 2000

Shot One	Shot Two	Shot Three	Shot Four
Alternatingly	Extreme close-up	Close-up cut to	Medium Far

Medium Close to Close Up		Extreme Close-Up	
Various models walk down the runway at a fashion show as their pictures are snapped by the press, who are sitting around them.	One model (coded as a drag queen) walks by an audience member who for some reason is holding a cat. The model then sneezes, spewing a volume of fluid onto the runway. Models behind her begin slipping, falling flat on the floor as a couple of feminine men watch with smiles.	Before she leaves the runway, the model has one more sneeze, shooting a spray onto a shirtless muscular man in the audience -- but he is protected by his fruit basket hat and sunglasses.	The model exits the stage. At the end, the British announcer says to the sneezing model, "Bless you, love."
		Narrator voiceover: "Still suffering from allergies? Isn't it time you tried Reactine?"	

Table 4, Pfizer "Fashion Victims" Segmentation

*Reactine* is a prescription allergy medication, branded as *Zyrtec* in the U.S. This commercial appears as a mix of camp and burlesque that directly and indirectly comments on gays and the fashion community. There is an element of laughing *at* the drag-queen model and the obviously gay onlookers, as well as *with* them. The characterization of the drag-queen model with exaggerated make up, running eye liner, and generally disheveled appearance, caricatures her role in the commercial as an object of pity ("Bless you, love.") and in need of medication to remedy her dishevelment.

But the impotence of other men in this commercial is potent. The feminized men in the audience with their stereotypical waiflike, effete appearance and another man's hypermasculinized muscular build are *acted upon* throughout the commercial. In the first group, they're passive watchers who do nothing to inhibit the model's progress, nor do they do anything to aid her apparent distress or those who fall behind her. Indeed, they smile at both her readily apparent illness and the distress of the other models.

The muscular man, with his ostentatiously gay Carmen Miranda-like fruited hat, is the unfortunate recipient of her gross sneeze. And although its impact is diminished by his accessories (hat, eye glasses, etc.), he remains incapacitated by this performance, reducing him to passive receptivity for disease. This communicates the distinct message that (1) gay men are clearly susceptible to illness (2) despite their physical narcissism, and (3) must use *Reactine* as the sole remedy to their problem. The presence of women is refreshing, but only until one realizes that they exist as caricatures of femininity. The women caricatured are alternatively disease infected, socially inept, and professionally vapid whose existence is only useful as vehicles of the fashion industry. High fashion becomes an industry that is easily curtailed by a simple cold. Again, ethnic minorities are completely absent, but this commercial perpetuates stereotypes of gay men.

That this commercial appropriates humor to subtly insinuate these messages without explicitly alienating its viewers is a tacit capitulation to the commercial strategy of inclusiveness and visibility when marketing to LGBT audiences. A consistent theme throughout these examples perpetuates the consumption ethic among LGBT viewers, while simultaneously alienating women and ethnic minorities whose total absence speaks volumes about these product's "inclusiveness." Despite superficial communitarian appeals through visibility that serve to "support" the LGBT community, the strategic rhetoric of these commercials is based not on product features or benefits, but on brand loyalty that captures pink dollars.

### **Brand Loyalty and Pink Dollars: Dangerous Results**

This chapter began with the perhaps unfortunate characterization of advertisers marketing to gay consumers as "shooting fish in a barrel," but there is research on the

facilitating roles "product/brand relationships play in the construction of gay community and gay resistance" in order to examine the impact of the "pink dollar" (Kates, 1998; Koss-Feder, 1998; Penalzoa, 1996). Given the *Logo Channel's* adoption of its marketing efforts as a microniche "brand," this research is valuable because it illustrates the complex dynamic through and upon which *Logo* operates as a brand.

