Queer Affluence, Popular Media, and the Matter of the Openly Gay Spokesperson

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

QUEER AFFLUENCE, POPULAR MEDIA, AND THE MATTER OF THE OPENLY GAY SPOKESPERSON

Presented by Owen L. Pillion, a candidate for the degree of doctor of philosophy, and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Abstract

This dissertation looks at queer representation in the media and highlights a particular representational strategy that is used in a stereotypical fashion. My first chapter does two things. First, it centers on an exemplar to anchor a discussion regarding the substance and ubiquity of the image of queer affluence. Second, I provide context for the image by pointing to the tenuous status of GLTB issues in politics at the same time popular media is expanding its repertoire of GLTB images. The crux of chapter two, in addition to reviewing scholarly work, is to argue that queer representations are cumulative over time. The assumption that the representations are cumulative is important because that quality provides the rationale for looking at selected images at particular times in order to understand images that came later. With that assumption in place, chapter three examines the construction of Leopold and Loeb as an early exemplar of queer affluence that was then recycled in the films noir of the 1940s and 1950s. I look at the construction of the queer men in these films and chart their relation to the stereotype of queer affluence seen in television programming today. In Chapter four, I analyze queer celebrity spokespeople, figures that I believe are intertextually related to all the images that came before them. Finally, I conclude by painting queer affluence as a representational strategy that is deeply invested in both maintaining sexual differences and assimilating the affluent queer into mainstream culture at the same time minimizing any hints of radical politics and leaving many non-affluent queers behind.

Chapter One: Introduction

"By midnight Charlotte discovered Manhattan's latest group to flaunt their disposable income—The Power Lesbian. They seem to have everything. Great Shoes. Killer eye-wear. And the secrets to invisible makeup."

- from the television program *Sex and the City* episode "The Cheating Curve"

"We're also not going to tell you to go out and spend $70,000 you don't have on a renovated kitchen—or even $7 on a glass of wine you don't want. It's not about spending money, guys: It's about spending *thought*."

- The Fab Five from the introduction to their book *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (p.13)

"My life is about dancing to my own tune. My American Express Card always backs me up."

- Ellen DeGeneres in television ad for American Express

Can you afford to be gay? I want to consider this question's literal meaning. Increasingly, popular culture has shown us that what it means to be gay is to be affluent, white, and to have an insatiable appetite for consuming products. And not just any products, but the best, most expensive the market has to offer. This representational strategy is best summed up by the name of the new gay cable channel: Logo. According to the channel's website they chose this name because, "For us, the word logo is about identity, about being comfortable in your own skin. It's about being who you are." Of course, any dictionary would show that the word logo is not about personal identity at all—it is about corporate identity—a symbol that stands in for or identifies a company and its products. Naming the channel Logo—where "for the first time ever Gay America

has a home on television where we can go to see ourselves"— is revealing because the name solidifies the association between consumer and queer cultures.[1] This association is pervasive in the media, and is at the heart of this dissertation. In fact, more and more, as queers are commodified as images in the mass media, signifiers of capitalism surface within these very depictions. For example, consider the language used in a Reuters article discussing the influence the film *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005) has had on Hollywood by Neil Giuliano, the President of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation:

> Gay people are now living more honest and open lives and that leads to others wanting to know more about our lives. People want this product and we can provide it in a compelling and powerful way that can be profitable. (Tourtellotte 2006)

In this article about how groundbreaking the film is in terms of its portrayal of gay men, I find it striking that the leader of a major GLTB organization's comments are in terms of the profitability of such images. When did queers and capitalism become such cozy bedfellows? What is their relation? My opening quotations and the two brief examples above are illustrations of precisely this linkage. When we look to the history of gay and lesbian representation in popular culture—the stereotype of queer affluence emerges. That is, images of queer people in film or on television, and especially openly gay spokespeople, are often images infused with capitalist discourse (e.g. profit, affluence, careerism, brands, logos, shopping, buying, selling, etc.). This introductory chapter will

[1] This comes from the channel's website under "About Logo" and then under the frequently asked question section: What is Logo? Found at http://www.logoonline.com/about/

accomplish five tasks. First, I will provide a justification for my study and define important terms that I use throughout. Second, I examine a particular instance of queer affluence which is meant to serve as an introduction to my topic area and to preview my theoretical concerns. Third, I discuss the rise of the openly queer celebrity spokesperson and posit that this celebrity is best understood as the physical embodiment of the stereotype of queer affluence. Fourth, I provide a brief sketch of the political realm as a way to contextualize queer affluence. My discussion will reveal that while the world of entertainment is seemingly fascinated with queer people, the fascination does not carry over into the realm of politics. Fifth, and to conclude my introductory chapter, I provide the reader with my dissertation blueprint and preview the content, rationale, and logic of subsequent chapters.

This dissertation is a critical analysis of the stereotype of queer affluence. Other gay and lesbian stereotypes exist in popular culture, but I believe the stereotype of queer affluence deserves special probing for three reasons. First, and most importantly, an awareness of any stereotype is the first step in dismantling it or at least calling attention to its troublesome aspects. Throughout my project, I wrestle with my own ambivalence toward queer affluence. On one hand, I see the recent prevalence of the trope as a sign of social acceptance and progress for gays, lesbians, and other queer people. On the other hand, I believe such progress and acceptance is tempered, and at times erased, by the depoliticizing nature and other limiting aspects of the stereotype. Throughout this dissertation, my analysis is sensitive to this duality. But, ultimately I position my project as one that is invested in raising questions about dominant representations of queer affluence. The second reason a study that examines queer affluence is justified is

because it provides for a reconsideration of representations that have already been subjected to queer analysis. Queer affluence allows for new readings of texts that shed new insight on and embellish our knowledge of queer representations. In this regard, my project aims to provide a new way of seeing images from the past, present, and future. Third, while it is true that all popular texts have a hand in promoting consumption, an argument that runs throughout my project is that representations of queer affluence are the rule not the exception. Not only does this representational strategy have a historical legacy, but as I will show in the remainder of this introduction, the problematic trope continues to thrive.

It is important to begin by getting some terminology straight. Throughout this dissertation, I employ the terms gay, lesbian, and queer. Typically homosexual men are gay and homosexual women are lesbians. Within the prose of my dissertation, when I use the term gay or lesbian, I use each to specify a homosexual sexual orientation and the identity based on that orientation. When discussing a specific person, I reserve the terms for those men and women who are out. Using gay and lesbian in this way captures several ideas at once: sexual orientation, the lifestyle that accompanies said orientation, and gender. However, as a shorthand, for example in my dissertation title, I use the term gay in a gender inclusive fashion to also reference lesbians. Although I often make use of queer as a synonym for gay and lesbian, the word queer is used throughout more complexly. I agree with Alexander Doty (1993) whose comments help sketch a definition of queer:

> I like those uses of queer that make it more than just an umbrella term in the ways that 'homosexual' and 'gay' have been used to mean lesbian or gay or bisexual,

because queerness can also be about the intersecting or combining of more than one specific form of nonstraight sexuality. (p. XVI)

The term queer, then, provides access to the ambiguity of images that are not straight, yet not explicitly gay or lesbian. So, for example, in my discussion in Chapter Three of Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, or characters in the film noir of the 1940s and 1950s, I use the word queer because these are men that are easily read as gay but are not directly acknowledged as such by the text in which they appear. Finally, by combining the term queer with affluence, I mean to make use of queer as both an umbrella term subsuming non-straight representations of affluence, including gays and lesbians, and also as a term referencing the traditional denotative meaning of queer as something odd or strange.[2] My own fascination with queer affluence is based on my contention that the images that I discuss throughout my project are queer in this traditional sense at the same time they are representations of non-straight people.

The Paragon of Queer Affluence

In order to introduce my topic in a more in depth fashion, I want to discuss an image that aided in the conception of my project and continues to fascinate me to this day. The day before Valentine's Day 2003, *The Dallas Morning News* ran a pictorial of

[2] It is important to note that I am using the terms gay, lesbian, and queer as a way to categorize images and people. I think that makes sense given that my study looks at popular culture as a reflection of American culture, which is invested in maintaining categories of sexual difference like gay and straight. So for my project I am using these terms in a functional way as they allow me to describe what I see. However, the term queer is a contested term. A key tenet of queer theory is to make trouble with the act of categorization itself, and within that scholarship the term queer is used as a way of circumventing, abolishing, or blurring categories of sexual difference. My argument is that queer affluence, and analyses in later chapters will support this, tends to support the status quo when it comes to categories of sexual difference. So I am not using queer in the way that a queer theorist would.

four couples entitled "The Look of Love." Each couple struck a pose together, copy directly underneath the large photos detailed what the couple was wearing, and a small article followed explaining each person's occupation and how the couple met. Standing out from the other three photos of heterosexual men and women in smiley, playful embraces was the picture of the couple in Figure 1.

Not only is this couple different from the other three in the sense that they are two gay men, but they are also the only couple that do not physically touch one another. In fact, in two of the other pictures, the men stand behind the women with their arms wrapped around them, with each woman clasping the man's hands. In the remaining picture, the man stands slightly beside the woman, with a hand on each of her elbows. Because the gay men are not touching, which reduces their proximity, the gay couple reads as less intimate than the other three couples. The differences between the straight couples and the gay couple continue. Consider how the two men are dressed. One man (unlike the men in the other photos whose arms are touching a woman) is carrying a large suit case, the other is holding their tiny dog. Importantly, the gay couple is the only couple featured that are clothed from head to toe in designer everything. Even their dog, whose name the copy says is Logo, is clad in Louis Vitton and Hermes—the highest of the high-end brands. The accompanying article chronicling their relationship reads like a made-for-TV spoof of gay life: they met in retail, one is now a hair dresser at Neiman Marcus, the other is an assistant at an interior decorating firm, they share an "obsession" not "passion" for fashion, they spent their fifth year anniversary doing the Paris fashion collections, after Valentine's day they are in route to New York City for a Liza Minnelli concert, while their dog is in route to a day spa. Featured along side seemingly ordinary,

"normal" straight couples the question becomes, is this the image of the "normal" gay couple? Could you afford to be this kind of gay?

What struck me about this particular depiction, aside from Mr. Asher's "women's size 8" stiletto heel boots, is that queerness becomes secondary to the men's ability to consume luxury, high-end products. In this respect, the representation gives credence to the third justification of my study (i.e. that queers are depicted as exceptionally good at consuming) because "even in Dallas fashion circles, David and Gregg stand out from the crowd…closets are a 'more is more' profusion of designer clothes, bags, luggage, and shoes" (Hayes, 2002, p. 3C). Of the four couples present, all of them consumers according to the copy, it is the gay couple that takes the proverbial cake when it comes to shopping. At first glance, the image and story remind me of Susan Sontag's (1997) "ultimate Camp statement: it's good because it's awful" (p. 65).[3] The picture of the couple and their story read as camp only because of their placement in the mainstream, if not conservative, *The Dallas Morning News*, among "normal," heterosexual couples, and in this respect they come to signify gayness for the readers of *The Dallas Morning News*. So the couple's placement is disruptive of the normal social order, in the sense that the

[3] There are a number of ways to read the couple in relation to camp. Above I say the couple *reminds* me of Sontag's final item in her list of what does and does not constitute camp, but I believe if we consider all 58 of her "Notes on Camp" the representation of the couple fails to achieve full camp status. I do find the couple campy in a perfunctory way—as though they showed up at the wrong Valentine's Day party. But the intensity of their consumer impulses, even according to the article, which are driven by "obsession" rather than passion, undoes the kind of playful, gender-bending, over-the-top quality the couple possesses at first glance. And for Sontag, "Without passion, one gets pseudo-Camp—what is merely decorative, safe, in a word, chic" (p. 59). And this passionless, fake camp, I believe, more aptly describes this couple.

feature provides visibility for a particular brand of gayness—a gayness aligned with consumption and affluence.[4]

Readers were quick to respond to the couple. Two days later, three letters to the editor were printed in response to the depiction. The same photo was ran underneath copy that read "One Gay Couple." Again, this frames the couple as a signifier for queerness. Aside from being two men in a Valentine's Day spread, what makes them "one gay couple" is their pattern of consumption. One man wrote in contesting the image of conspicuous consumption calling it "cartoonish." He writes

> Next time David Martin and Gregg Asher need a logo fix, they could visit the HIV clinic where I work. Instead of reaching for some Jimmy Choo Stiletto boots or a Hermes dog collar, they could buy a bottle of overpriced, brand-name HIV antiretroviral medication and keep one of my patients alive for another month.

A woman wrote in who insists that she has lots of "homosexual friends" to chide the "prize winning family newspaper." She says, "But, shame on you, *Dallas Morning News*, for picturing two cuddling men, one in women's spike heels, representing romantic two-somes. It's just a little too 'in my face' to suit this old-timer." Lastly, an openly gay man wrote in and used the opportunity to point out how homosexuals "are born—not made" and so for him the criticisms the couple received regarding their sexual preference were unfair. Regardless of one's take on the depiction, I believe this representation shares similar qualities with other representations of gay men and lesbians in popular media. The issue of consumption is central to the photograph. The fact is these gay men are

[4] In the Dallas gay scene, the two are known as "The Prada Twins." A friend of mine brought the couple to my attention. I find it interesting that even among the gay community, the two are known in relation to high-end branding.

represented not just as guys who like to shop (like some of the women in other parts of the spread), they are depicted as a kind of brand conscious, hyper-consumer. In a world where images matter, in a world that seems to want to be accepting of gays (the newspaper ran their picture and story juxtaposed with other couples), but in a world that is still deeply homophobic (the newspaper's choice to run this "campy" couple vs. another, the letters to the editor)—the image of queer affluence in the mass media presents a curious terrain. Understanding these images as representations and as commodities that sell the public ideas about queer people sheds light on contemporary ideas of sexuality and identity. What is it about queerness that makes it especially well suited for capitalism now? If the Valentine's Day couple in *The Dallas Morning News* is a perfect example of queers who buy things, what about queers who have something sell?

The Emergence of the Queer Spokesperson

The image of the rich, white, queer is nothing new. Think of Oscar Wilde's dandified Dorian Gray. Think of Brandon and Phillip from Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948), Waldo Lydecker from Otto Preminger's *Laura* (1944), more recently Catherine Trammell in *Basic Instinct* (1992) or the Brian Kinney character from "Queer as Folk" (1999-2005). These examples, though neither comprehensive nor meant to suggest that other images of queers are not circulated, illustrate that a history exists in popular culture that depicts some queers as affluent members of society. Affluence is generally thought of as a measure of success in American culture. However, in these and countless other examples, this positivity is generally undermined by other factors such as the queer character's paralyzing narcissism, homicidal impulses, or unbridled sexuality. The

implications of these depictions have been documented and analyzed by a host of media and other scholars.[5]

Recent scholarship on queer representation has turned attention to the realms of advertising and marketing (see Sender 2004, Chasin 2000, Schulman 1998). These works, which I review in Chapter Two, have documented the history of and begun to account for and theorize the explosion of queer visibility in these areas. My project, then, is a direct extension of this research. Research shows that since the 1990s, the gay market has begun to take a particular shape as companies imagine a specific type of gay consumer as they market products and design their campaigns in gay and mainstream media. The rich, white, queer, (male), emerges yet again—this time as the ideal consumer. During this same time, Katherine Sender (2004) has shown how certain products became aligned with and signified a queer sensibility such as Absolute Vodka, Calvin Klein underwear, or Volkswagen. For Sender this alignment is the direct result of successful niche marketing because there is nothing inherently gay about vodka, underwear, or cars. But what about products and brands that are literally marked with the face of gayness because the company employs an openly gay spokesperson? What about products that bear the name of an openly gay person?

From 2003 to the present, openly gay fashion designers Isaac Mizrahi and Todd Oldham develop lines of clothes and home décor for retail chain Target. In 2004, Thom Felicia and Kyan Douglas of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* became spokesmen for Pier One and L'Oreal Paris, respectively. In 2004 Ellen DeGeneres became a spokeswoman for American Express. In 2005, Nate Berkus, a staple on *The Oprah Winphrey Show*,

[5] The implications I am referring to are discussed in my literature review and in subsequent chapters.

came out on her show when he discussed losing his partner in the Asia Tsunami. That same year, in addition to making numerous appearances on the show, he launched a new book and his own signature line of products at big-box retailer Linens-N-Things. The list of queer spokespeople and their various products grows. Queer celebrities embody the stereotype of queer affluence, and narratives of success, careerism, and commodity culture circulate within the text of their celebrity. This is a key point that I introduce now and develop throughout the remainder of my dissertation.

The Political Landscape: Queers and Politics

"All things just keep getting better."

-The chorus to the song played during the opening of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*

"The male is the piercer; the female the pierced. That is the way God designed it. It's unfortunate that homosexuals have taken the moniker 'gay,' because their lifestyle and its consequences are anything but. Look what has happened in the decades since the sexual revolution and acceptance of the gay lifestyle as normal. Viruses have mutated. S.T.D.'s have spread. It shows that when we try to change the natural course of things, what comes out of that is not joy or gayness."

-Pastor Brian Racer quoted in "What's Their Real Problem with Gay Marriage? (It's the Gay Part)" (Shorto 2005)

In the summer of 2004 in the sphere of cable reality television it was possible for five queer guys to rule the world in *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. On Showtime, in the land of pay cable drama, there was a kind of his and hers of realistic and complex portrayals of gay men and lesbians: *Queer as Folk* and *The L Word*. Although voted off the island when she came out in her sitcom and to the public in the mid 1990s, comedian Ellen DeGeneres returned in 2004 with a successful syndicated talk show on day-time network television. On satellite television, it seemed a rerun of *Will & Grace* was on at

any given time of day. On a steady diet of this kind of programming with queers at the center, it was not difficult to start to believe that for gays and lesbians things just *might* be getting better. And then it was time to vote.

At the same time, on Tuesday, August 3, 2004, 1,055,771 Missourians voted to amend the state constitution so that marriage would be defined as a union between one man and one woman. By comparison, only 439,529 Missourians voted not to amend the constitution. These measures were preemptive because it was not as though same-sex couples could already legally marry. The amendment in Missouri and in other states is a smoke screen and not about "protecting" "traditional" marriage at all. These amendments are about putting gays, lesbians, and other queers in their place, which is to say, outside of politics. The arguments of the pro-amendment side, like the amendment itself, are a cover story. Thinly veiled behind a rationale of raising children, maintaining tradition, and protecting the backbone of the country is the message that the relationships of non-straight people, and therefore the people who comprise those relationships, are inferior to heterosexuals and threatening to the social order. Three months later, while the fourth season of *Queer as Folk* was steaming up and setting trends on pay cable across the country, the November general election came and Louisiana, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Utah voted to amend their state constitutions in similar fashions. In 2005 Kansas and Texas followed.

In the general election of 2004, both main political parties took problematic stances towards gays and lesbians. First, the vision of "A Safer World and a More Hopeful America" presented in the Republican Party Platform (2004) is one where gays

and lesbians do not fare well. In fact, they are only directly mentioned twice in the entire Platform. First, queers are discussed in a section that bolsters the quality of our military: "We affirm traditional military culture, and we affirm that homosexuality is incompatible with military service" (p. 20). Second, in a large section entitled "Protecting Marriage" the platform states,

> We believe, and social science confirms, that the well-being of children is best accomplished in the environment of the home, nurtured by their mother and father anchored by the bonds of marriage. We further believe that legal recognition and the accompanying benefits afforded couples should be preserved for that unique and special union of one man and one woman which has historically been called marriage. (p. 83-84)

This language makes clear how families that do not fit this mold figure in to the Republican worldview, which is to say, they do not. And not fitting in has clear negative ramifications in a host of domains that constitute public and private life.

In contrast, gays and lesbians fare better in the Democratic Party's (2004) "Strong at Home, Respected in the World" Platform. The democrats at least envision a world where gay people are permitted: "We support full inclusion of gay and lesbian families in the life of our nation and seek equal responsibilities, benefits, and protections for these families" (p. 38). However, where same-sex marriage is concerned, the democrats take the route of "states rights" rather than civil liberty. So, if states like Missouri and others want to effectively ban same-sex marriage—the logic of states rights would justify such a ban. By relegating the issue to states rights, the democrats are able to neither accept nor reject same sex marriage—a safe position. To be fair, in regards to a national ban on

same-sex marriage the party takes a firm stand: "We repudiate President Bush's divisive effort to politicize the Constitution by pursuing a Federal Marriage Amendment. Our goal is to bring Americans together, not drive them apart" (p. 38). Unlike the Republicans, The Democratic Party recognizes that gays and lesbians face social problems and they attempt to address some of them: "We will enact the bipartisan legislation barring workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation. We are committed to equal treatment of all service members and believe all patriotic Americans should be allowed to serve our country without discrimination, persecution, or violence" (p. 41). The quotations that begin this section are meant to illustrate the sharp divide that exists between popular queer entertainment and current queer political issues. The fantasy world of television where queers of all kinds participate as full citizens is in stark contrast to the realm of contemporary politics where queers are rendered bearers of disease (as in the opening quotation), as a class of citizens in need of legal protection (as in the world view envisioned by the Democrats), or as a group of non-citizens that threaten the social order of the country (as imagined by the Republicans). This discrepancy surfaces throughout the media analyses in my dissertation. What follows is a preview of the remainder of my project.

Dissertation Blue Print

An important function of Chapter Two, my literature review, is to situate this dissertation within scholarly work that examines queer media representations as well as theoretical work on stereotyping. An important premise of my dissertation is that queer affluence is more than a trend that will evaporate. It is not new, and it is not going anywhere. Also, my review of works on queer visibility suggest that present day

manifestations of queer affluence are best understood in conjunction with other contemporary popular representations of queers in general. When we see queer representation as part of a historical trajectory that is moving towards more dimensional (and hence less superficial) depictions of queer people, then there becomes value in a project that assesses the recent past as well as the present moment of representation. Today's successful representations evolve into future representations. As time goes by, remnants of the stereotype analyzed in this dissertation will be useful in consideration of future queer representation just as we learn about present representations by making references to the past.

The purpose of Chapter Three is to explicate the stereotype of queer affluence and uncover the status that it occupies presently in popular culture. I begin by looking at Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb—two extremely wealthy young lovers who killed a boy in the 1920s in Chicago. I look at how they were constructed in the newspapers as affluent perverts and how they embody the aesthetic ("the look") of queer affluence. I then show how Hollywood film noir of the 1940s and 1950s picks up this aesthetic in fictional form---offering a variety of queer characters who fit the stereotype of queer affluence: well dressed, well educated, bitchy/sarcastic, surrounded by luxury décor. Here, I do a general discussion of the queer in film noir, but a lengthy focus on the queer character from *Laura* and the queer men from Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope*. Next, I look briefly at the neo-noirs of the 1990s, focusing on the main character in *Basic Instinct*. Unlike the gay men, in general film noir gay women where working class dykes. But in the neo-noir of the 1990s--the lesbian becomes more like the film noir gay man---affluent, well educated, careerist, well dressed, central to the narrative. I then use

characters from the television programs *Sex and the City*, *Queer as Folk,* and *Work Out* to look at the most recent examples of the stereotype and how it is similar to and different from past depictions. While all these recent characters embody the aesthetic of queer affluence, important ideological changes are now present with the stereotype.

In Chapter Four, I will argue that the emergence of the openly gay celebrity spokesperson is another manifestation of queer affluence. We should begin to think about how queer affluence and its stereotypical baggage carries over and structures our understanding of queer celebrities and the products they sell. These new instances are unique because never before have we seen gay faces selling their own products to a mainstream, predominately straight audience/market. While there are currently a number of queer spokespeople, I will anchor this chapter by focusing on celebrities I see as exemplars of queer affluence: Ellen DeGeneres, Suze Orman, and Carson Kressley.

Even ten years ago we did not see the sheer volume of queer visibility we see today. We certainly did not see mainstream companies employing openly gay spokespeople to represent their brand to mainstream America. So we need to ask, why now? What is it about our current society that is receptive to such queerness? In Chapter Five, my conclusion, I will broaden the scope of my arguments by answering these questions and by showing how the findings of my previous two chapters are connected to larger social, political, and economic movements. I will demonstrate how circulating images of queer affluence are connected to current cultural conversations about the general status of gay people in society. This is also the place where I will show how my findings intersect with current debates over assimilation, visibility, and social justice movements. I believe it is impossible to critique images of queer affluence without

considering their relation to capitalism. What about queerness lends itself to selling particular kinds of products (home products, credit cards, fashion)?

If American Express helps Ellen DeGeneres dance to her own tune in the realms of shopping and image making, is the company there to back her up when it comes to politics and social change? The opening credit sequence of *Queer Eye For the Straight Guy* begins with a song whose main lyrics are "All things just keep getting better." And for queers in the media this does in fact seem to be the case. But we live in a time where people (gays included) are deeply divided about the status of gay people in society. A legacy of social injustice continues including the fear surrounding coming out of the closet, gay relationships not being recognized by states or the nation as equal to heterosexual relationships, kids being assaulted by their peers for being gay, and discrimination in the work place. Of course there are more. But, just as these injustices potentially take their toll on individual psyches we can turn on the television or read a magazine and enter a world where it is okay to be queer. There is a perception that the increased presence of queer visibility in the media is connected and/or contributory to a social (and according to the same logic—political) climate that is tolerant and accepting of queer people. That connection, as this dissertation will demonstrate is tenuous and complex. In addition to analyzing media images and the social contexts in which they are produced and consumed, I believe it is critical to expose the role that capitalism—the social relations it conceals and the injustices it perpetuates—plays in shaping queer identity not just in the sphere of media representation, but also in the spheres of politics, public and private life.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

That little faggot with the earring and the make up
Yeah buddy that's his own hair
That little faggot got his own jet airplane
That little faggot he's a millionaire

-from the 1988 song "Money for Nothing" by Dire Straits

The lyrics above and the literature reviewed below demonstrate that an association exists in popular culture between queerness and affluence. The over-arching concern of this dissertation will be to explore, critique, and ultimately illuminate this association in new ways. To that end, this chapter serves three purposes. The first is to situate this critical study within several lines of established research. My study of the stereotype of queer affluence and queer spokespeople can be considered multifaceted. For example, this project can be considered at once a study of representations, of stereotypes, of sexuality, of marketing, of public relations, of social class, and of the politics of queer visibility. The list could continue. This chapter will advance arguments that not only critically examine previous works, but will make explicit my theoretical commitments for examining queer affluence in Chapters Three and Four. My review of literature moves across areas of scholarship that include descriptive accounts of queer representation, works on the issues that arise from queer visibility, the connection between queer representation and developments within marketing and advertising, and finally, theoretical work on stereotyping. The second purpose of this chapter is to initiate an argument thread that contends that queer representation is cumulative and that representations at one point in time carry textual baggage (e.g. meanings) from the representations that preceded them. I begin this argument later in this chapter in my

review of works that have examined gay men and straight women, but the argument is implicit throughout the remainder of my investigation. This feature of queer representation as far as queer affluence is concerned is why understanding queer affluence and its present incarnations on film, television, and in celebrity spokespeople will be important for understanding images of queer affluence that come later. The third purpose of this chapter is to posit my research questions and explain the method that I will use for answering them.

Representations of Queers in the Mass Media

Because I seek to examine media texts and their meanings, this project is connected to other scholarship that centers on representations. Such scholarship, as it pertains to queer representation, tends to fall into three general camps: the descriptive, the theoretical, or a combination of the two. In this section, I will consider each of these camps in turn. It is my aim to show how my project will ultimately fit into this third category.

Numerous works exists that chronicle and describe instances of gay and queer representations in mainstream media. In general, these works function as a history lesson that combat the notion that gays have remained largely invisible in mainstream media. Instead, these scholars retell film and television history and reveal how queers, albeit usually in marginal ways, have and continue to exist in and alongside popular media. This history teaches us that queers have served as producers and consumers of media texts that were designed primarily for heterosexual audiences. In short, these scholars and their works serve to queer media history in both the realms of production and reception. An exemplar of such work is Vito Russo's (1985) influential book *The Celluloid Closet*

which is encyclopedic in its examination of gay images, situations, and characters, from popular, foreign, and independent films. Since the inception of Russo's book other scholars have followed in his footsteps and continue to produce historiographies that document queer experiences within media. If Russo brought us up to speed on queer images from early cinema to the early 1980s, Benshoff and Griffin's similar survey (2006) picks up and brings us up to 2002. Others have looked less at specific films and more at producers and directors. For example, the hope of Thomas Waugh's (2000) *The Fruit Machine*, which looks across film history at both texts and directors, both foreign and domestic, from mainstream to independent film, is that his project will lead to a "rediscovery of certain films and filmmakers from the past, and perhaps more important, to a rediscovery of cultural and political frameworks that might have bearings on today's images and issues" (p. 1). In the realm of television, Stephen Tropiano (2002) presents an exhaustive chronicle of queer representations on prime-time television. He documents programs, characters, and story lines across TV genres starting from 1954 to 2002 that dealt or deal directly with queer themes and issues. Like any history, his analysis reveals how the frequency of gay characters and themes from the past lead to what we see today. The trajectory he sketches throughout his book is realized in his final genre, the Prime Time Gaycom (e.g. *Will & Grace*). For Tropiano the gaycom is defined in two parts. First, the situation comedy must feature one or more gay or lesbian characters. Second, and most importantly, the gay characters cannot be reduced to second-class citizens. Exemplars of the genre include *Ellen* and *Will & Grace*. While studies like Waugh's and Tropriano's may have a superficial appreciative quality to them and possess an underlying urgency to chronicle as many depictions as possible, they are foundational to

this dissertation. Each lays out a rich canon of film and televisual texts whose connections to present texts are evolutionary in nature. That is to say, queer media history as laid out in the works of these two scholars can teach us something about the texts of the present.

Studies that are primarily descriptive teach us a great deal about how gays are represented in the media. We learn that queers have been and are presented in mainstream texts; however, when queers are featured, they are often portrayed in specific ways. Understanding these portrayals is important because they represent for the audience, both queer and straight, particular composites or slices of gay life.[6] In other words, such depictions construct some forms of queerness while leaving other forms of queerness out. What is not said is often as crucial or revealing as what is said. Part of the task of my project is to examine very recent depictions of queers and queerness in mainstream and other media texts, and so a piece of this project shares in the descriptive nature of the works I have just described. Because media are continually evolving, documenting images and their meanings has value for future media scholarship. The past and the present provide the foundation for this and future studies.

The Explosion of Gay Visibility in the Media

The prominence of gay characters in the mass media is an important concern because such representations (though frequently problematic) can have a normalizing tendency. Talk shows from the mid-1980s like *The Jenny Jones Show* or *Sally Jesse Raphael* are a prime example. At that time, homosexuality itself was often a featured

[6] The couple from *The Dallas Morning News* is an illustration of this point. As the only gay couple presented, they became ambassadors for queerness.

topic because it was viewed by the mainstream as aberrant or freakish.[7] Fortunately, times have changed, and while many people's attitudes towards homosexuals have remained constant, recent popular film and television have begun to feature gays in more substantial ways. In fact, there has been an explosion of queer visibility across media in the past decade which continues even more so in the present. The issue of queer visibility has social and political implications. Consider the cliché but truism "seeing is believing." In other words, we gain knowledge, however partial, incomplete, or distorted, through the visibility of entities (e.g. queers) in media and other popular culture forms. Fejes and Petrich (1993) hint at the connection between media portrayals and the development of gay and lesbian identities. These authors contend that images in mainstream media of queers, specifically lesbians and gays, regardless of their positive or negative portrayal serve as important sources of information. This educational function of the mass media is particularly important for a community "that organizes itself around a vision of sexuality and gender that is at odds with the dominant, heterosexist society" (p.397). And so, in such a society, the media may be the only outlet, or at least one important outlet, that a gay or lesbian person has that allows her/him to make some kind of sense of his/her difference.

Today, no one would argue that queers are going unrepresented in popular culture. While Gross & Gerbner (1976) discussed the problem of symbolic annihilation, which is the absence of or trivialization of depictions of minority groups in the media, a

[7] For a concise history of homosexual topics on *Donahue* and *The Oprah Winfrey Show* see Joshua Gamson (1998) *Freaks Talk Back: Tabloid Talk Shows and Sexual Nonconformity*, especially pps. 47-57, which looks directly at this time period. I remember watching Oprah in the early 1990s when she had guests on who were in gay relationships. That was the entire topic of the show. Such a topic would be passé by today's standards because queer visibility has become a fixture on television.

more vexing problem is posed most recently by Suzanna Walters (2001) when she asks, "If the problem once was perceived as invisibility itself, then how is the problem defined in era of increased visibility?" (p. 9). The problem, as Walters points out, is one of perception. A cultural logic exists that says because queers are increasingly visible, in the news, on sitcoms, in popular film, on line, etc, that our culture has become more tolerant and accepting of queers. According to this logic, visibility is seen as a kind of barometer, where visibility and being seen in popular culture is equated with increasing social acceptance and corresponding political changes. The logic that equates increased queer visibility with increased social acceptance is fallacious. Walters states the dilemma succinctly:

> In many ways, this moment 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. We may be seen, now, but I am not sure we are known. (p. 10)

What Walters' analysis of queer visibility reveals is a more complicated, paradoxical relationship between queer visibility and its larger connections to the social and political arenas of the present. For Walters this paradox is characterized by a tension whereby gays are not fully embraced nor fully rejected by either the contemporary social or political moment. The current moment in relation to queer visibility is paradoxical because it is one of apprehension, acceptance, conflict, and resolution.[8]

[8] This is exactly my point and why I contrast the seemingly endless supply of queer images in the media with the current political environment in Chapter One.

This explosion of queer visibility in the mass media has followed a rather narrow track in terms of representational strategies. For Walters, queer representations tend to break down into two general areas. First, is the "straight with a twist" mode. Here, gays are represented as basically the same as heterosexuals—sharing the same basic desires and experiences. The minor detail that gays possess same sex desire is usually omitted or otherwise underplayed. An example of this mode is found in Bonnie Dow's (2001) reading of the sitcom *Ellen*. Dow calls Ellen DeGeneres "the ultimate user-friendly lesbian… Of course we like Ellen. She's pretty and funny, and doesn't take herself too seriously—so we don't have to either. In most episodes, she's just another single woman hanging out with her friends and looking for love—standard fare for a sitcom." (p. 137). This mode minimizes differences in favor of an assimilationist agenda that says "please accept me, I am basically just like you."

The second mode outlined by Walters appears at first more progressive. This mode says something like "I'm queer, I'm stylish and I'm cutting-edge-- don't you want to be like me?" Under this model queers are seen as trend setting, fashionable, and cosmopolitan. This 'style vs. politics' mode emphasizes and appears to celebrate difference, but the celebration has clear boundaries. Walters argues that "the straight flirtation with the more 'transgressive' aspects of gay culture should not be mistaken for an honest embrace of the varieties of gay life" (p. 17). This second mode has spectacular elements in the sense that difference is celebrated in a superficial, if not consumerist fashion. Difference in this mode becomes fetishized and becomes a way of aligning oneself (whether straight or queer) with a chic sensibility. Walters believes that "the cultural visibility of crossing often 'crosses out' the cultural visibility of the more

mundane and prosaic gender-bending moves, such as lobbying Congress for an end to employment discrimination, or pursuing second-parent adoptions" (p. 17). So the spectacle of difference inherent in this mode, deflects attention away from the realities of gay life and leaves little room for politics.

This second mode is brought to light by Alexander Doty (1993), who provides a striking example of mainstream culture's flirtation with the transgressive aspects of queer culture, its connection to consumerism, and the limits of such flirtation. He reads the star persona of Paul Reubens as Pee-wee Herman. For Doty, the appeal of Pee-wee to the mainstream was his queerness, which in his films and children's television program was always relegated to the realm of connotation. However, once Reubens was arrested for masturbating in an adult movie theater in Florida in the early 1990s, his queerness busted out of the realm of connotation. Reubens and his alter ego Pee-wee were sexual beings, and not just sexual, but somehow sexually different, perhaps even deviant. This marked the end of mainstream culture's flirtation. Doty asks why:

> … Warner Brothers, CBS, the Disney corporation, Mattel, Toys R Us, Kiddie City, and other big and little capitalist businesses were making lots of money from Pee-wee's difference. But once Reubens queered the deal by being sexual in public, his market value as Pee-wee was nil—particularly since the two groups these businesses made much of their Pee-wee profits from were kids and queers. This became a lethal combination when pornography and masturbation were added to the public understanding of Pee-wee's world. (p. 97)

This was the end of Pee-wee Herman.[9] And it shows the limitations of how far queerness can be pushed in mainstream culture. Some queers are allowed to be different—as long as the difference is superficial, preferably helping to sell products, and far removed from the realm of the sexual.[10]

Marketing and Queerness:

Because Chapter Four of this dissertation will analyze advertisements, recent trends in the advertising industry are worth noting. These trends, which I will review below, increasingly target a gay and/or gay friendly demographic. Some of the ads directly acknowledge a gay audience whereas others are more ambiguous. These ambiguous ads are considered gay friendly or 'gay vague' because they work on multiple levels. One level plays to gays, yet the text is subtle enough to cater to heterosexuals. To achieve this, typically advertisers will use the same ad, but with different copy. The addition of text reconstructs the ad for the gay audience. A good example is an ad for Waterford Crystal that features two men walking with a woman, all three carrying glasses of champagne. As is, the ad can run in any type of publication (gay or straight). The meaning of the ad was significantly changed when the text "It's time your crystal came out of the closet as well" was added when the ad appeared in *Out* magazine (Hamilton, 2000). This line, still somewhat ambiguous, provides for a re-imagining of the

[9] Interestingly, Doty points out how other scandals at the same time did not end the careers of the men involved. This included the publicizing of a video that showed actor Rob Lowe having sex with a female minor as well as a sex scandal involving Congressman Ted Kennedy. The implication in these examples is that heterosexual displays of sexual desire are not met with the same consequences as displays of sex acts deemed 'queer,' such as masturbating in public.