LGBT audiences construct a sophisticated, dynamic and vital meaning system in which "brands play significant facilitating roles" which constitute a commitment to a "communal" understanding of consumerist "citizenship." This concept is defined as a condition in which a person's civic identity is at once defined and reproduced by their consumption of products that other individuals immediately recognize and accept. And consumerist "citizenship" is also characterized by a commitment to particular brands which assume shared meanings, traditions, and values above and beyond their commonly understood utilitarian functions.

This characterization is supported by data which reveals that LGBT consumers were likely to purchase from "gay-positive companies that advertise in *gay media* that target gay customers....Such positive feelings appear to transfer to these companies' brands" (Kates 2000, 506). And the "consumption ethic" is defined as the use of LGBT consumers "market power and dollars as weapons to wield against those organizations they perceived to be their corporate enemies," while simultaneously rewarding and deepening "brand loyalty [with] those companies that treat gays and lesbians in an ostensibly decent manner." Both withholding dollars as weapons and spending dollars as rewards formulate "relationships with various businesses as a means of empowerment and of dealing with homophobia" on an individual level (Kates 2000, 507).

This consumerist capitalism isn't exclusive to the tripartite dynamic between advertisers, LGBT consumer, and *The Logo Channel*. Television actors, producers and other program content shareholders participate (albeit in a limited fashion) in this dynamic. Many people of varying political persuasions were troubled by what they saw as a harmful mix of consumerism and gay politics, either because of the harm caused by any consumption of a "gay lifestyle" or because of the harm caused by having such a serious issue sullied by consumer exchange. Koojiman recounts how, whilst in a discussion about her show, Ellen DeGeneres states that she "...seemed concerned about what this (the show's cancellation) might do to her future earning power. Well aware of her own position within the TV industry, she remarked on more than one occasion that 'I'm the one who's going to get the biggest boycott.... I'm the product here,' and even went so far as to plead in her *20/20* interview, 'Please buy me!'" (2005,45).

While it is not the objective of this research to closely examine the financial data of *The Logo Channel's* marketing efforts, it's reasonable to conclude that its marketing executives are knowledgeable about the economic and politically shared dimensions that characterize LGBT consumer's "consumption ethic" and their communal "consumer citizenship". *Logo* strategically capitalizes upon this dynamic and indeed, its financial success and longevity is emblematic of its success in that endeavor. However, that success comes at a price.

*Logo's* commercial advertisements emphasize the *ideal* image of the gay consumer as affluent, white, male, thirty something and gender conforming. The construction of this image occurs at the expense of ethnic minorities, bisexuals, and particularly the transgendered.



The rhetoric of inclusiveness and visibility is purchased through the consumer citizenship of the LGBT community; these pink dollars buy a very narrow portrait of the LGBT community that is a reflection, not of the community itself, but of the gay/lesbian demographics and tastes *of the marketers* and the *media producers*.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

Television is a great source for entertainment, and it's a very efficient tool to communicate and educate. American society's love of television is evident in the passionate, quick embrace of this technology, and the longevity it has enjoyed since its development and subsequent marketing in the 1940's and 50's. But the social effects of television have long been a source of intellectual curiosity and intrigue. The highly complicated regulatory history of the medium reflects the tenuous struggles made by our government to address television's social impact.

A variety of areas have historically been subject to government efforts to control that impact; business practices, advertisement and program content have all been regulated through government intervention. The use of profanity, language, dress, appearance, and behavior of characters on television are examples of how program content has been censored over time. Regulation, control, and censorship is the U.S. government's recognition of the power of television as a communication medium for persuasion, social control, and political agendas

How society has adopted, interpreted and perpetuated messages communicated through television has long been a source of academic and scholarly interest as well (perhaps *because of* the perceived threat that television's poses to government). That intellectual interest has manifested itself in variety of scholarly questions over time, which has focused on these areas of communication. My interests parallel those interests, with *The Logo Channel* as the subject of my efforts.