[10] Again, think of the Valentine couple. Unlike the other straight couples, they are not touching each other. They are not shown to be sexual at all. They consume products rather than one another.

relationships between the three people in the ad. This trend is important to consider because such ads intentionally play on ambiguity to target a gay consumer.[11] How this gay consumer is imagined by advertisers is not unlike (in terms of race, class, gayness) the men and women represented in the texts that I will consider in this dissertation. A line of argument touched on in my introduction with the gay Valentine's Day couple (seeing the two men as an exemplar of queer affluence), I will advance below and then develop throughout the course of subsequent chapters, is the double-edged nature of imagining gay men, and increasingly lesbians, as a particular demographic. When being gay is always equated with being a white, upper-middle class hyper-consumer, we must ask, who gets left out? Who is not represented?

It appears that a certain type of gay culture has become chic in mainstream media. At the end of the 1990s more and more companies began to tailor advertisements for gay and lesbian consumers. Michael Wilke (1998) reports a significant increase in advertising revenues by gay publications which jumped from $73.7 million in 1996 to $117 million in 1998 (p. 30). This increase is attributed to the success experienced by "big advertisers" such as Philip Morris, IBM, and American Express who were some of the first major companies to create gay specific ads. Stuart Elliot (1998) discusses a twelve page advertorial for Levi-Strauss Dockers which ran in *Out* magazine featuring ten gay men

[11] The manner in which ads imply consumers has been taken up in the work of Rachel Bowlby (2001). Historically, the consumer has been imagined as primarily female (e.g the woman as shopper). Today, as part of an evolutionary track across the history of advertising this is not the case. According to Bowlby, "The consumer has ceased to be seen as part of a jellyishly susceptible mass, having become instead an individual endowed with rights of which, by implication, his or her previous incarnations had been deprived. She (or he) is no longer a fool, but the model of modern individuality, the one who, as patient or passenger or parent, demands and gets the deal to which, implicitly, she was always entitled but that she was never granted before" (p.7)

and lesbian women each sporting Dockers pants. Elliot's article is telling because Levi-Strauss' primary motive becomes clear. Mark Malinowski, a representative at Levi-Strauss is quoted in the article, "First and foremost, we're trying to reach 25 to 34 year olds whom we call 'urban modernists.' When we looked at who made up that group, gay men and lesbians are a large part of it" (p. C11). Notice also, the primary goal is the creation of a niche market for profit, not the recognition of a marginalized group of people. This notion of the urban modernist is the precursor to the ubiquitous metrosexual and is important because it signifies not only a particular type of gay man and lesbian, but also a specific type of heterosexual. The degree to which these texts appeal to this straight, "urban modernist" viewer is fairly provocative. Does this type of programming and advertising sell the idea to heterosexual people that by aligning themselves with the marginal, by taking pleasure in the consumption of these texts and products, that they are able to make statements about themselves, namely that they are politically progressive, cosmopolitan, "hip" urban modernists? And if they are—then would it not stand to reason that this marketing phenomenon is a good thing? Can shopping bring us all together?

In an article in *The New York Times*, William Hamilton (2000) surveys a variety of ads for a variety of products that rely on same-sex innuendo. Rather than explicitly acknowledge a gay consumer, these ads seek a broader target. According to Hamilton, these ads "are designed to reach both gay and mainstream audiences" (p. F1). Here, as with Levi-Strauss' desire to hit urban modernists, the emphasis of the gay vague pitch is to attract gays and straights alike. Because this a rather new development within advertising, I suggest that the vagueness here (which is often not vague at all) works to

position straight people in relation to a trend that sees gayness as cutting edge and/or progressive. Within this framework, politics becomes synonymous with consumption. The clothes you buy, the television shows you watch, the newspaper you read all signify the brand of politics you subscribe to. For Alexandra Chasin (2000), such consumerism becomes a mode of political participation. Chasin maintains that "identity based marketing and consumption are kissing cousins to identity politics" and so each must be considered in conjunction with the other (p. 102).

Conceptualizing a gay vague sensibility is important precisely because it emphasizes the target of both demographics: "Gay vague advertising aims at what many companies believe is an affluent gay dollar, while also displaying a casual, inclusive attitude toward same sex issues that advertisers hope will capture younger, hip mainstream consumers"(Hamilton, 2000, p. F1). So this merging of gays with a chic straight audience, especially within this context of consumerism will be an important element for future development and discussion when it comes to queer spokespeople. How does a mass retailer such as Linens-N-Things manage the queerness of someone like Nate Berkus? If you know Berkus is gay images of him read one way, if you do not know, you are free to read him as straight. At this point, I mention gay vague advertising to provide one context for understanding the connections between images and sexual identity. But this same point is worth thinking through again in later chapters when we look to an openly queer spokesperson such as Suze Orman, whose persona, like Berkus, reads differently depending on a particular viewer's perspective.

Another point I want to address regarding advertising directed at gays is a double-edged sword phenomenon. Recall the mixed responses to the gay couple from *The Dallas*

Morning News. On one hand, I want to applaud companies who as Gluckman and Reed (1997) point out have realized that "the profits to be reaped from treating gay men and lesbians as a trend-setting consumer group finally outweigh the financial risks of inflaming right-wing hate" (p. 3). While the profit driven motive should and does remain suspect, this trend is certainly positive for gays in the sense that it helps to make a certain type of gayness visible. On the other hand, another problem emerges for Gluckman and Reed:

> But most straight Americans have harbored few ideas about whether gay men and lesbians were rich or poor, spendthrift or frugal. Past gay invisibility has proved a blank slate of sorts, a slate that is rapidly filling up with notions that have more to do with marketing than with reality. (p. 4)

The contention here should not go unnoticed. This type of ad, vague or not, through their depictions of gays promote only that segment of the gay population which is white, upper-middle class, and usually male. Imagine if the couple from *The Dallas Morning News* was the only image that came to mind when thinking about gay people. But what if the image that came to mind was Nate Berkus? Or Suze Orman? Would that be so terrible? I mean this question rhetorically, but the answer that I believe my project will demonstrate is, yes *and* no. My entire argument rests on the belief that images such as the couple in *The Dallas Morning News* **and** the images of queer affluence from various films and television programs and embodied by spokespeople like Berkus, Ellen, and others are virtually the same figure. Each instance is slightly different versions of the affluent queer stereotype. An important task of my project is to show how they are connected.

The types of products marketed to gay people are worth considering. It is important to realize that it is seldom prosaic commodities such as dish soap or laundry detergent being sold to a gay audience. The majority of ads are for luxury items like designer clothing and expensive furniture or prescription drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes. Gluckman and Reed's essay helps to explain how this trend developed by arguing that gay marketing groups and gay publications, in their attempts to secure advertisers, inflate gay incomes or conflate their readers' incomes with those of all gay people. What happens is this "data" makes it appear as though gay people earn more than two times more than the national average.[12] This demographic, if as wealthy as thought, would be of obvious interest to advertisers. However, these inaccuracies regarding incomes become ammunition for antigay groups in the political arena. Gluckman and Reed (1997) point to several significant instances where escalated income figures were used to deny gay people civil rights. The group Colorado for Family Values, Justice Antonin Scalia of the Supreme Court, and Jonathan Rauch, a gay social critic writing in The New Republic, believe that because some gays possess this much earning power, they could not possibly be oppressed. This logic is flawed since it assumes that sexual orientation transcends social class, and that a minority of privileged gay men can stand in for all queer people. This is the nature of the double-edged sword, where visibility is desired, but the costs of such visibility in other aspects of life remain problematic. This conflict is an issue that I will revisit as contemporary images of queers are considered across a variety of media throughout this dissertation. I now turn to a discussion of stereotypes and their relevance to my project.

[12] For a thorough explanation of the statistical and sampling errors incurred on estimates of gay incomes see Badgett (1997).

The Matter of Stereotypes: More on Queer Visibility

Contemporary representations of gay men and lesbians remain highly suspect. In his analysis of prime time television shows in the late 1990s, Ron Becker (1998) addresses the notion of gay visibility by observing the proliferation of homosexuals on popular sit-coms. As with the trend in advertising discussed above, he attributes this visibility not only to an increasing social climate of acceptance, but also to the realization by networks and advertisers of niche markets.

> The conflation of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community with a specific quality audience of gays and lesbians moves the entire debate to the realm of consumption, disregards all notions of wider social oppression, and threatens to fracture the gay community along axes of class, gender, race, and sexual identity even more than it currently is. (p. 44).

Here, as with advertising, gays as a group are targeted because of the assumption that they possess a large disposable income. While the men are generally portrayed favorably on television, these contemporary representations continue to further certain stereotypes.

Stereotypes perform important social and cultural work. Drawing on the arguments of Walter Lippmann, Richard Dyer (1993) furthers an understanding of the social function of stereotypes. In his book-length analysis of a variety of media including film, art, and fiction novels, Dyer extends the notion of stereotype and suggests that they should be viewed as an ordering process, a shortcut, and as a referent to reality. Dyer's conception of the stereotype as an expression of social value and belief is both provocative and useful. He challenges the idea of the stereotype as a social agreement about a certain group, and instead argues that "it is from stereotypes that we get our ideas

about social groups" (p. 14). In other words, social understandings of groups come from stereotypes. So one's understanding of another group does not arise independently of the stereotype but in conjunction with it.

Dyer's conceptualization of stereotypes and their imposition of boundaries is relevant to the current project. He notices how stereotypes function to mark boundaries and make the "invisible visible" (p. 16). This point is well taken when the issue of homosexuality is considered. Because sexual orientation is enmeshed with issues of desire, it would seem that one cannot tell just by looking at an individual his or her sexual orientation. However, there are a multitude of signs, of cultural codes, derived from stereotypes, which mark that meaning.[13] So under this view, the stereotype becomes indicative of the culture at large because the meanings stereotypes attribute to a group and by extension, members of that group, are socially derived.

Stereotypes and the issue of representation in the mass media demand investigation for a variety of reasons. One question some might ask, is why do representations matter? Dyer (1993) forcefully answers this question by pointing out the underlying power in media representations of social groups:

> How a group is represented, presented over again in cultural forms, how an image of a member of that group is taken as representative of that group, how that group is represented in the sense of spoken for and on behalf of (whether they represent, speak for themselves or not), these all have to do with how members of groups

[13] Think of the couple in *The Dallas Morning News*, only forget that the image is part of a Valentine's Day spread and forget the copy. What codes enable you to make sense of that image as a gay image? For me, it is the shoes, the hair, the dog, the proximity of the two men—all codes that I associate with queerness.

> see themselves and others like themselves, how they see their place in society, their right to the rights a society claims to ensure its citizens. (p. 1)

Dyer's assertion suggests that representations and images, and by extension stereotypes, have the power to influence individual members of social groups. Similarly, Dyer contends that these representations influence how others view these groups that in turn determines how these groups are ultimately treated by society at large. It is not until one examines and questions representations that the possibility for changing the stereotype can occur.

Media representations depict gays and lesbians in very specific stereotypic ways. Films in the early 1980s marked a change in the representation of homosexuals in popular cinema. Jeffrey Nelson (1985) examined five films released in 1982 that all featured homosexuals as protagonist or dealt with themes centered on homosexuality. His analysis revealed the emergence of two central paradoxes that he argued reflected changing societal ideas of gays and lesbians. The first paradox, called "inferiority vs. mainstream" surfaced in these films as a tension between the long held belief that gays and lesbians were mentally ill and/or cast as social deviants with the simultaneous presentation in these films of homosexuals as healthy, productive members of society. The second related paradox, which remains intact today (as I have alluded to in my discussion of the double-edged nature of visibility) is "mainstream vs. distinctiveness." This bifurcation centered on the conflict between the desire for the homosexual to be accepted by the mainstream, and at the same time, retain his/her uniqueness as a gay or lesbian-identified

individual. Remnants of both paradoxes continue to surface in contemporary media representations of gays and lesbians.[14]

In the 1990s, Larry Gross (1991) traced depictions of gays and lesbians on television with an emphasis on stereotypes. Noting a general absence of this "sexual minority" on television, he asserts that "when they do appear, they do so in order to play a supportive role for the natural order and are thus narrowly and negatively stereotyped" (p. 150). The natural order refers here to ideological imperatives such as heteronormativity. As television and film in the late 1990s moved gays to the center of the narrative, the gay male still strongly adheres to this supportive role (the mainstream film *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997) or more recently *Sweet Home Alabama* (2002) are perfect examples).[15] At the level of ideology, Gross (1996) articulates what would be at stake if gays were portrayed in non-stereotypic ways. He argues that such representations "undermines the unquestioned normalcy of the status quo, and it opens up the possibility of making choices to people who might never otherwise have considered or understood such choices could be made" (p. 154). So while visibility and representation helps ease fears of Others, on television, in advertising, and in popular film, the image captured is often distorted, and as Gross points out, there are vested interests in the continuance of

[14] Chasin's (2000) work shows that this last paradox has historical roots in the assimilation of immigrants and other ethnic minorities in this country. She is quick to point out that it is problematic to draw an analogy between sexual and ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, she argues that "the market has enabled both kinds of groups to finesse the choice between nationalism and assimilation. That is, the market is the prime mechanism for defusing the conflict between sameness and difference or between assimilation and de-assimilation" (p. 109).

[15] Both films, immensely popular, feature gay men in important supportive roles to the female protagonist. He is her best friend.

portraying gays in these specific and stereotypic ways. Whose interests are served by portraying gays in the ways in which they are portrayed today?

The preservation of the ideology of heterosexism, the belief that heterosexuality is the human norm and therefore earns a privileged space in our culture, is a primary culprit in the continual portrayal of gays and lesbians in stereotypical ways. Fred Fejes and Kevin Petrich (1993) in their concise historiography of homosexual representation in film, television, and in the news, contend that gay images in the 1990s have "moved to a higher level of subordination and domination" (p. 412). They suggest that heterosexism as an ideology pervades society and the media:

> It [heterosexism] subsumes difference within a larger heterosexual narrative about identity, personal relations, sexuality, and society. Aspects of gay and lesbian identity, sexuality, and community that are not compatible or that too directly challenge the heterosexual regime are excluded. This heterosexism is endemic in all aspects of society and its media, including the media of the gay and lesbian community. (p. 412)

In synch with this notion of heterosexism are contemporary films where gay characters are increasingly portrayed favorably, yet continually rendered "safe" within the dominant system of heterosexuality. A good example is the mainstream film *In & Out* (1997). Here the protagonist is gay and is shown to be asexual, or lacking any sexual passion whatsoever. While this depiction helps dismantle the stereotype of gay men as sexually promiscuous, it is not without problems. James Keller and William Glass (1998) suggest that by presenting the main character as "neutered," the film does nothing to challenge negative stereotypes of homosexuals. Instead, *In & Out* supports the idea that gays are

acceptable as long as they are silent and keep their desires to themselves. The ideological and social consequences of the heterosexism that surfaces within and alongside images of gays must continue to be investigated.

In general no person's sexuality is immediately apparent. It must be communicated to others. Michael Brown (2000) connects the communication of homosexuality to the idea of the closet. To remain silent, to not communicate, requires remaining hidden, literally out of view, relegating homosexuality private spaces where it is all too often depoliticized (e.g. the closet). However, this notion of silence mandated through social policies (e.g. the military's 'don't ask, don't tell) and reified by society at large, is internalized by many homosexuals (Kimmel, 2001). For there are consequences for those who "tell" in the military, and by implication, and often times by practice there are punitive consequences for those who make their sexuality known in society at large. By remaining silent the status quo is preserved, hence masculinity is hegemonically preserved (Kimmel, 2000). In contrast, for many gay men the communication of their sexual orientation becomes an act of defiance in the social process known as "coming out." Peter Davies (1992) examines the role of "disclosure" in the process of coming out. His analysis shifts the focus from traditional accounts of sexual orientation as a primary identity to a perspective that allows for "the possibility of multiple identities, which compete, collide, and compromise in the process of everyday life" (p. 83). This role of disclosure will be taken up in my analysis of queer spokespeople and the degree to which this knowledge structures the celebrity's persona and his/her products and publicity.

Economics, Queers, and the Media

A central premise of my dissertation is the idea that the economy matters. The imperative to consume underlies all mass media messages, especially representations of queer affluence. But what is the relation between queerness and capitalism? The work of Marx (1990) is useful in beginning to make this connection. For Marx, it is the economy, and the form it has taken under capitalism, that is directly responsible for shaping human relations and human consciousness. In Marx's analysis of capitalism, he explains how it is that the economy became central in organizing social life. In pre-industrial society, the work that one performed was connected to the work of others. For example, I performed my work out of the necessity for survival, and I depended on you and others just as you depended on me. If my job was to gather water, I did so because I knew that you were busy gathering food, while someone else was planting more food or making objects that we would *use*. In any case, I performed my work because I knew that others were performing their work and that together we would be able to survive. The work that we did had a use value and the work provided social linkages. As capitalism developed in industrial societies, Marx argues that there is an erosion between the labor I perform and the labor performed by everyone else. Under capitalism, and particularly under mass production, what becomes important is the idea of exchange value or my and others' ability to exchange products, irrespective of any use or survival value. What happens is that I become alienated from my work because there is no apparent connection between the post-it notes that I produce in a factory that I work in and the tubes of tooth paste that you help produce in the factor you work in. Under capitalism, what is important is that the capitalists (the owners of the means of production) are able to take these commodities

(post-its and tooth paste) and exchange them for other commodities. But even for the capitalist, aside from this exchange value of the commodities, there is no social link between him and every other capitalist. What used to be relations between people in pre-industrial society has now become a relation between things (commodities).

For Karl Marx, the commodity has a mystical character. In other words, the commodity is not just something to be sold, bought, and used. It is those things, but in addition, it is objectified human labor—a sign of the production processes and human labor that went into its creation. This aspect of the commodity is concealed, hidden, not contemplated. As a commodity, that is, as an object that is more than what it appears, it is placed in the market place among other commodities (which are also objectified human labor) in order to generate profits for the capitalist. The centrality of the commodity, and its logic, is what Marx refers to as the commodity fetish. The mass media becomes one tool for capitalism because it guarantees, through its stories and advertisements, the continuance of commodity fetishism. Of course images of queer affluence are instrumental in the maintenance of commodity fetishism.

A more direct connection between queer identity and the economy is established in the work of John D'Emilio's (1992). In his seminal essay "Capitalism and Gay Identity," D'Emilio argues against those who believe in the fixity or essence of gay identity. He presents three arguments that intersect with one another. First, he argues that gay and lesbian identity is not eternal, but rather came into existence through the development of capitalism. He tracks social changes that resulted from when the economy shifted from agriculture to industry. During this time, people began to move away from their family and into urban areas. Next, D'Emilio maintains that under

capitalism, sexuality is separated from procreation. With more people living in the cities, the functional need for children diminished and so sexuality became associated with intimacy and pleasure. Because of both of these social changes, D'Emilio argues that capitalism "created conditions that allow some men and women to organize a personal life around their erotic/emotional attraction to their own sex" (p. 104). These social practices over time gave way to gay and lesbian communities, which in turn developed a politics based on sexual identity. But, a contradiction emerges. For D'Emilio, capitalism or that which makes gay life possible, is that which alienates and abhors it. To account for this incongruity, D'Emilio makes a third argument and traces the contradictory relationship between capitalism and the family. Capitalism, in D'Emilio's view, allowed for family members to leave the home but, by ideologically maintaining the heterosexual nuclear family at the expense of all other configurations, capitalism ensures that the next generation of workers will be (re)produced. This is why, for D'Emilio, capitalist society enshrines the family (and thus heteronormativity). The overarching argument presented in my dissertation will ultimately diverge from D'Emilio's because my research suggests (and I discuss this in Chapter Five) that capitalism may be more accommodating of sexual diversity that D'Emilio allows.