### **Where We Started vs. Where We're Headed?**

I began this thesis with the assertion that *The Logo Channel* possessed great potential to further LGBT efforts of social equality and failed to achieve that potential. This failure occurred despite *Logo's* significant visibility in American cable television because of the perpetuation of negative stereotypes that marginalized ethnic minorities and women and through a variety of self-serving practices that undermined *Logo's* liberatory potential.

*Logo's* power is vested in *Logo's* visibility: its visibility as a legitimate business, its visibility and powerful ability to attract advertisers and messages that it communicates through its programs to viewers about LGBT identities; its visibility as the Channel for Gay America. TV's gay/lesbian characters are constructed as crucially important epistemological points that contribute to the production of knowledge, if not always to the dramas that drive TV productions. Studies which indicate that people demonstrated significantly more positive attitudes than did those who were exposed to anti-gay visual media, even after two weeks had passed (Levina, Waldo and Fitzgerald 2000) suggest that the effects of visual media are not only powerful, but also possibly lasting. And this ability to influence attitudes is another source of *Logo's* power.

The visibility of positive LGBT characters and individuals in its programming and advertising messages has a potentially powerful impact on both *Logos'* LGBT audience and on larger "mainstream" television viewers *of all demographics*. The judicious and strategic exercise of television's influence has a serious and potentially long lasting social impact on "mainstream" heterosexual societies' approach to LGBT activism. How *Logo* effectuates social change is connected to its ability to successfully communicate positive messages about itself *and* its characters. A brief glimpse at the

popularity of “reality TV” exposes the highly subjective and rapidly changing world of television programming and the advertisements which support those series.

How *Logo* negotiates this rapidly changing environment, the decisions it makes, and the implications of those decisions may have far reaching effects on LGBT efforts towards social equality. I’ve identified the unfortunate consequences of the decision to cancel *Noah’s Arc* in an attempt to illustrate the potential dangers such a decision can have for LGBT ethnic minority viewers. The same far-reaching effects can apply to other constituencies across the social spectrum of LGBT American society. And as Joyrich points out, “Like a television console whose exterior is made to be displayed while the actual workings are hidden within, such tactics may repackage or reframe but not necessarily short-circuit the system...” (2001) of oppression that exists in American society for LGBT people.

### **Cultural Criticism of *Logo* with an African-American Queer Eye**

My own stakes in this cultural criticism of *Logo* are high ones. My personal experiences as a gay man and an ethnic minority are characterized by exclusion, struggle, and searches for representations of myself in the media. My critique of *Logo* centers on my disappointment in *Logo*’s practices, programming, and advertising that fail to accurately reflect and problematize my world in all its complexities.

In Chapter Two, *The Television Industry and Another Lost Opportunity*, I offered a brief history of the cable television industry, the television business model, and the representations of gays and lesbians on television to draw a parallel social history centered on visibility. I extrapolate conclusions drawn through these observations and argued that *Logo*’s financial success comes at a cost to its LGBT viewers/customers. *Logo*’s success is centered on heteronormativity, consumerism, and visibility that

constrain, rather than empower and deconstruct, a discriminatory paradigm which equates LGBT identity with social inferiority. Utilizing trade publications, public relations communications, and scholarly business journal articles published during *The Logo Channel's* most recent fiscal year (2007), I provided quantifiable financial data on the profitability of the *Logo* channel. This information stands in stark contrast to *Logo's* potentially libratory opportunity to unshackle its LGBT audience from social tyranny. The network's industry position served to illustrate the precarious and dangerous contradictions and trade-offs necessary when visibility is purchased at the price of social and political subjecthood.

Chapter Three, *Logo's* Programming: Like Taking Candy from a Baby examined three reoccurring series on *Logo*: *Noah's Arc*, *Can't Get a Date*, and *Round-Trip Ticket*. Chapter Three argued that these shows communicate complicated and contradictory messages of consumerist capitalism, homonormativity, and ethnicity to *Logo's* LGBT audience that ultimately undermines *Logo's* opportunity for social activism. To accomplish this, I analyzed each reoccurring series for the specific ways in which ethnicity, homonormativity, and consumerism are enacted. The cancellation of *Noah's Arc* was especially painful to me since this was a television show produced and created by and for gay black men. Despite its superficially positive and empowering depiction of African-American gay men, the mere presence of ethnic minorities is insufficient to remedy the continuing racial inequalities experienced by this demographic within the gay and lesbian community. Moreover, negative depictions of gay black men on this television show could conceivably damage, and further erode, any social progress made

by this group toward remedying the racial discrimination they already suffer from the hands of both gay and straight communities.

Chapter Four: *Logo's Advertising: Easy as Shooting Fish In a Barrel* examined the histories of television advertising, the risks and benefits of advertising on *Logo*, and the history of gay and lesbian print advertising. This history laid the foundation for exploring contemporary constructions of *Logo's* target market as the "ideal demographic." To accomplish this, I analyzed three commercials that enjoy primetime slots on *Logo* to demonstrate how the rhetorics of inclusiveness and visibility operate to the exclusion and invisibility of a wider demographic. Chapter Four argued that a strong and destructive relationship exists between brand loyalty and the "pink dollar" that's complicated by constructions of an ideal demographic which adopts a homonormative, consumer capitalist approach to revenue investment..The evolution adopted by commercial marketers towards the LGBT demographic has exposed an increasing sophistication that results in substantial financial profits, but uses socially destructive practices that continue, rather than eliminate, LGBT discrimination.

The larger consequences are very real and very dangerous. Gay men are effectively marginalized by their same-sex desire already in heterosexist society; but through these industry, programming, and advertising mechanisms, they become even more marginalized and that occurs with their unknowing complicity by participating in a capitalist endeavor shaped and manipulated by external forces. Lesbians are similarly affected but are also further abused by their complete and almost total absence as a source of attention. What does this mean for "mainstream" television? It means that

these tactics are accepted as “standard operating procedures” which are both profitable and innocuous given the lack of opposition voiced by *Logo* subscribers.

### **Why Is Any of This Important Now?**

This thesis serves an important role in American scholarship by exposing the machinery of American televisions’ business, marketing, advertisement and programming trends, while situating *Logo* within that complex machinery. But most importantly, by exposing how *Logo* works (or doesn’t work) within this machinery, we can learn more about how LGBT identities are either knowingly and unknowingly constituted, constructed and communicated to LGBT audiences and American society at large.

If, as Sedgwick compellingly argues, “sexuality is inextricable from what counts as knowledge in our culture, then it is impossible simply to define a program of knowing sexuality. This, of course, is as true of television programs as it is of academic ones. The question of what exactly the viewers of queer TV texts know must thus remain an open one,” (Sedgwick 1993) but one thing is certain – where and how those queer TV texts appear as equally important as what they say. U.S. television does not simply reflect an already closeted sexuality but actually helps organize sexuality as closeted and *Logo’s* power to change this dynamic can serve to empower its LGBT audience. When this exercise of power occurs without regard to the social consequences for its audience, *Logo* only mimics the same discriminatory behaviors of “mainstream” television’s history, albeit in a nicely appearing package of same-sex imagery, sight and sounds.

### **What Does the Future Hold?**

The future of television is difficult to predict. The changes in technology and their influences on content, advertising, and industry practices will inevitably continue

beyond the current digital evolution. But given the significant power attributed to television in popular American culture and the valorization of its actors, actresses, directors, and others, it seems prudent to suggest that the research conducted here continue. Possible avenues to explore would be the examination of *Logo*'s content from a transgendered subjectivity, a much closer examination of Lesbian representation on this network, not to mention *resistance* to *Logo*'s construction of audience, demographics, and industry practices.

How the LGBT community might “push back” on *Logo*'s monolithic industry position to will be a fascinating line of inquiry. Ultimately the passage of time, money, and social change will show what, if any, substantial role *Logo* plays in the advancement of social equality for its LGBT viewers.



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