The fusion of Marxism and queer theory with media studies can be seen in the work of Robert Brookey (1996). Brookey sees sexuality as a rhetorical construction which can then be subjected to critical inquiry. Brookey draws on the work of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler:

> There is no 'real' homosexual identity to be misrepresented. If sexuality is a means of disciplining individuals and exercising power, then any critical approach

to representations of sexuality must analyze what types of behavior are being enforced and what type of power is being exacted. (p.18)

Brookey argues that for the film *Philadelphia*, which has been celebrated by the mainstream as a positive portrayal of the gay community, that validation is offered to gays who are white and middle class.[16] He poses a rhetorical question: "When the representation of positive homosexuals is limited to a particular ethnic group or economic class, are these representations liberating homosexuals, or are they validating the superiority and autonomy of the white, middle class?" (p. 28). The answer, I believe is probably both. Such representations are neither fully liberating nor oppressive for gays, but unless the class distinction is further analyzed, across more types of media, representations of queer affluence are serving to legitimize dominant class interests in the guise of queer visibility.

Recent Queer Visibility: Gay Men, Straight Women and Popular Narrative

Chapter Three will demonstrate that the stereotype of queer affluence has been a part of popular culture since at least the 1920s. However, characters that I look at the end of that chapter, as well as the queer celebrity spokesperson of the present—the subject of Chapter Four—are preceded by the queer characters that I discuss in this section. This matters because I believe there are common representational strategies (and there are important differences as well) that are shared amongst these seemingly unrelated depictions. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, popular culture became infatuated with a curious couple—the gay man and straight woman. Evidence for such a couple can be

[16] Philadelphia was an important moment in film and social history because it did humanize people with AIDS for a mainstream audience. Still, Brookey's points are well founded. The film's primary project is to highlight the social problem of work place discrimination rather than gay rights.

found in various forms throughout the history of film and television, however films in the late 1990s and early 2000s moved this "new couple" from the margins to the center of the narrative. The 1997 film *My Best Friend's Wedding* placed the cultural spot light on this couple in a significant way. This film was pivotal because of its enormous popularity and its transgression against its generic status as a romance. The film leaves the female protagonist without a heterosexual mate, but instead offers her the companionship of a gay male confidant. Other films such as *The Object of my Affection* (1998), *The Opposite of Sex* (1998), and *The Next Best Thing* (2000) followed which all featured the gay man/straight woman dyad as a central narrative element, if not THE narrative element. Alongside this trend in popular film is television's *Will and Grace*, a "gaycom" which premiered in the fall of 1998. The entire show centers on the relationship between gay Will and his straight best friend roommate, Grace. This program consistently enjoyed high ratings and was placed within NBC's Thursday Night "Must See TV" lineup. This is the space allotted to only the most successful of television shows.

The couple turns up in other places as well. Margaret Cho professes her love for gay men and dedicates a hefty portion of her standup routine in *I'm the One That I Want* (2000) to her status as a quintessential "fag-hag." In Cho's second one-woman show *Notorious C.H.O.* (2002), she again reprised her "fag-hag" status with even more time of her routine dedicated to the topic. In *C.H.O. Revolution* (2004), Cho's gay male confidant Bruce Daniels is her opening act. Stanford Blatch, a recurrent character on the HBO series *Sex and the City*, is Carrie Bradshaw's best gay male friend. Several episodes

feature their relationship as a central narrative thread.[17] Interestingly, the couple structures several other pop culture texts. Smoking up the aisles of Barnes and Noble is the book *Sex Tips For Straight Women by a Gay Man*. Not only does the sex manual promise to educate readers on such matters as "Combo Platters," "The Princeton Belly Rub," and "Backsliders," but the book itself is the product of gay man/straight woman dyad Dan Anderson and Maggie Berman whose "biologically determined friendship transcends the battle of the sexes, freeing them to dish and compare notes." The examples that I have pointed to demonstrate the frequency of the dyad and its fluidity across various media. Media scholars, in literature that I will review below, have begun to analyze the dyad in the context of popular narrative. When you think about gay male spokespeople selling products for the home, it is hard not see this dyad reconstituted. So what do we know about this couple?

Whether *The New York Times* runs a piece called "He's Gay, She's Straight, They're a Trend," or *Entertainment Weekly* features Eric McCormack and Debra Messing (*Will and Grace*) with copy that reads "Gay Men and Straight Women, Why Hollywood Just Loves Them," the emergence of the couple did not escape the popular press. In these and other pieces, authors describe the couple within the context of Hollywood and a social climate that is increasingly accepting of homosexuals, yet perplexed or uneasy about how to represent them to a mainstream, largely heterosexual audience. Stephen Holden argues that by focusing on the couple, more threatening aspects of the gay man (i.e. his sex life) can be safely diverted. Similarly, Jacobs writes of Will and Grace that

[17] In episode 3 called "Bay of Married Pigs" one of the plot lines involves Stanford and Carrie contemplating a marriage of convenience so that Stanford can inherit his family's money and so that Carrie can shake off her single status.

"they're certainly the dream couple for nervous networks. On one hand, there's enough gayness to grab some hipster credit and lots of Oscar Wildeish repartee. On the other, the straight gal keeps the scripts from drifting into Joe Six-pack-alienating Ellen territory" (p. 22). In other words, the couple in these mainstream narratives functions as a sanitized depiction of the gay man in order to fit into a space (American network television and popular film) that caters above all else to a heterosexual audience.

Media scholars and others help us to understand the ideological underpinnings of the dyad as well as the cultural climate that the dyad is in part responsive to. Baz Dreisinger (2000) wants to know why the couple has become so prevalent. In order to answer this question, Dreisinger connects the current women's self help movement, which makes much of the difference between heterosexual men and women to the point where both are rendered literally and figuratively alien[18], to a close reading of *My Best Friend's Wedding*, *The Object of My Affection*, *As Good As it Gets*, and *Will and Grace*. If the self help literature acts as a "barometer of women's sexual culture" then what straight women desire in a mate is much more than sex. Dreisinger believes that all of these books present a world where "good rapport is seen as far more precious to women than good sex" (p. 5). Using this ideology to inform her reading of the dyad in the films mentioned above, she coins the term "safe eroticism." In contrast to heterosexual men and the psychological pain they bring straight women (according to these self help books and these films), "friendship with a gay man provides all the benefits of a relationship

[18] The exemplar books that Dreisinger is referring to are John Gray's *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus* and *The Rules* by Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider. Dreisinger sums up the message to straight women of both books: "Follow the rules, even though it is painfully difficult to do so. Effort and practice will make perfect. Making contact with alien beings—men—is not a walk in the park but an arduous expedition" p. 4.

with none of the detriments" (p. 6). After looking at how sexual tension gets played out in these films among all the characters, including the gay men, Dreisinger ultimately suggests that the dyad represents cultural anxiety about the status of heterosexuality and this anxiety goes unresolved and is mapped onto the dyad.

Chrys Ingraham (1999) echoes and extends many of Dreisinger's concerns as she looks at an identical set of texts with the exception of *As Good As It Gets*.[19] Ingraham criticizes the films and television show for how they may appear on the surface as progressive because they offer a gay male as a major character, but only in the service of the preservation of what she calls "the heterosexual imaginary." Like Dreisinger, Ingraham argues that when gay characters are used in this manner it points "to a state of ambivalence about the institution of heterosexuality and the legitimacy of homosexuality" (p. 140). For Ingraham this formula embodied by the dyad is successful or popular with audiences because the gay man represents the "fantasy of the perfect man" and because the couple never consummates the relationship. Therefore, the audience remains intrigued because "people can't suspend their disbelief that men are naturally attracted to women" (p. 141). Because of this heterosexist assumption, a tension structures or underlies these texts and this tension or suspense is what draws and maintains the audience. Because of this structure, heterosexuality is always preserved within these narratives. [20]

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[19] Ingraham's project is a materialist feminist critique of the wedding industry. To further her primary argument, she explores wedding ideology in popular film. The same films she examines and even *Will & Grace* correspond with those that feature the dyad.

[20] This is similar to the structure that D'Emilio identifies within capitalism that is permissive of gay identity, but always reinforces heterosexuality. This same scenario plays out continually on *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* where in every episode the gay

Helene Shugart's (2003) more recent analysis of *Will & Grace*, shows how the gay man is "heterosexualized" or rendered "the same."[21] This straightening of the gay guys is done in several ways. First, there is a romantic subtext as the scholars mentioned above have pointed out. Also, the narratives make use of a foil or a stereotypical, obviously gay character that when considered alongside the central gay man, deflects his gayness and leaves him more masculine or more straightened in comparison. For *Will & Grace* the foil is Jack. Interesting, the straightening of the gay male for Shugart is tied into the larger issue of white male privilege. Ultimately these narratives extend heterosexual male privilege to the main gay male character. This is accomplished in two ways. First, the sexual tension is unilateral—the gay male is "represented as having sexual access to and license with their heterosexual women friends, but the women are not depicted as having truly reciprocal privileges" (p. 80). Second, the men are paternalistic or depicted as embodying a "dad factor" to the straight woman. Here the stereotypical dichotomy between the rational, mature, stable male and the emotional, childlike, irrational female is realized and materialized. Through these narrative moves, patriarchal paternalism and heteronormative masculinity is reified in these shows and films that on first glance may appear somewhat progressive because they feature queer characters.

Kathleen Battles and Wendy Hilton-Morrow's (2002) study of *Will & Grace*, echo Dreisinger and Ingraham. These authors focus on the constraining features of the sitcom genre that focuses on interpersonal relationships rather than characters

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guys help reconstruct a straight man in order to strengthen his relationship with his wife or girlfriend.

[21] Here I am drawing a connection between this representational strategy and the first mode ("Please accept me I am just like you") of representation that Walters identifies.

connections to larger social institutions and how these conventions re-inscribe an ideology of heterosexism and heteronormativity. Like Dreisinger, they argue that the show is ultimately a romantic comedy where the most successful relationships are between men and women. The ensemble is paired in male/female dyads: Will and Grace and Jack and Karen. Within these pairings, the conventions of the sitcom are limiting because of the focus on interpersonal relationships at the expense of characters' relationships to the outside world. So the show depoliticizes gayness. This depoliticization, according to Battles and Hilton-Morrow, occurs in two ways. One, homosexuality is presented as a problem for straight characters to deal with. That is, the plot hinges on the problems of dealing with a gay roommate or gay son or gay co-worker, rather than being a gay person dealing with a heterosexist world. Two, because of the focus on the interpersonal, the show fails to acknowledge "the social consequences of gay and lesbians persons living in our heterosexist culture" (p. 99). In other words, the problems unique to gay life are not addressed. Perhaps that is one reason why people can take such pleasure in these queer images, but fail to recognize that queer people are politically disenfranchised. When queer characters or queer celebrities are political, they are often demonized in popular culture—think of Rosie O'Donnell for example. She is rendered a polarizing figure because of her political beliefs that she consistently made known on *The View* and that she continues to make known on her personal blog. The degree of politicization where representations of queer affluence are concerned is an issue revisited throughout subsequent chapters. Having reviewed a variety of literatures as a way to contextualize my study of queer affluence, I will now present my unique research questions and the approach I take to answer them.

Research Questions, Text Selection, and Approach

Four research questions guide Chapter Three. They are as follows:

RQ1: How has queer affluence been constructed in popular culture in the past?

RQ2: What meanings circulate around each of these past constructions?

RQ3: How is queer affluence constructed in popular culture presently?

RQ4: What meanings circulate around each of these present constructions?

As my literature review has suggested, queer visibility in popular culture is a fairly recent phenomenon, and therefore samples of queer affluence from beyond more than a decade ago are scarce. Because of limited availability, I have chosen five salient people/characters. Salience was defined by the relative ease with which people and characters could be considered by the various texts as both queer and wealthy, and the person or character needed to figure prominently in the narrative so that there was enough textual material related to queer affluence to analyze. Additionally the story or film needed to be considered popular.[22] Using the above criteria I selected Richard Loeb and Nathan Leopold who murdered a young boy in 1924. I created a text using newspaper articles that appeared in *The Chicago Daily Tribune* and *The New York Times* on the days surrounding their confession. To analyze the text, I focused how the two were written about in terms of affluence: direct discussion of their wealth, their superior intellect/education, expensive clothing. Also, I focused on how queerness was inferred

[22] By popular I mean that the media event was covered extensively in the mainstream newspapers or the film or television program is/was commercially successful. If the reader is unconvinced at this point of the popularity of a given texts, when I discuss each text in depth in their respective chapters I will offer additional evidence to support this contention.

from how the pair was written about: Loeb's feminization, the dominant/submissive aspects of their relationship, and their connection to necrophilia. Looking at the articles in this way I was able to provide answers to RQ1.

Constructions of queer affluence surface again in the films noir of the 1940s and 1950s. Using the same criteria I used to choose Leopold and Loeb, I look at two salient constructions of queerness in two famous films noir: Waldo Lydecker, the queer male in the film *Laura*, and Brandon and Phillip, the queer male couple in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (a film based on Leopold and Loeb). In order to ascertain how queer affluence was constructed (RQ1), I watched both films and took careful notes on how the men were dressed, their physical surroundings/decor, their interactions with other characters, what they said, and what was said about them. To answer RQ2, I supplement my analysis with queer readings by other scholars of these men to tease out the meanings surrounding constructions of queer affluence. Recent depictions of queer affluence include men and women, but thus far my sample has included only male depictions. Using the same selection criteria above, I look at Catherine Trammell, the main character in the neo-Noir film *Basic Instinct*. Here too, I watched the film, taking notes on how Trammell was dressed, her physical surroundings/décor, her interactions with other characters (including her lesbian lover), what she said, and what other characters said about her. I use my analysis of Catherine Trammell to reassess RQ1. I, for reasons I describe in the actual chapter, see the film as a transitional piece—a representational segue from the past images of queer affluence to those of the present.

To answer RQ3 and RQ4 I focus on characters and narratives from episodes of the following texts: Showtime's *Queer as Folk*, HBO's *Sex and the City,* Bravo's reality

series *Work Out*. These are texts that adhere to the following criteria. Importantly, the characters in these shows present obvious representations of queer affluence. Next, these shows have proven commercially successful. This is important because it lends credence to the claim that the stereotype is widely circulated and occupies a space in popular culture. While the texts I have chosen are on cable television, and therefore enjoy a relatively smaller audience than a network program. However, the focus remains on these cable programs because I believe if we are to understand the stereotype, these serialized cable programs allow for a level of character depth not yet found on network television. They are therefore "richer" depictions than say the gay characters on *Will and Grace*. To answer the research questions, I screened episodes of each show. I took notes on how each queer character was depicted in terms of dress, physical surroundings/décor, interactions with other characters, what they said, and what other characters said about them. Because these texts are able to openly portray queer sexuality, I especially looked for scenes of and talk about sex. Because I feel the characters in each episode chosen are paradigmatic examples of queer affluence, and because they are main characters, I paid close attention to the narrative of each episode in order to reveal deeper meanings circulating in these texts regarding queer affluence (RQ4).

Chapter Four seeks answers to three questions:

RQ1: How does the stereotype of queer affluence structure the celebrity-as-text of the openly gay spokesperson?

RQ2: What features does the openly gay spokesperson share with the fictional/televisual affluent queer analyzed in Chapter Three?

RQ3: What efforts, if any, are made to contain queerness?

To answer these questions I have chosen three high profile openly queer (two lesbian women and one gay man) celebrity spokespeople: Ellen DeGeneres, Suze Orman, and Carson Kressley. I wanted to look at popular celebrities who specifically are connected to mainstream audiences through their spokesperson capacity. I elected to choose celebrities I felt best embodied queer affluence either because of their profession (Suze Orman is about money), their previous work on television (Carson Kressley is famous for being on *Queer Eye*—a show that glamorizes shopping), or because of the company they were a spokesperson for seemed relevant to affluence (American Express, the company Ellen did an ad campaign for, is a kind of 'prestige' charge card). Because celebrities are people (and not texts), texts had to be created. I did several things to build texts to use to answer my research questions. For Ellen DeGeneres I used two print ads and one television commercial which all "star" DeGeneres and are part of the advertising campaign she did for the American Express Credit Card. I also use a brief segment from her daytime talk show *Ellen.* The segment is significant because her wealth is referred to throughout. This segment and the commercial were recorded on video. For Suze Orman, I used a newspaper interview that appeared in *The New York Times* where she comes out publicly for the first time. I also used her personal biography as it appears on her website. Finally, for Carson Kressley, I relied primarily on his hour-long appearance on home shopping channel QVC as he sells his Perfect line of clothing. Having complied these various pieces and creating a patchwork text, I attempted to answer all three research questions for each person in turn. To answer RQ1, I would examine these texts and look for the signifiers of affluence in what the celebrity did or said (e.g. money talk, luxury item talk, advertising context) and create a profile of the ways in which she or he

was depicted as (among other things) affluent. Having done that, I was able to answer RQ2 and RQ3.

Chapter Three: Queer Affluence and Popular Media

"The one thing this culture longs for and seems to value in queer life is the image of wealth. It appears to be the only thing we do right. And it is the only piece of our queerness that we can use when our citizenship is at stake."

-Queer activist Amber Hollibaugh (2001)

Examples abound in popular culture that link gays and lesbians with affluence and wealth. The purpose of this chapter is to illuminate this linkage in a way that has not been done before and to lay the foundations of a larger argument that will be fully advanced in chapter four—the crux of that argument is that understanding representations of queer affluence is essential to understanding the rise of the queer celebrity. In order to validate this claim, descriptive, interpretive, and analytical steps are necessary. This chapter defines what is meant by queer affluence, and shows that its formations, though varied, share a familiar, if not similar core. The origins of the representation of queer affluence will be traced by an examination of the 1924 media coverage of Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb and their roles in "The Crime of the Century." I juxtapose this discussion alongside work done in film studies. I will argue that contemporary representations of queer affluence contain vestiges from representations of queer characters found in Hollywood films noir from the 1940s and 1950s. The similarities between these representational predecessors and current depictions of queer affluence (both in the media and in the "real world") are striking—not just in terms of image, but in terms of the ideological work each performs. I then move the analysis to three television case studies of contemporary queer affluence on television. This chapter ends with a sketch of queer affluence as a troublesome fantasy perpetrated by the media and by

explaining how this fantasy lays the groundwork for the emergence of queer celebrity spokespeople, the topic of the next chapter.

Defining Queer Affluence

What does it mean to talk about queer affluence? How does queer affluence get played out as a representational strategy? To be clear, the focus in this dissertation, while on queer affluence, is not meant to suggest that other images of queers do not exist. In fact, for every image of queer affluence that I can think of in the media, I can point to other images of queers that are not predicated on affluence or wealth. But I do believe that if one were to corral the totality of queer images available in the media, that the connection between queerness and affluence would be evident. The examples referred to in this chapter and throughout this dissertation support this claim. Those who study queers and marketing/advertising would agree that the cultural spot light shines brightest on these images at the expense of others. Activist and self-proclaimed "high femme, mixed-race, white-trash lesbian" Amber Hollibaugh (2001) agrees when she says, "The myth of our wealth goes deep, so deep that even other gay people seem to believe it." What contributes to this myth and where does it come from? What exactly is queer affluence?

Sociologist Paul Ransome's (2005) work extends the basic definition of affluence, which, in general, describes those with access to income above and beyond that required to meet one's basic needs. Ransome explains what he calls "the affluence hypothesis":

> The basic argument here is that as people are more easily able to satisfy their basic survival needs, they have devoted an increasing proportion of their disposable income to consumption and leisure activities, and have consequently

> come to regard work as of secondary rather than primary importance…The significant thing about affluence and choice is that under conditions of affluence we are able to consume things because they bring pleasure and satisfaction in and of themselves without always being tied to the satisfaction of basic needs. Affluence allows consumption for purposes other than simple subsistence. (p.5)

This project employs this understanding of affluence because it moves away from simplistic notions of wealth and into the domain of commodities and consumer culture. In other words, the products of consumption, i.e. commodities—things—are what marks affluence. So under this view, a person may be very wealthy, but it is what he or she does with that wealth that signifies affluence. In other words, you have to buy things to be affluent.

This project finds queer affluence in those texts, images, and moments in popular culture where gays and lesbians are connected visually and/or linguistically to the signifiers of affluence. Again, I refer back to the Valentine's Day couple in *The Dallas Morning News*. They are dressed from head to toe in designer clothing. Although the article mentions they do have jobs, more attention is dedicated to how the two spend their leisure time, and hence, their money: shopping and traveling. While my aim here is to sketch a composite of queer affluence, it is not my intention to generate a definitive list of characteristics and then sort instances in terms of if they qualify or not. Queer affluence comprises a range of behaviors, attitudes, and signifiers, but as I will show, there tends to be striking similarities across time and media. Precisely what these behaviors, attitudes, and signifiers are will come into focus as I look at particular instances below.

Leopold and Loeb: Early Models of Queer Affluence

> Both dressed well, wearing suits and ties to classes. Both were wealthy; both lived in imposing houses in the same neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago. They drove expensive cars. They drank. They smoked. They had been graduated from college at an age when most boys were being graduated from high school. To add to the confusion, their names were similar, both starting with the letter L. Later, as they became known, many people would have difficulty remembering which one was Leopold and which one was Loeb. Even some acquaintances had difficulty separating the two in their minds at times. It made a difference, but on the other hand, it would make *no* difference. One was Leopold and one was Loeb, but they became Leopold and Loeb. Though possessing different personalities, they became the sum of those personalities.
>
> -Hal Higdon (1975) from *The Crime of the Century: The Leopold and Loeb Case* (p. 20)

The meticulously planned and brutally executed murder of 14 year old Robert (Bobby) Franks by Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb in the late spring of 1924 became known as the first "Crime of the Century." The kidnapping-turned-murder and the resultant trial captivated the American public and was covered daily in the media. Almost overnight, Leopold and Loeb became household names. The media coverage of the young men—the manner in which the two were constructed—what was said openly about them in the press, and what lurked in the subtext of these constructions—are the historical precursors to the depictions of queer men in Hollywood film in the 1940s and 1950s—which precede queer men and women on television and in film today. In the depictions of Leopold and Loeb we find two highly educated, cunning, wealthy, and very queer young men. In this section, I will first give an overview of Leopold, Loeb, and 'The Crime of the Century.' Then I want to look to examples from 1924 media coverage of the two men and show how this coverage lays the foundations for the codings of queer men that would occur in much later media depictions (e.g. film noir). Even by 1924 standards, I will show that the construction of Leopold and Loeb embodied queer affluence.

Leopold and Loeb, both post-graduate students at The University of Chicago,

kidnapped 14 year old Bobby Franks and beat him to death in the back seat of the car they rented just for this occasion. They then drove to Wolf Lake (a regional lake), stripped the body of all clothing, poured acid on Franks' face, genitals, and other identifying marks; and, finally, shoved Franks' body into a culvert. All along, Leopold and Loeb's intention was to create the appearance that Franks was only kidnapped. They sent a ransom note to Franks' home and also telephoned—demanding a ransom of $10,000. Leopold and Loeb's plan quickly collapsed. Franks' body was discovered a few days later before the ransom had been paid, and Leopold's glasses had been found near the body.[23] Within a matter of days, Leopold and Loeb were brought in for questioning by investigators, where each confessed but named the other as the killer. Beginning with the supposed kidnapping, the press and the public were obsessed with the story. That Leopold and Loeb came from extremely wealthy families and both were academically advanced only fueled the public's interest. Why would two young men who seemingly had everything commit such a crime? Their motive was unbelievably simple: to see if they could get a way with it. At the age of 19 and 18 respectively, Leopold and Loeb were sentenced to life in prison plus 99 years.

[23] The glasses themselves became famous. They were a special kind—only three pairs had been sold in Chicago—one pair to Nathan Leopold (Higdon 1975, p. 77). Because they were horn-rimmed and small, all kinds of theories regarding the type of person who would wear such glasses ensued in the press: "Of all the clues recovered from the scene of the crime, Leopold's eyeglasses provided law enforcement and the Chicago community with the most bountiful fodder to draw together homosexuality, Jewishness, degeneracy, and perversion" (Franklin 2003, p. 124).

The motif of queer affluence reverberates throughout the coverage of Leopold and Loeb and the duo acts as an early representational example thereof. The press and the public were infatuated with the fact that Leopold and Loeb were rich:

> Crowds gathered every place they and their investigators stopped. Crowds gathered about their homes, police being needed several times to disperse them. The curious were ever present wherever young Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb were taken yesterday…There was no doubt of the interest in the solution of the Franks kidnapping murder mystery and in the almost unbelievable fact that the wealthy youths were the slayers and admitted it. (Doherty June 2, 1924)

Once people were able to wrap their minds around the fact that these rich young men had in fact committed and confessed to this horrific crime, the fact that they were well-to-do began to figure into press accounts in other ways—namely, as a contributing factor to the crime itself. A psychiatrist is quoted in *The Chicago Daily Tribune*:

> These boys always have had their needs anticipated. They never had to earn a penny, only knew how to throw away a dollar," he asserted. "Some rich men's sons are so highly organized that this is possible without spoiling them. But in the cases of these two there was no moral check. They were surfeited with books, elegance, ultra-refinement. They led an upholstered life. (Herrick June 5, 1924, p. 5)

Moreover, some articles suggested that the wealth of the defendants would prevent a fair trial. For example, the front page of *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, Monday, June 2, 1924 read "Millions to Defend Killers" implying that money might be able to buy these young

men their lives:[24] Leopold, especially, was portrayed as flamboyant regarding his family's wealth.

> Young Leopold, son of the prominent manufacturer, is sure money can do anything. Loeb, son of the vice president of Sears, Roebuck & Co., is less sure, but hopeful. It remained, however, for young Leopold to put it into words. "You know, he said "we've got a lot of dough, I don't know how many millions. How about fixing this thing up by getting to a few of the jurors?" (*Chicago Daily Tribune* June 2, 1924, p. 1)

In addition to being wealthy, the two were cast as affluent "pretty boys," with reporters focusing on their manner of dress. In an article demonstrating the popularity of Loeb at college, it was reported that, "His acquaintance on campus was large, and in general he was well liked. He always dressed very well" ("Differed in college life," p. 3). Also, once in prison, Tyrell Krum (June 4, 1924) wrote of Loeb that "Perhaps it was due to the prison clothes he donned when he gave up his $200 garments, which were taken away to be fumigated the night before. Except for the classic head, brow, firm skin, and delicate hands the boy might have been mistaken for any of the others" (p.2). The next day Krum goes on to describe Loeb playing a game with the other prisoners were a ball is rolled into each man's hat, "Loeb was busy jumping for his hat because the others took delight in watching him perform. His $20 imported silk lined hat soon was crushed and torn by the feet of the players" (Krum June 5, 1924, p. 3). This 'pretty boy' image dovetails with

[24] The trial of Leopold and Loeb is famous also from a legal perspective. Clarence Darrow, an avid death penalty opponent, was hired to defend Leopold and Loeb. He gave a famous speech at the trial lasting 12 hours. Though the death penalty was sought by prosecutors, and public opinion favored hanging the two, Leopold and Loeb's lives were spared.

the image of queerness that floated around these same depictions of the young men which I now turn to.

With the hindsight of history, we now know for certain that Leopold and Loeb were in fact lovers.[25] Though suppressed in the papers, some elements of queerness still emerged in the days immediately following their confession.[26] For example, an article appearing in *The New York Times* June 2, 1924, chronicling the lives and academic careers of the two young men concluded with this line: "Loeb seems to have more 'friends,' but the two preferred their own company and books. Neither was particularly attentive to the girls of their own set." (p.1) Also, John Herrick in *The Chicago Daily Tribune* (June 5, 1924, p. 2) writes of Dr. James Fitzgerald, a phrenologist and 'expert in character analysis:'

> He pointed to Leopold. "This is the dominant will," he declared. "Leopold is the male, Loeb is the female, when it comes to a comparison of the temperaments of these two."

Dr. Brill, a psychiatrist commented on the theory that the young men's wealth was a culprit in the crime: "Money had nothing to do with it. They must have been abnormal to start with (*New York Times* June 2, 1924 p. 3). Morrow Krum (June 2, 1924 p.2) wrote

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[25] While what I am providing here gestures towards their queerness, homosexual aspects of their relationship, including graphic depictions of specific sex acts, was admitted at their trial via the psychologist who interviewed them. See Higdon (1975) pp. 214-215 on 'the compact' Leopold and Loeb had.

[26] I have provided a cursory analysis of Leopold and Loeb using *The Chicago Daily Tribune* and *The New York Times* around the dates of the 'kidnapping' and confession to see how Leopold and Loeb were presented in terms of queer affluence. For a thorough analysis of the entire crime, including a very detailed biography of Leopold and Loeb, their relationship, and trial see Higdon (1975). For a detailed queer analysis of the crime and trial see Franklin (2003).

the following about Loeb as Loeb was being escorted by investigators and reporters to various parts of the crime location:

> "Tell me," he whispered to the reporter, "do you think Capt. Schoemaker believes I was dominated?" It was the second time he asked it. He continues with the thought. "Well, it was sort of that way, after all. He planned it. I guessed I yessed Babe a lot."
>
> "Was Babe a pervert?" the reporter asked.[27]
>
> He shook his head. "I don't know anything about that," he said.

Clearly, then, there is something about these two men that lurks just beyond the comfort zones of these news stories which conceptualizes the two young men into an "abnormal," "perverted," even sexual relationship (one being the man, the other the woman). This logic was taken even further when Genevieve Forbes (June 2, 1924 p. 3) wrote:

> A cold dead corpse, a naked body in a culvert, a lifeless mass of human flesh. Not the least bit distressing, for that's part of the experiment. But the actual killing, that is repugnant. There are vague hints that this strange and dreadful crime may have some relation to necrophilism, that morbid fondness for being in the presence of dead bodies, and the unwholesome pleasure derived from the experience. But the boys refuse to discuss any such theory.

This was written in relation to Leopold's nonchalance in his discussion of Franks' dead body ("we stick pins in bugs and birds to see how they will act; why shouldn't we do it to human beings") but his absolute disdain for the messiness of the actual murder. Finally,

[27] Babe was Nathan Leopold's nickname.

Paul Franklin (2003) shows how public perceptions at the time linked homosexuality with Jewishness:

> …while references to homosexuality and Jewishness in the press and courtroom often were whispered or shrouded in innuendo, homophobia and anti-Semitism nevertheless were writ large in the pubic reception of the crime and trial. What went unsaid in the course of the investigation and prosecution of Leopold and Loeb did so precisely because it went without saying. These youths were construed to be two Jewish teens whose Jewishness 'naturally' predisposed them to homosexuality, a 'crime against nature' that incited them to commit further crimes against humanity (pp. 122-23).

To conclude, whether writers in 1924 characterized the young men as "abnormal," "perverts," dominant/submissive role players, as uninterested in women, or even necrophiliacs—amidst the media coverage of the case are these moments that bubble up to the surface and contribute—even back then—to an understanding of Leopold and Loeb as affluent, killer queers—a blueprint for the gay men that surface in Hollywood film noir.

The Queer Affluence Aesthetic: Hollywood Film Noir

It is in the dark world of the film noir where Hollywood first shined its light on queer characters in as major of a way possible.[28] Film noir is a uniquely American genre/film style whose stock of characters, at least a handful of them queer, are

[28] Censorship was a major obstacle. Davidson writes, "Although the Production Code severely limited what could be shown of 'deviant' passions, noir films created unforgettable gay icons…" (p. 59).

representational precursors to the images of queer affluence we find today. Film noir, considered by some critics a genre and others a film style, refers to films made post-World War II, roughly between 1940 and 1960. Films noir, perhaps the most famous of which is *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), are always set in dark, shadowy cityscapes, and feature hardboiled detectives, femme fatales, and a host of shady characters. The narrative logic of the film noir is one of fracture, complexity, confusion, and impending doom—a cinematic terrain ripe for depictions of queer characters[29].

Queer characters and characters coded as queer have appeared in Hollywood film since its inception in virtually all genres[30]. Film noir is a special case—one that deserves further attention, because, as Barrios (2005) writes, "…they (homosexuals) became, early on, part of the texture of these films…sometimes clearly defined, other times not. As with horror, noir thrives on ambiguity and multiple meanings, so sometimes it's impossible to tell sometimes exactly what's intended" (p. 185). It is in this space between that which is said and that which is implied where queerness thrives. When we consider particular examples of queer characters in particular films noir a coherent

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[29] When we think of queer stereotypes and classic Hollywood genres the musical might spring to mind. After all, musicals are known for their lavish costumes, singing, dancing—a sort of fantasy/camp aesthetic is foundational to the musical—an aesthetic that by today's standards would in itself connote queerness. But it is the themes of the musical during this time period, which reify the importance of community and/or the insistence on heterosexual coupling that really push queer representation out of the foray of the musical. In a society that pathologized homosexuality via psychiatric discourses, it is no wonder the queer characters turn up in the darkness of the film noir.

[30] While my argument that follows focuses on film noir specifically, of course queers have been represented in various instances in other genres and in other specific films. The work of Richard Dyer proves that film noir is the first corpus of films for which gays and lesbians figure (albeit in problematic ways) into central features of the narrative. Before they tended to be minor characters. For detailed discussions of queer representation in New Deal Era films see Lugowski (1999), for the horror film see Benshoff (1997), and for the musical see Cohan (2005).

aesthetic emerges. The repetition of this aesthetic throughout particular films noir has been theorized in various ways in the work of film scholars. The exact nature of the aesthetic and the ideological work it performs will be discussed below.

Film scholar Richard Dyer (1993) has done a comprehensive study of gays and lesbians in Classic Hollywood films noir[31]. Because it was against production code to imply homosexuality at the time, Dyer says that "gays are thus defined by everything but the very thing that makes us different." (p. 61). What, then, is the *everything but*? The classic film noir queer is not defined by his/her sexuality in the same way gay characters or out celebrities are today, but rather their sexuality is inferred by their looks, language, artifacts, and mise-en-scene.[32] In Dyer's analysis of nine queer men from nine films noir, he demonstrates how queerness is signified by the following familiar traits: "fastidious dress, crimped hair, perfume, manicured nails, love of art, bitchy wit, knowledge of clothes" (p.60). Also, Robert Corber (2005) says of Addison, the gay man in *All About Eve* (1950), "Addison wears elegantly tailored clothes; speaks with an upper-crust accent; has a dry, bitchy wit; and is associated with a feminized profession (he's in theater)"(p. 16)[33]. Similarly, Barrios (2005) points out that by the time film noir was underway that the vision of the gay male had changed in American culture from "pansy," "old fairy types," coded by "the flower, fedora, the small mustache, the 'whoops, dearie"

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[31] Regarding gays and lesbians, Dyer argues that given "their absence from all other types of film and the caution with which even film noir had to introduce them suggests that they do none the less constitute a defining feature of film noir taken as a whole" (p. 60)

[32] Mise-en-scene is a concept from film studies. It refers to that which is in front of the camera at any given time. See Bordwell and Thompson (2003).

[33] *All About Eve* is technically not a film noir. However, as Corber's chapter demonstrates, the film takes up similar concerns as the film noir ideologically, and especially in its presentation of the gay male.

catchphrases, to a model of queerness laced with the markers of affluence that we see today. Barrios writes:

> The new type of gay man on screen, beginning in 1944, was not a subject for ridicule in most cases. In fact, he did much of the mocking himself, being acerbic, witty, and (to use a word of the time, not necessarily negatively) bitchy. These qualities were evident less because of how he looked or moved than how he tended to imply his superiority… the new gay type: immersed in culture, intelligently sharped-tongued, no so much expendable to the main action as an interested observer of it. (p. 201)

Barrios' quote helps sketch the aesthetic as well as position the gay male subject in relation to the narrative. In addition, observable personality traits, décor in films noir works to connote a male character's queerness. Instead of conceptualizing the ornate settings in terms of affluence per se, Dyer describes a "luxury milieu" which iconographically surrounds queer men in film after film:

> The ideological pairing of male homosexuality with luxury and decadence (with connotations of impotence and sterility) is of a piece with the commonplace linking of women with luxury (women as expensive things to win and keep, women as bearers of their husbands' wealth) and decadence (women as beings without sexuality save for the presence of men). The feeling that gay men are *like* women yet *not* women produces the 'perverse' tone of this mode of iconographic representation. (p. 65).

And this coding of the conjoining of gay men with the accoutrements of luxury *as feminine* is deployed as part of the ideological work of the film noir which sought to

reconcile postwar anxieties over the status of (straight) men and women in American culture after the significant social and economic changes the war brought about (e.g. women in the work place, suburbanization).

Waldo Lydecker: Queer Affluence in *Laura*

Waldo Lydecker is the quintessential affluent film noir queer. As the film begins the camera sweeps throughout his extravagant apartment following detective McPherson who has come to ask Lydecker questions regarding the murder of the titular Laura Hunt. McPherson finds Lydecker in his majestic bathroom, typing on a typewriter, fully nude, bathing in an oversized, elegant marble bathtub. McPherson says, "Nice little place you have here," to which Lydecker says, "It's lavish…what I call home." In this first scene, Lydecker is coded as queer because he is naked in front of another man, and McPherson is less than amused when Lydecker stands up out of the tub and insists that McPherson hand him a towel. McPherson throws the towel at him.

Similarly, the film wants to underscore Lydecker's obsession with things, particularly his furnishings. When Lydecker sees McPherson eyeing his grandfather clock he says, "there's only one other in existence." Similarly, when McPherson touches some knick-knacks Lydecker exclaims, "Be careful there, that stuff is priceless." So, in this opening scene introducing Lydecker, the film establishes his queerness through décor and his awareness of the commodities that surround him. Lydecker's bitchy wit is another way the film places him in the realm of the queer. When McPherson asks Lydecker if he had been in love with Laura, Lydecker replies, "Laura considered me the wisest, the wittiest, the most interesting man she ever met. I was on complete accord with her on that point." In a flash back to Lydecker's first meeting Laura, he insults her

because she has interrupted his lunch: "Young woman, either you have been raised in some incredibly rustic community, where good manners are unknown, or you suffer from the common feminine delusion of the mere fact of being a woman exempts you from the rules of civilized conduct, or possibly both." When Laura asks if he will endorse a pen (he is a writer by trade) for an ad campaign she is designing Lydecker says flippantly, "I don't use a pen, I use a goose quill dipped in venom." Lydecker's snarky comments, his fastidiousness in his style of dress (always in a tailored suit with a flower on the lapel), and the lack of any kind of love interests (every other man in the film is in love with Laura) suggest that Waldo is not straight. Finally, at one point Lydecker has had Shelby, Laura's fiancée followed by a private investigator. When he retrieves the file to give to Laura he refers to himself and says, "Old Mother Hubbard has something in her cupboard." This dialogue makes it fairly clear that Lydecker is a queer. The film is equally insistent on Lydecker's affluence. At the end of film when McPherson moves to arrest Laura, Lydecker says, "Don't worry darling. Let them keep you. We'll fight them. I have every weapon. Money. Connections. Prestige. And my column. Everyday millions will read about you and rally to your defense."

For Robert Corber (1997), who devotes an entire chapter in his book on Cold War homosexuality to Lydecker, the linkage of the feminized gay male with affluence as I have defined it, is the crux of that film's ideological project. Corber points out that during the Cold War the economy shifted to one that was primarily driven by consumption. And, of course, shopping and buying things has always been gendered as feminine. Where masculinity had previously been aligned with production or entrepreneurship, after the war, masculinity would need to be reconfigured to be aligned

with appropriate forms of consumption. Part of the anxiety that arises in the film noir, at least in *Laura*, is precisely a manifestation of the cultural anxiety that results from this reconfiguration of (heterosexual) masculinity. Corber explains how this maneuver is achieved:

> Where *Laura* is undeniably homophobic is in its identification of Lydecker with the lure of the commodity…we are clearly meant to think that Lydecker's apartment is too exquisite for a man. In the opening sequence, the camera pans the apartment, lingering over the exquisite furnishings and priceless objets d'art Lydecker has accumulated. In this way, it links Lydecker with the commodity form…His lavishly furnished apartment serves as evidence of the feminine position he occupies in relation to commodity culture. (p.67)

So, Corber's argument, one that is as complex as it is fascinating, is that the film sets up a distinction between socially appropriate masculine forms of consumption as evidenced by Mark McPherson, the straight male hero, and excessive, feminine forms of consumption embodied by the extravagance of Lydecker, the gay male:

> Looking and buying became increasingly linked through the exhibitionistic display of commodities. This linkage helps to clarify the function of Lydecker's association with visual excess in the film. Lydecker embodies the seductive power of the commodity form. His lavishly furnished apartment and elegant wardrobe function as a form of merchandising. They solicit the gaze and promote desire for his body by diverting attention from its semiotic deficiency in relation to the conventional signs of masculinity. Thus the exhibitionistic display of his body and his possessions threatens to transform Mark, not into a homosexual, but

> into a consumer by inducing in him what Walter Benjamin called the 'dream-sleep' of consumer capitalism (p. 69).

Corber's intricate reading of the film illustrates how ultimately Mark is able to "resist the lure of the commodity," unlike Lydecker who has succumbed to it and who "does not accumulate durable goods but luxury items that function purely as objects of visual pleasure" (p. 71). So, because of his inappropriate consumption which is directly tied to his queerness, and in addition to his status as 'the killer,' Lydecker, and thus, queerness is demonized. Dyer (1993) reminds us regarding the world constructed in *Laura*, "Women can be legitimately be identified with luxury, with obsessions with beauty and appearance—Laura herself is the epitome of all that is alluring in such a world. Men who are associated with it, however, be they gay or gigolos, are weak, villainous or depraved (or all three)" (p. 65).

In *Rope* (1946), a film ostensibly based on Leopold and Loeb, Alfred Hitchcock explored the relationship between to the two killers without ever identifying the two young men as lovers. They were coded as such delicately. The opening scene of *Rope* has much in common with *Laura*. The film begins famously as Phillip and Brandon murder David by strangling him to death with a piece of rope. Hitchcock's camera is invested in revealing a decadently decorated penthouse city apartment. They have nice things. After the murder, cocky Brandon immediately lights a cigarette and grabs the glass that David took his last drink from and then quickly puts it back down: "We really should preserve it for posterity…except it's such good crystal and I'd hate to break up the set." Like Lydecker, Brandon and Phillip are both dressed in tailored suits. Each man's hair is styled and when Janet arrives, she comments on Brandon's cologne. She says,

"Be careful of my hair, it took hours. You smell dreamy. What it is?" Later during the dinner party Janet notices new art by the "young American primitive." So the text and image is working to convey affluence. Queerness can be inferred in several ways. Before the first guest arrives, Phillip expresses regret for killing David and wishes they would have chosen someone else. He slowly speaks his lines: "I don't know, I guess anyone would have been as good…or as bad as any other…you perhaps…you frighten me…you always have…from the very first day in prep school…part of your charm I suppose..." During this spoken dialogue the two's eyes are locked on each other and they are very close in proximity to one another. Also, it becomes clear through the story that the two men live as a couple, and everyone in the film treats them as though they are. At one point the housekeeper says, "Both of them must have got up on the wrong side of the bed." Finally, the subtext of Rupert's (Jimmy Stewart's) dramatics once he finds out the men have committed murder are suggestive of queerness: "There must have been something deep inside you from the very start that let you do this thing... you strangled the life out of another human being who could live and love as you never could." With this dialogue, just as with the Lydecker character in *Laura*, *Rope* posits a connection between queerness and homicidal impulses, and this is how these films banish/punish the queer characters. These queer men had it coming.

Casting was another vehicle that noir directors employed in order to communicate the queerness of a character. Hitchcock brought the taboo subject matter to life by ingeniously communicating the gay relationship of Brandon and Phillip: he hired gay actors John Dall and Farley Granger to play the leads (Barrios, 2005, p. 209). Likewise, Clifton Webb, the actor who played Waldo Lydecker in the above mentioned *Laura* was

also known to be gay. Webb, unlike other gay stars, did not hide his homosexuality. By casting gay men in the roles of gay men, a certain nuance is generated, perhaps in the realm of the connotative, but nevertheless lending queerness to the characterizations.

To strip away the luxury/affluent aesthetic from these characters is to dismantle their queerness. Clearly these men were not sexual creatures. Parker Tyler (1972) writes of Clifton Webb, the gay actor who played the prototypical queer noir male, "Yet Webb's decisive mark as a prof-sis (professional sissy) was that he never used his elegance in the service of the romantic; it was as if disinfected of eroticism…and he was wonderful, socially speaking, at putting on the chill." (p. 334). Tyler continues to gush, "He created this idealness it seems to me, because everything he did seems squeezed of all erotic innuendo before he did it. That is no small triumph: being stylishly unsexy" (p. 334). And it is this dimension of stylish unsexiness that rounds out the film noir male.

My discussion thus far has centered on queer men in film noir. The lesbian figure, when she appeared in the film noir was not linked to affluence and luxury as the gay male was. Just as the gay male was feminized and villianized, the lesbian of the film noir was masculinized and villainized, and she tended to be 'butch' and working class (Dyer, 1993, p. 63). My argument is that when we see queer affluence today we see both gay men and lesbians. Both figures today are related to those queer images found in film noir, but it is the image of the affluent lesbian of today is not akin to the lesbian of the film noir. The lesbian of the film noir was working class. Instead, the image of the affluent lesbian of today is anticipated by the queer woman of the neo-noir where she inherits some of the qualities of the film noir queer male.

One of the most popular instances of queer affluence is Sharon Stone's character from the 1992 film *Basic Instinct*. In the film Stone plays Catherine Tramell, a bisexual writer whose rock star boyfriend is tied up in his bed and repeatedly stabbed by an ice pick by his female sexual partner (whose face we never see)—a scene taken directly from Catherine's recent novel. Tramell becomes the center-piece of the investigation into the murder which is spear-headed by 'hardboiled' Nick Curran played by Michael Douglas. Catherine Tramell is the embodiment of queer affluence. First, she's queer because her sexuality is not easily pinned down. We know she was having sex with the rock star before his murder but she says she was doing this for research for her book. We know she has sex with Nick, but we also know she is using Nick as "research" for her next book. We also know that she is sexually involved with Roxy, her lesbian lover, and therefore we know Catherine is not straight. In the infamous interrogation scene, she summarizes her sexuality for the investigators: "I don't make any rules Nick, I go with the flow."

The film was hugely successful and immediately catapulted Sharon Stone to major Hollywood stardom. Like the detective, Director Paul Verhoeven's camera is obsessed with Sharon Stone as Catherine, showing us many close-ups throughout the film of her sexually alluring, predatory glances. Her look as well as the looks she receives from others are one source of her power. But there are two other elements that are key to knowing Catherine—and which align her with her queer male predecessors from classic film noir: her wealth and her education. As the investigation begins, the police present the facts in her profile. She has "estimated assets of 110 million dollars" and graduated "magna cum laude Berkeley" with a double major in psychology and literature. While

considered wealthy by any measure, the film revels in Catherine's affluence. She has two mansions: one in downtown San Francisco and one on the California coast (we see both of them). She owns a Picasso and drives a Lamborghini (we are treated to a several car chases involving the sports car). Though she need not, Catherine works and churns out novels. Like Leo, Loeb, and the gay male of the film noir, Catherine is of superior intelligence. Her top-shelf education allows Catherine to tease Nick and the other investigators with her skillful use of language just as the film teases us by always making it seem as though Catherine is the killer, but then never fully resolves the matter. Understanding queer affluence as depicted in *Basic Instinct* in relation to this lineage from films noir is useful in assessing the stereotype in the present. As I have shown, at least since the 1940s, queers, to one degree or another, have been defined in terms of style, commodities, and affluence. Queers in films noir then laid the groundwork for the representations of queer affluence that follow them. If one rewinds to the recent past and forwards to the present to examine images of queer affluence, these same signifiers remain unchanged.

Queer Affluence Today

If queer affluence emerged in film noir from the 1940s and 50s what is the status of the image today? What accounts for what scholars refer to as the "myth of gay wealth?" I have suggested in my discussion of Leopold and Loeb and films noir that the association is not new. Still, one area that media and other scholars have identified that contributes to this myth is the realm of marketing and advertising. In the early and mid-1990s as marketers packaged the gay market to sell to potential advertisers they created a vision of the gay community as highly educated, affluent, largely white, and male

(Chasin 2000, Sender 2005, Walters 2001). Essentially what would happen is marketers would survey readers of an upscale magazine, like Out Magazine, a gay glossy, with a predominately male, affluent readership. They would poll these readers and that data would in turn be used by marketers as characteristic of the entire gay community. Clearly, this is a fallacious interpretive leap. Queer scholar Michael Bronski (1998) explains the issue:

> The image that *The Advocate* and other magazines presented of how the 'average' gay man lived was representative of some men's lives: usually those with a high level of education, who lived in urban gay neighborhoods and had well-paying jobs and enough disposable income to purchase nonessential, lifestyle products. But not all gay men who identified with the 'gay lifestyle' earned at that level. Many gay men, of course, did not fit the image of the 'gay lifestyle' at all—men in rural and suburban areas, men who were closeted, and men who did not construct their lives around their sexual identity. (p. 148)

Bronski's point is important because it suggests that there is a material basis, even if it is limited, for the stereotype of queer affluence. For sure, some queer people are affluent, but as Bronski says, many do not fit the bill. Media scholar Katherine Sender (2005) says, "Market research does not, then, simply offer a window onto a world of gay consumption, but selectively and strategically gathers, manipulates, and reports data gleaned from that world" (p. 142). But, in our society where affluence is seen as highly desirable, and in a subculture where one is literally defined by what he or she consumes (according to the logic of the media), this misinterpretation has tended to escape scrutiny. Media scholar Susanna Walters (2001) writes, "Many gays themselves, eager to assert

gay inclusion, hold fast to the myth of gay wealth and join in the chorus of voices crying 'sell to me'!" (p. 243). And so it was the creation of the gay market that in part contributed and continues to contribute to this image of queer affluence. Even outside the media, the connection between queerness and affluence circulates.

Economist Richard Florida's (2004) popular book *The Rise of the Creative Class* essentially sorts cities and up-and-coming cities based on their ability to sustain affluence and that which affluence brings. Basically, if you want to be "with it" or "hip," a "creative class" city is where you need to be. Florida and another economist use "The Gay Index" which ranks areas based on how many gay people live there. For Florida, "gays predict not only the concentration of high-tech industry, they also predict its growth" (p. 257). He goes on:

> In addition, ten of the top twenty Gay Index regions numbered among the top twenty centers for the Creative Class. The Gay Index was positively associated with the Creative Class in both periods (1990 census data vs. 2000 census data); but it was negatively associated with the Working Class. (p. 258)

It is no surprise that the top Creative Class cities are San Francisco, Boston, Seattle, Los Angeles, and Washington, D. C.—the nation's most expensive cities. In Florida's sequel *The Flight of the Creative Class* (2005), he tries to explain the correlation: "Accordingly, places that accept gays are also likely to be accepting of all different types of people, and those places therefore open themselves up to innovation and entrepreneurship from a wide range of human sources" (p. 60). So in the realm of popular economics, gays are seen as trend setting, affluent urban professionals—leading the way for high tech companies and the people who work for them to follow. I have demonstrated that queer

affluence is not only a film image but also a marketing construct. I now want to look at three specific examples of queer affluence from contemporary television.

Queer Affluence and Millennial Television

Sex and the City

The episode of *Sex and the City* called "The Cheating Curve" contains a storyline that will make explicit much of the discussion I have presented thus far.[34] The episode's "Power Lesbian" narrative is a textbook case for conceptualizing contemporary depictions of queer affluence. The episode opens and finds the four female principles (Carrie, Charlotte, Samantha, and Miranda) dressed to the nines at an art opening featuring a lesbian artist's paintings at art dealer Charlotte's gallery. Carrie, also the narrator, tells viewers in voice-over while art openings in Manhattan are routine—this particular one has "transcendent qualities." Carrie says that "most New Yorkers would attend the opening of an envelope" but that the lesbian art opening was a somehow superior event. The only rationale is the fact that it was by and largely attended by lesbians. She says, "It was lesbian chic meets art world cool."

As we are introduced to the "power" lesbians, what is important about them, according to the logic of the narrative, is their affluence. The camera tracks a pack of smartly dressed (outfitted in power suits, hair pulled back, champagne in hand) thirty-something women as Carrie's voice-over narration acts as a kind of introduction to the

[34] I chose to center my discussion on this episode of *Sex and the City* for several reasons. First, it is striking in its depiction of queer affluence—the characters clearly adhere to the notions of affluence in the way that I have defined it. Also, the episode is self contained and the storyline that involves the queer characters starts and begins in this episode. So it is a rich text in this regard. There are other queer characters on the series that probably exemplify queer affluence (e.g. Stanford Blatch and Anthony Marantino) but these are recurrent characters that appear throughout the series which makes analysis more complex.

pack: “By midnight Charlotte had discovered Manhattan’s latest group to flaunt their disposable income—the Power Lesbian. They seem to have everything. Great shoes. Killer eye-wear. And the secrets to invisible make-up.” The pack of power lesbians parks directly in front of one of the paintings. Dialogue ensues between the two leaders of the pack:

Lydia: I want that one, I’m going to take it.

Eileen: Didn’t I say I was buying that piece?

Lydia: I thought you were taking the large painting when it came in.

Eileen: I want both.

Lydia: Oh, for God’s sake

While they jokingly bicker about who should get to buy the piece, it is evident from their expressions that this is a superfluous purchase—after all it is art—hardly a necessity and clearly falls in the domain of luxury item. The two lesbians exchange friendly glances as Carrie’s voice-over informs us that Charlotte had never sold out a show before until tonight. Apparently, power lesbians are good for business. They like to buy things.

A few days later we find Charlotte back at the gallery on the phone as Lydia and Eileen enter the gallery, she goes over to the two who are standing in front of the painting.

Lydia: I just came in to pay for my painting.

Eileen: It’s her painting for six months then she’s selling it back to me.

Lydia: Excuse me, I’m the one with the big loft and all the empty white walls.

Eileen’s cell phone rings, but as she takes the call, she says to Charlotte, “By the way, love the Prada loafers.” Out of nowhere we hear Carrie say, as if stating a major kernel

of wisdom for us, "Power lesbians and their shoes are like Wall Street bankers and their cigars." Before the scene ends we learn that Lydia is a vice president at Warner Music and that Eileen "works on Wall Street." This second scene is the one I find most revealing. Lydia is there essentially as a shopper. She has come to "pay for" her painting. That Eileen is going to buy it back from her seems over-the-top. These lesbians are not your typical consumer—they are hyper-consumers. The Prada loafer moment is also telling. Charlotte is casually dressed and there is nothing remarkable about her shoes—they are loafers—save the red Prada logo on the heel. Only a high-end, brand-conscious person could even spot the tiny red strip that marks Prada loafers from any other kind. They are loafers, but what makes them special is that they cost several hundred dollars. Finally, it is important that we learn that Lydia and Eileen are members of the professional, managerial class and would definitely fit into Richard Florida's notion of the Creative Class. Not only do these women flaunt their disposable income, but they tout jobs that imply they have a certain caliber of education. Charlotte becomes enchanted by the women's lifestyle and begins spending time a lot of time with them at lesbian clubs—but she does not reveal her heterosexual status to them.

The power lesbian storyline concludes at the luxurious home of Patty Astin who outs Charlotte as straight. The scene finds Charlotte and Lydia, walking down a grand spiral staircase in a rotunda with a large life-size bronze sculpture of a female warrior figure on top of a horse. Regarding Patty Astin, Carrie's voice-over explains: "If power lesbians represent Manhattan's new social hive—Charlotte was about to meet their queen bee." Via Lydia's dialogue we learn that Patty "sits on the board of like 100 different charities" and has "a gorgeous house in Telluride." When Charlotte comments on the

sculpture Patty quips, "Diana: The Huntress. I got her on sale." All of the features of queer affluence are at work here. In the third scene, "queen bee" Patty Astin is depicted as having lots of money and leisure time. In addition to the "100 charities" she sits on, we also learn she is taking flying lessons—all activities which require free time. Patty too is seen as a savvy shopper since she got her art "on sale." What these makes these women "power lesbians" is their queer affluence. They know commodities and they relish spending their money on them. This kind of consumption is the essence of queer affluence.

Queer As Folk

One of the most important instances of queer representation in general, and queer affluence in particular, is the Showtime television ensemble soap opera/comedy/drama *Queer as Folk* which ran from 2000-2005. Because it was an hour-long drama running on a cable network, the series was afforded degrees of latitude in content and depth that would be impossible for a standard network show to touch. Because of its location on cable, the show was able to explore queer specific issues (both political and personal) like no show has ever done before. For these reasons, *Queer As Folk* was ground breaking. With 83 episodes each with a run time of 55 minutes, *Queer as Folk* is ripe with queer content. However, because it is so massive, it is difficult to work with from an analytical standpoint. By centering on the character Brian Kinney as a prototype of queer affluence I am able to tease out dimensions of the trope in its post-Millennial incarnation. Are there other characters and moments in the series that work as illustrations of queer affluence? Yes. However the characters are not figured as prominently in the narrative and only appeared on one or a few episodes. Also, once the workings of queer affluence

have been mapped, examining each instance becomes redundant because queer affluence, as a collection of traits, as an aesthetic, and as a narrative thread, coalesce into a coherent formation. The formation is fairly consistent across media. I use Brian Kinney and later Jackie Warner to show how queer affluence functions much the same in representations of gay men and lesbians. Rather than looking at the intricacies of the entirety of the series, I will concentrate my discussion on Brian Kinney, one of the principle characters, who, as I will show, personifies queer affluence. Looking at this character as an exemplar will reveal a typical staging of queer affluence in terms of aesthetics, narrative, and ideology. In terms of queer affluence, much of what is true for Brian Kinney, is true of his representational successors in other media.

Brian Kinney is iconic as a representation of a particular brand of gay culture. Brian is traditionally handsome, styled (fashionably dressed, hair styled), traditionally masculine (read: "straight acting"/ not flaming/stereotypically gay), youthful, in possession of an athletic, well manicured and maintained body, and, like all the characters on *Queer As Folk*-- white. Aesthetically, his image is always tied to the series and is used in its marketing and advertising across all the seasons of the show. We literally see his image and the word *Queer* (from the show's title) juxtaposed when we see ads, series spin-off products (music CDS, calendars, coffee table books) or other signifiers for the show. To be sure, the show does represent a variety of types of white gay males. But Brian is held up by the show as a near perfect queer ideal. Of the show's gay men, Brian is the "alpha-male": cocky, hypersexual (to the point where it becomes an inside joke among the show's viewers), able to have sex with anyone he wants (wherever he wants) and does so in nearly every episode. And, except for one scene in

the entire series, Brian is always the dominant partner (top) when he has sex with others. Importantly, Brian is the only principle character on the show who is wealthy. And he possesses all the accoutrements of affluence: interior designed loft[35], a sports car, designer suits and skin care products, and access to large amounts of his own cash. One of the key features of queer affluence is a strong commitment to a work ethic. And according to the narrative of *Queer as Folk*, Brian's wealth is not just a given, it is the result of an unyielding commitment to personal success through careerism. One episode is particularly revealing in this respect.

In episode 217, Brian has made plans to go on a romantic trip with his much younger boyfriend Justin at the same time he is certain of being promoted to partner at the advertising agency he works for.[36] Instead of telling him he has made partner, Brian's boss tells him that the company has been sold. The central conflict of the episode is set up when Garner Vance, the feisty new owner of the company, fires everyone including Brian but gives Brian one week to "prove to me you're worth it." Momentarily knocked off his pedestal, the episode becomes fixated on Brian's careerism. Staying late at work, Brian researches Garner Vance and discovers he has never been able to land a coveted athletic equipment company as a client. Brian's mission is to secure this account for his new boss. To complicate matters, the client is in Chicago and not currently shopping for a new ad agency. Despite the apparent impossibility of securing the deal, Brian's confidence never wavers. He immediately pulls out of his trip with Justin so that he can travel to Chicago, a move that disappoints Justin:

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[35] The loft, over the course of the series, becomes an important setting in the show (e.g. several plot lines center on it). Like Waldo Lydecker's extravagantly decorated apartment in *Laura*, Brian's too is meant to reveal his status as a wealthy man.
[36] Lydecker in *Laura* was also at the top of the advertising field.

Justin: What the hell is in Chicago?

Brian: My new account.

Justin: But we're going to Vermont tomorrow.

Brian: Some other time.

Justin: Come on, you promised.

Brian: It's business.

Justin: Fuck business.

Brian: That's exactly who you're fucking. It's business. It's my business. It pays for this loft, it pays for snowboarding in Vermont, it pays for the Pittsburg Institute of Fine Arts. Now if I don't get on that plane, I'm going to be collecting unemployment in my fucking Armani Fall Collection.

The dialogue demonstrates how work takes priority over Brian's personal life. Brian never considers not fighting for his job. In contrast to other depictions of queers (for example in film noir) who were "naturally" affluent, here we see an acknowledgement on the part of the character that "things," the accoutrements of affluence, must be earned. In this respect, the character comes to symbolize the promise of capitalism.

Other characters take note of Brian's careerism. In a scene over breakfast, an upset Justin talks about Brian with Brain's best friend Michael.

Michael: I'm sure he would have rather gone with you.

Justin: Do you always defend him?

Michael: Look, if he doesn't make it now he never will.

Justin: He's already made it. He has money, success, a killer loft. What else does he want?

Michael: To be the best. If he gets this account he'll be a star, if he doesn't he's out of a job. It wont be that easy starting over at a new firm… you know with all the new guys, younger guys coming up all the time.

Justin: So what about me? Where do I fit in? I don't want to wait. I want a boyfriend who only wants to be with me. Who wants to stay home every once in a while. Who at least gets jealous when some other guy is sucking my dick right in front of him.

Michael: That's not Brian. It never will be.

Here, the idea is communicated that mere wealth is not the desired outcome of careerism and ambition, but rather being the best in one's chosen profession is. This competitive spirit is a tenet of capitalism where commodities compete with one another. This competitive drive is necessary between people according to the logic of the show. A kind of hyper-commitment to one's job at the expense of one's personal relationships becomes a key feature of queer affluence. It is not enough to work. You must be the best.

Another aspect of this episode is the manner in which Brian is able to use his sexual power (and "queer eye") to secure the new account. First, the athletic company uses very pedestrian ads to sell their products: the products are the only elements to their ads. Before heading to Chicago, Brian produces a photo shoot comprised of hard bodied, half naked (gay) men to posing with the athletic equipment. Brian makes-over the advertising campaign in a more sexual way—he brings a queer aesthetic to the images of

produces (think Abercrombie and Fitch catalog). Once in Chicago, Mr. Brown, the straight owner of the athletic company, makes it clear that he will not see Brian. To overcome this obstacle, Brian seduces Mr. Brown's male assistant (and has sex right there in the office). In exchange, the assistant tells Brian where Brown lunches. Brian shows up at the restaurant, pitches Mr. Brown his photos as "adding heat" to his all American athletic equipment by appealing to the gay market. Brown loves it. Brian lands the deal and secures Brown as a client. Back in Pittsburg, Garner Vance asks Brian, "I've been after him for years, how did you manage that?" Brian replies, "Did my homework." Clearly, doing one's homework pays off. Using his super-powered sexuality, unbridled ambition, and queer eye, Brian goes from fired to partner in one episode. According to the logic of the show, hard work and careerism pay big.

Work Out

If Brian Kinney is the gay "alpha male" of Showtime's *Queer as Folk*, Jackie Warner is the "alpha female" of Bravo's reality/fitness/gay soap opera, *Work Out* (2006-present). Like Brian Kinney, Jackie Warner is an avatar of queer affluence: "I'm just a small town girl from Mid-America who came to L. A. to seek my fortune," says Warner in a voice-over monologue opening the first episode of the first season of the show. We hear Warner's words as we see a montage of images of Beverly Hills (palm trees, high fashion stores, mansions, etc). Like Brian Kinney, Warner embodies careerism evidenced as her opening monologue continues:

> "I had a vision of a gym high in the sky, different from anything anyone had ever seen before. Two years ago when I found this incredible roof top space, I

transformed it into an elite penthouse gym called Sky Sport and Spa. Now I'm working hard to make it the most successful gym in Beverly Hills."

Automatically, the premise of the show is framed as a show about work.[37] So we learn within the first minute of the show that the "plot" of the show centers on Warner and her business. Of course it is not an ordinary gym. The monologue continues as Jackie says, "At Sky Sport, A-list clients pay up to $400 a session to stay in shape." Like Brian Kinney who is at the top of his profession, the function of the prelude of *Work Out* is to place Jackie "at the top of her game." The song that accompanies the opening credit sequence (and thus frames every subsequent episode of the series) achieves the same goal. A selection of the lyrics of the hip-hop song are as follows:

> *Beverly Hills where the rich keep it sexy.*
> *Work hard. Play hard. Turn into celebrity.*
> *With driving passion, Jackie keeps you motivated.*
> *Top of her game, your lifestyle will change.*
> *Work out. You can really work it out…*

It is not just a job. It is her "driving passion" for which she is at the "top of her game." It should be clear from the discussion thus far that affluence is part of the meanings circulating in the persona of Jackie Warner, and hence, in a show that centers on her life (and especially her work life). Jackie says, "The more I work, the more work I have. The more I build a brand or a business, the more work piles on my plate." But what makes this series an instance of queer affluence? Warner announces she is gay within moments of the first episode as she works with a male client who appears to be hinting at

[37] The title *Work Out* has multiple meanings. Set in a gym, the title references what people do in one. However, although it is a "reality" show it has much in common with fictional programs (think *ER* or *Murphy Brown*) that situate drama in the work environment rather than the family. In other words, part of the show is whether or not she is successful in business—will career choices *work* out?

a romantic interest in her. After this moment, the relationship she has with Mimi, her long time girlfriend, becomes a central narrative thread of the show (and trailers for the show). This show becomes "a first" in the way it spotlights a lesbian relationship, a tumultuous one at that—making yet another play on the show's title: will Jackie and Mimi *work out*?[38] With Jackie now coded as an out lesbian and with that coding centralized, the show's work aspects (e.g. the narrative threads that deal with Jackie running her business) become narratives that deal with queer affluence and entrepreneurship. And like Brian Kinney of *Queer as Folk*, in terms of aesthetics, Jackie foots the bill of queer affluence. She's attractive, charismatic, well dressed, impeccable body, and posses the accoutrements of affluence (BWM SUV, large home in "the Hollywood Hills, etc). Both characters are examples of queer affluence and demonstrate how recent depictions of queerness are permissive of the queer sexuality in a way previous images have not been. Both Brian and Jackie are sexual. From the perspective of ideology, though, their careerism minimizes the progressive elements of their queer sexuality. Their hyper-achievements become ways of not identifying with the characters. While they are certainly worthy of being role models, their tales teach us a version of assimilation. The may be queers, and they may be winning, but they still play by the rules of the game. And therefore, the game remains unchallenged, the status quo remains in tact.

[38] Of course *The L Word* is the first show to deal in any substantive way with lesbian relationships. However, *The L Word* is, like *Queer as Folk* was, on Showtime—a pay cable channel. Bravo, while on cable, is included in most basic cable packages, and is therefore able to reach many more households. In other words, *Work Out* is in a more mainstream venue then *The L Word*.

The Fantasy of Queer Affluence: A Conclusion

One problem with queer affluence is that it is prevalent enough to matter. Activist Amber Hollibaugh (2001) says, "We are told—and we tell ourselves—queerness can't be poor." And so the fantasy of queer affluence masks the reality of life for many gays and lesbians and is thus divisive. Hollibaugh writes:

> We punish people in this country for being poor and we punish homosexuality. When both are combined, it does more than double the effect: It twists and deepens it, gives it sharper edges, and heightens our inability to duck and cover or slide through to a safer place. It forces you to live more permanently outside than either condition dictates.

So when we see queer affluence over and over people forget that queers are everywhere, not just in the upper echelons of society. David Becker (1997) is troubled by the stereotype of queer affluence:

> This characterization is a perfect right-wing wedge issue, effectively isolating us from each other and other disenfranchised groups, in addition to echoing anti-Semitic slurs of the past. Such efforts require those of us with money to come out about our privilege in order to expose these lies, as difficult as that can be sometimes. (p. 231)

It is a wedge issue because the logic of the right wing would say, how can those who are so affluent possibly need 'special rights.' Their lives look pretty good by any standard. And this is the lie that Becker refers to. When we see queer affluence, we forget about those who have not. The real danger in these kinds of representations is that they work to render invisible larger social class power structures. Hennessey (2000) writes:

> Redressing gay invisibility by promoting images of a seemingly middleclass gay consumer or by inviting us to see queer identities only in terms of style, textuality, or performative play helps produce imaginary gay/queer subjects that keep invisible the divisions of wealth and labor that these images and knowledges depend on. (p. 140)

And so we can see this principle at work even in a hypersexualized gay subject like Brian Kinney or a less 'hyper' yet still sexual subject like Jackie Warner. Both of their shows tend to fetishize queer visibility using these characters/people to push the envelop of queer representation. While the shows force the viewer to fixate on the issue of queer visibility (in the way it is embodied in these 'progressive characters'), what I have tried to show, in consideration of queer affluence, is that these characters' relations to capital goes unexamined—but does not have to. It seems to me that both figures straddle the line between their transgressive qualities as sexualized subjects and their safe qualities which hail from their entrepreneurial/corporate business acumen. In fact, both characters demonstrate that aside from sexual differences (which makes them 'new and improved' from what came before them), these characters are totally compatible with, if not poster children for, American Capitalism, and are therefore, not that threatening at all.

In the next chapter, building on the understanding and inner-workings of queer affluence as I have uncovered it above, I will turn to the queer celebrity spokesperson. The figure, aimed at the mainstream, co-opts strands of queer affluence and its signifiers, but these characteristics and signifiers are re-packaged in such a way so as to be palatable to a mainstream audience. The queer celebrity spokesperson, not only consumes in the spirit of affluence, but also sells the idea of consumption to a larger audience.

Chapter Four: Queer Affluence and the Openly Gay Spokesperson

"I'm not made of money, I just have a lot of it."

-Ellen DeGeneres (Out Lesbian Talk Show Host/Comedian)

"I have a million dollars in the stock market, because if I lose a million dollars, I don't personally care."

-Suze Orman (Out lesbian/Financial Guru/Best Selling Author/TV Personality)

The previous chapter has chronicled and theorized the trope and stereotype of queer affluence in popular film and television. A variety of texts were analyzed from both media with a particular focus on contemporary narrative television. The present chapter dovetails with the last by looking at the rise of the queer celebrity, a figure whose presence I will argue is made possible by the commercial success and popularity of the texts heretofore considered. The purpose of this chapter is to elucidate a particular version of queer celebrity as it intersects with the signifiers of queer affluence. This task is accomplished by focusing on individual stars who function as "real live" exemplars of the fictional figures examined in the pervious chapter. How is it that some celebrities become the literal embodiment of queer affluence? This question is at the center of this chapter.

The Queer Celebrity Industrial Complex is a term I use in this chapter as a way to conceptualize and think about a cadre of celebrities, corporations, traditional products (goods and services), and media products (television programs, books, web pages, blogs, etc.) that, when considered alongside each other coalesce into a meaningful Master Narrative. The characters in this Master Narrative are the queer celebrities whose individual narratives embody queer affluence. Because this Master Narrative is being

continually written, any discussion here will be incomplete. Rather examine this text through to its final climax, my aim is to sketch the queer affluence story arcs by looking a the mini-narratives that comprise the Master.

Intertextuality and Celebrity-as-Text

Intertextuality is a concept that is tantamount to my entire dissertation because it has the theoretical power to link every text considered herein.[39] Nevertheless, it is a concept whose rhetorical limits must be sketched in order to be functional. Texts are superficial and deep all at once:

> Because of their incompleteness, all popular texts have leaky boundaries; they flow into each other, they flow into everyday life. Distinctions among texts are as invalid as the distinctions between text and life. Popular culture can be studied only intertextually, for it exists only in this intertextual circulation. (Fiske, p. 126).

Furthermore, using intertextuality as a critical-analytical framework has important implications for drawing lines between media texts and contemporary culture. Ott and Walter (2000) argue, "It [intertextuality] expands the way critics think of the practice of reading, and enhances understanding of postmodern culture and its role in the social world. It is a valuable theoretical tool—provided that media scholars are precise about how they are employing it" (p. 442). Borrowed from literary criticism, an explication of this concept as it has been applied in media studies is necessary in order to proceed.

Intertextuality is a reference of some kind between texts. Jim Collins (1992) in sketching the tenets of postmodern television criticism contends that intertextuality is a

[39] Intertextuality is the "theoretical glue" which links all representations of queer affluence.

feature of all postmodern media texts. He calls this marker hyperconsciousness, which is when texts actively acknowledge their status as text. Texts accomplish this through intertextual references to other texts and even at times, back to themselves. Mapping intertextual connections, then, becomes a way to access the meanings in a text.

For media and popular culture scholar John Fiske (1987), intertextuality comes into play anytime a text is read. He posits a general version of the theory: "… intertextuality proposes that any one text is necessarily read in relationship to others and that range of textual knowledges is brought to bear on it." (p. 108). This relationship need not be a direct reference or connection to another specific text or texts, but instead is a connection to "our culture's image bank." (p. 108). So for Fiske, "intertextuality exists rather in the space between texts"(p.108).[40] Because of this link between text and cultural image bank, uncovering the intertextual relations among and between texts becomes important cultural work because it "can provide us with valuable clues to readings that a particular culture or subculture is likely to produce from it" (p. 108). To be clear, my project and the arguments developed below, rely, in part, on the uncovering of these intertextual connections to make apparent the plausibility of my arguments. My arguments rest then, on the features of the text, and while I am discussing possible meanings, I am not in any way arguing what particular audiences do with the texts that I

[40] To understand the difference between intertextuality and a direct reference to another text, Fiske gives an example using Madonna's "Material Girl" video from the 1980s. The video copies (via costume, mise-en-scene, setting, character) a scene from Marilyn Monroe's film *Gentleman Prefer Blondes*. This parody aspect of Madonna's video, Fiske calls allusion, but "the video's intertextuality refers rather to the cultural image of the sexy blonde star who plays with men's desire for her and turns it to her advantage" (p.108).

discuss. This chapter is not a study of producers or consumers of messages, it is a study of messages and their meanings.

Ott and Walter (2000) take issue with Fiske and Collin's conceptions of intertextuality because they feel the term is conflated when employed by various other scholars. They seek to restore the terms "hermeneutic value" by first establishing its dual legacy and then offering their own made-over conception of intertextuality.[41] These authors divide intertextuality into two general areas. In their area one, borrowing from Fiske, intertextuality is an interpretive practice—it is something that particular readers or groups of readers (audiences) do (decode) with a text in order to make sense out of it. In their second area, these authors also conceptualize intertextuality as a textual practice—something that producers of texts do (encode) in the creation of a text. In this area, they distinguish between parodic allusion, creative inclusion, and self-reflexive reference.[42] What is most important is that both areas have become conventional in today's media landscape.

None of these conceptions of intertextuality specifically address how a celebrity functions as a particular kind of intertextual reference. This is a conception that I wish to develop in this section in order to validate the arguments I make later in consideration of the three celebrities-as-text that I analyze in the sections below.

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[41] The dual legacy refers to the term's use as a way to describe how audiences interpret a given text and an intentional built-in feature of the text by its author. The problem as these authors see it is the same term is used to describe two separate phenomenon.
[42] Parodic allusion is illustrated by the Marilyn Monroe reference in the Madonna video discussed previously. Creative inclusion involves using a fragment from another text. And self-reflexive reference is when a text references others and in doing so acknowledges its own status as a text.

A star (celebrity) is a particular kind of text. Namely, one that is always already intertextual.[43] Richard Dyer (2003) argues that "the star phenomenon consists of everything that is publicly available about stars" (p. 2) and that "star images are always extensive, multimedia, and intertextual" (p.3). Drawing on examples from the 1980s Fiske (1987) explains how the meanings associated with the celebrity Mr. T cross-over into B. A., the character he played on *The A Team*: "The meaning of Mr. T/B. A. does not reside in any one of his screen appearances but in the intertextuality which is the aggregate of all and an essential part of the reading of one" (p. 109). Similarly, to complicate the notion of the celebrity as simply a person, Fiske gives another example: "Madonna is similarly a web of intertextual meanings crossing media boundaries, "she" is a sign formed by television, film, records, the press, and the publicity industry" (p. 109). Likewise, in another Fiske (1989) essay he writes "Madonna is only the intertextual circulation of her meanings and pleasures; she is neither a text or a person, but a set of meanings in process." (p. 124). Celebrities, then, must always be seen as celebrities-as-text; an eternal amalgam of flesh, blood, image, commodity.

I think it would be a mistake to not factor in the idea of "the real person" in the construction of a given celebrity. The texts and celebrities-as-text that I examine below are real people that real people relate to. Dyer argues that "Stars articulate what it is to be a human being in contemporary society; that is they express the particular notion we hold of the person, of the individual" (p. 7). And it is because of this "articulation of

[43] In this section I am reviewing literature within film studies, and this literature uses "star" and "stardom" nomenclature to theorize what I am referring to as "celebrity." These scholars who study, critique, and theorize "stardom" typically focus on classic Hollywood and the typical Hollywood star. I am co-opting their arguments to discuss what I see as the postmodern equivalent—the celebrity. For example, Suze Orman is a celebrity, not a star.

personhood" that there is a need to believe in what Dyer calls "The rhetoric of sincerity or authenticity." People want to know who the celebrity "really is" and what they are "really like." Despite the various roles that a star may play, there is still an underlying coherence read into that star's image. Dyer gives an excellent example:

> A series of shots of a star whose image has changed—say Elizabeth Taylor—at various points in her career could work to fragment her, to present her as nothing but a series of disconnected looks; but in practice it works to confirm that beneath all these different looks there is an irreducible core that gives all those looks unity, namely Elizabeth Taylor. Despite the elaboration of roles, social types, attitudes and values suggested by any one of these looks, one flesh and blood person is embodying them all. We know that Elizabeth Taylor exists apart from all these looks, and this knowledge alone is sufficient to suggest that there is a coherence behind them all" (p. 9).

For Dyer people crave this coherence because "…what the star really is can be located in some inner, private, essential core. This is how the star phenomenon reproduces the overriding ideology of the person in contemporary society." This coherence and consistency will be revisited in my discussions of Ellen DeGeneres, Carson Kressley, and Suze Orman. Having now outlined intertextuality as a theoretical tool for discovering meanings in texts in general and then examining how celebrities can function as intertextual texts themselves, I will now analyze particular celebrities, their texts, and the meanings they circulate regarding queerness and affluence.

The Rise of the Dykon: Ellen DeGeneres and Suze Orman

When a celebrity reaches household-name status and becomes a popular culture icon and this same celebrity happens to be a lesbian—a dykon is born.[44] Dykons are the embodiment of queer affluence. According to Out Magazine's April 2007 list of "The Most Powerful Gay Men and Women in America" Ellen DeGeneres, Rosie O'Donnell, and Suze Orman are in the top of the class ranking number three, six, and thirteen respectively. According to the article, DeGeneres made the list because "everyone loves an out-and-proud lesbian—that and the $65 million she is reportedly worth." O'Donnell is given credit for reviving lackluster morning chat fest *The View* as well as being a trailblazer in the world of gay family travel by starting R Family Cruises with her partner Kelli O'Donnell. Suze Orman is on the list for her net worth, television program, and proliferation of books. On an even bigger Who's Who list, Ellen ranked number 17 on *Forbes 20 Richest Women in Entertainment in 2007* with an estimated net worth of $65 million.[45]

My Life, My Card: Ellen DeGeneres and American Express

Nowhere is queer affluence more apparent then in the celebrity of Ellen DeGeneres. She is arguably the most popular and successful "out" celebrity that has ever lived. Jennifer Reed (2005) calls DeGeneres "Public Lesbian Number One." Rather than trace the trajectory of her celebrity as Reed has done, I will examine a recent

[44] The term dykon has not been used in academic literature. The urban dictionary (www.urbandictionary.com) defines it as "any celebrity or cultural icon who popular among lesbians and considered a gay icon." My usage is slightly different.

[45] Rosie O'Donnell is someone whose celebrity text could be read in relation to the issues raised in this chapter. But I feel as though she is political in the way that Ellen and Suze are not. And while her stint on *The View* was definitely mainstream (but turbulent) her relation to the Queer Industrial Complex is somewhat tenuous. Because she brings queer issues to the forefront she is not seen as "playing nice" like Ellen and Suze.

composite that consists of the advertising campaign she has done for credit card company American Express as well as a segment from her popular daytime television talk show.

American Express's "My Life, My Card" ad campaign ran from 2004-2007 and featured a variety of celebrities. According to American Express executive David Schwab (Ellen lends 2007) the concept behind the campaign was to capitalize on our celebrity obsessed culture, to see what stars do on their own time, but in a "nice, classy way." In one television spot, the viewer finds Ellen in a large, Zen-like, open-air room with garden views, on a mat in a meditation pose. We hear her thoughts in her own voice as she meditates, "Clear the mind, mind clear." She quickly loses her focus. Her next thought is "I still can't figure out how I got charged twice for that pair of socks." She ponders various scenarios of how this might be and comes to the conclusion that she was charged per sock because they were argyle. What is important about this ad is the structure of building identification with a middle-class sensibility while at the same time allowing DeGeneres to retain her affluent status. What is subtracted from this ad is any queer connotations, except for that brought in simply by casting DeGeneres. In deconstructing the ad, the setting is crucial. With the exotic and private nature of the setting (the décor, the background bird noises, the well maintained gardens, lack of any other people), she must either be traveling abroad or she must be at her own home. In either scenario she is in a place where only the wealthy would be. Any psychic distance the viewer might feel seeing a wealthy woman meditating in this lush setting, is undone by the conversation she has with herself. The logic goes something like *She is just like me*. *Like me*, *she reads her credit card statements and it's a problem that she was*

overcharged.[46] So at the same time she is not like us because of where she is, she is like us because of her concern. A precarious position to be in indeed.

Two print ads from the campaign achieve a similar effect. Each ad consists of a picture and a questionnaire filled out by DeGeneres. The questionnaire is a list of open-ended questions that includes items like "Childhood ambition----------" or "Last purchase----------" and DeGeneres has penned in the answers. The effect of this questionnaire along with the words "My Life, My Card" positions the ad as an authentic glimpse into the "real" life of DeGeneres. One of the print ads shows DeGeneres sitting playing poker with a dog at a kitschy-kitchen table. As in the television commercial, the setting is crucial. The kitchen is small and aside from a modern coffee maker and blender appears to be from a different time period. The busy wallpaper, the retro-1950s style table and chairs, the yellow cupboards, all work to achieve a certain level of quirkiness. Is this Ellen's kitchen? Also, Ellen is dressed in what appears to be pajama bottoms, mixed-matched undershirt and shirt, and her hair is disheveled. In another print ad, which contains the same questionnaire, a black and white photo shows DeGeneres simply brushing her teeth. She is turned, back to the sink and mirror and acknowledges the camera. It would not be a stretch to imagine that the bathroom in this ad could be found in the same house as the kitchen. The bathroom is small, tiled, contains a small sink and medicine cabinet. Because there is an emphasis in the copy that accompanies these two photographs on authenticity in that DeGeneres uses her own handwriting and that we learn the intimate detail that the last thing that she purchased was butter, the ads

[46] The point that I am trying to make here is that even though she's a millionaire who really can buy a sock factory if she wanted to, she is presented here as having a middle class concern.

want us to assume that this *is* DeGeneres's residence. Now one could argue that literally playing poker with dog is enough to cast doubt on the authentic nature of the one ad, but the possibility remains open for the reasons I just outlined above: the copy, her persona, and her target audience---who at some level needs to believe she is just like them. *She is middle class, she is not extremely rich. She is not gay. Any way you cut it, I can relate to Ellen.*[47]

The April 26, 2007 episode of *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* featured a segment where Ellen goes house hunting with her real estate agent. The entire segment is a tour of "the priciest home in Bel Aire"—30,000 square feet and $30 million. In this segment we can witness the same identification tactic I describe above—the affirmation and denial of difference via wealth. At the beginning of the tour, Ellen inquires about price and asks her agent if putting $20 thousand down would allow her to get a mortgage---a reasonable figure for middle class home owners. The agent tells her that she would have to put down half the cost of the home ($15 million). During the remainder of the tour, which includes all the excesses a $30 million mansion might offer, Ellen continues with the mortgage joke—bartering with her agent for various deals—all of which sound as though she is looking to buy a home that costs $200 thousand.

During each stop on the tour, DeGeneres appears to separate herself from the affluent person who could afford such a home. At one point, she tells the agent what she would do if she lived in the house. High camp ensues as DeGeneres pulls out a three-foot

[47] This same element is illustrated in the stardom/celebrity of Oprah Winfrey. We know Winfrey is a billionaire (number 1 on the aforementioned Forbes List). A few years ago the theme song to her show was "I'm every woman" which made clear her ability/desire to literally be relatable to every kind of woman/person. And in this regard, Ellen is the same way.

tall champagne flute, and says as though she is doing an impersonation of someone, "I have money and I drink out of a giant glass." The effect of this seems to be to distance herself from the excesses of the wealthy. At the same time, she continues to remind the viewer that she does in fact have money: "I'm not saying I don't have money, because I do." The mortgage banter continues during a tour of the home's regulation bowling alley. DeGeneres asks if she could supplement her meager down payment by opening the bowling alley to the public and charging admission. I believe the segment is an illustration of the way in which DeGeneres, "the user-friendly lesbian" stays user friendly.[48] She is popular because we can believe she is just like us, even though we know she is not.

As an openly queer celebrity, this is some feat. In fact, just as Ellen denies and affirms her affluent status, what has become of her queerness in these depictions? It might appear to be erased from the composite of her celebrity I have analyzed thus far. Her queerness, though downplayed in her star persona, can never fully evaporate because of the intertextual connections to her coming out in the 1990s as Ellen Morgan on her then television sitcom.[49] So by the time she is doing ads for American Express, Ellen's star text is already one in which authenticity is a key feature. Dow (2001) writes that "DeGeneres's public confession of her sexuality was saturated with implications of authenticity at different levels. First and most clearly, her revelations were couched in

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[48] According to Dow (2001) she is the "Ultimate User Friendly Lesbian."

[49] Recall that Ellen's character on television came out at the same time she did. A postmodern move for sure. Jennifer Reed (2005) writes of "the event," "This was not about a single television series. It was more of an epic drama. It was an intertextual media event" (p. 23). Reed's piece is an excellent chronicle of the various pieces of that 'epic drama' from a feminist perspective.

terms of her personal discovery or recovery of authenticity; she was revealing her 'true' self to the public" (p. 126). The case of Ellen's coming out is a near perfect illustration of celebrity baggage spilling over from one text to another.

> Not only does the program gain credibility for its representation from the intertextual links with DeGeneres's personal testimony and its interpretation in other venues, but, in many ways the struggle for the truth and the eventual triumph of authenticity and honesty that DeGeneres described or alluded to in interviews was enacted within the Ellen episodes. (Dow, 2001, p. 126)

In other words, Ellen's credibility was bolstered by her television character and her television character's 'authenticity' was bolster by "the real" Ellen coming out. Dow concludes, "Thus, DeGeneres's testimony, coupled with the contexts in which it appears constructs an authenticity narrative…" (p. 126). This authenticity is carried forward into the depictions of Ellen in the ads discussed above as well as in the house-hunting segment.

Ellen's queerness comes through in her play on gender. In the print and televised American Express ads and well as the segment from her show analyzed above, Ellen dresses like a stylish teenage boy from the 1950s. She wears slacks, tennis shoes, argyle sweaters with dress shirts popping out around the collar, her hair is messy, but styled. She is not traditionally feminine nor is she butch. In a sense, she is neutered and she is therefore able to be identified with by all.[50] If I want to see a lesbian I can see a lesbian. If I want to see a comedian, I can see a comedian, if I want to see someone family

[50] Oprah is similar in that her persona contains little references to her having any kind of interest in sex. Of course, Oprah and Gayle's relationship allows for obvious queer readings despite her recent denial.

friendly, I can see that. If I want to see a power lesbian I can see that. In short, because of Ellen's ambiguity and because she is like us and not like us, she becomes someone for everyone.

The Courage to be Rich: Suze Orman[51]

With bestselling books like *The Road to Wealth*, *The Laws of Money*, and, *The Courage to Be Rich*, Suze Orman has fashioned her own industrial complex. In addition to these and other books, she writes a monthly column for *O Magazine*, a biweekly column for Yahoo Finance, has her own branded credit score improvement software which she sells on QVC and PBS (and major online retailers), and has a syndicated television program on CNBC. While never having affirmed nor denied being a lesbian, Suze Orman finally came out publicly in February 2007. The manner in which she did it was quite queer indeed. She came out in an interview while promoting her new *New York Times* bestseller appropriately titled *Women and Money*. In an interview by Deborah Soloman in *The New York Time Magazine*, the question is asked of Orman, "Are you married?" Orman responds, "I'm in a relationship with life. My life is just out there. I'm on the road every day. I love my life." Soloman follows up, "Meaning what? Do you live with anyone?" And finally Suze spills the beans for the first time ever publicly, "K.T. is my life partner. K. T. stands for Kathy Travis. We're going on seven years. I have never been with a man in my whole life. I'm still a 55 year old virgin." Interestingly, after this major admission, the conversation turns directly to money. Soloman asks, "Would you like to get married to K. T.?" Suze goes right to money talk,

[51] *The Courage to be Rich* is a brilliant (though insulting) title and the first Suze Orman book that I bought. The title is a perfect encapsulation of the argument that I will make regarding Orman. The expression is a rewording of the American Dream and implies if you are not rich, the problem lies with you—you lack courage.

"Yes. Absolutely. Both of us have millions of dollars in our name. It's killing me that upon my death, K. T. is going to lose 50 percent of everything I have to estate taxes. Or vice versa." Unlike someone like Ellen DeGeneres whose celebrity continually positions her as "just like us," Orman freely discusses her wealth. Soloman bluntly asks Orman, "How much are you worth these days?" To which Orman gladly answers, "One journalist estimated my liquid net worth at $25 million. That's pretty close. My houses are worth another $7 million." Finally, Orman, who has made a career of teaching people how to save their money and live a debt free life admits to Soloman that she in fact does enjoy spending money: "My greatest pleasure is still flying private. I spend between $300,000 to $500,000, depending on my year, on flying private."

In so many ways Suze Orman's celebrity image is the epitome of queer affluence. Intertextually, Suze equals money. The mythology of Suze Orman is presented in a piece of publicity on her website entitled "Suze's Story." This document is fully illustrated with personal photos and is a combination of the American success story with a touch of Dickens's *Great Expectations* sans the romance: Suze starts out life with a speech impediment that keeps her in the back of the class and unsure of herself. She carries this insecurity into college. When she completes college she finds herself working at a restaurant for seven years feeling as though she could accomplish nothing more. Finally, she decides she wants to open her own restaurant but is $20 thousand short of what she needs to get started. Miraculously, on that very day, a customer leaves $50 thousand with a note that says, "This is for people like you, so that your dreams can come true. To be paid back in ten years, if you can, with no interest." The remainder of the story has Suze at Merril Lynch Brokerage where she invests the money and gets a job, works her way up

the corporate latter, and blossoms into the millionaire she is today. Of course she pays the money back to the man who lent it to her but does not hear back from him after she does so. Years later, she closes her story with what is suppose to be the actual note from the man thanking her for repaying her:

> That loan may have been one of the best investments that I will ever make. Who else could have invested in a counter girl with porcelain blue eyes and a million-dollar personality and watch that investment mature into the successful career woman who still has porcelain blue eyes and a million dollar personality?

This story, in the context of her website, in addition to the products that she sells and the advice that she gives, is also meant as a way for her to connect with her audiences on a personal level. Harry Hurt (2007) financial columnist for *The New York Times* reviews Orman's new book *Women and Money* and comments on how one of Orman's texts sends readers to another:

> In a dazzling display of multiplatforming, Ms. Orman punctuates her text with directions on how to consult suzeorman.com for more particulars on matters ranging from finding the best discount stock brokerage firms to the importance of paying off high-interest-rate credit card balances as quickly as possible.

Hurt also did an informal survey of successful business women who identified with Orman: "She started with nothing just like a lot of us did, and she's made a success by knowing what she's talking about." Like Carson Kressley, Orman's job is dispensing advice. Her famous catch phrase punctuates each of her hour-long call-in shows: "People first, then money, then things. Now *you* stay safe." The inclusive pronoun *you* again, coupled with a solitary Suze on camera speaking directly to the home viewer

builds identification. Another feature on her website is "Suze's Scrap Book" which allows site visitors to look through digital photo albums from the last several years. The photo albums serve to bolster my claims regarding work and affluence. The photos (since they are literally arranged chronologically) tell the story of a woman, author, television personality, and yes, even QVC host, who is constantly on the go. As she travels from book signing to cable network, to public speaking venue, the image of Suze Orman is the only constant. Like Ellen, even though partnered, Suze is alone. When she is pictured with children the photo captions let us know they are nieces and nephews. There are two pictures of her partner K. T. In one, K.T. stands in front of a promotional poster for Suze. In another, the two women embrace. However, if you read the photo in the context of the other photos, and you have no idea who K.T. is, you would never know that she is hugging her lesbian partner. As Dyer notes about star as texts, "we make it work according to how much it speaks to us in terms we can understand about things that are important to us." (p. 14). If you are "in the know" then the Suze scrapbook reveals an affluent lesbian. If you are not, the scrapbook is a glimpse into the "authentic" life of Suze Orman—a career driven, money maven—a exemplar of all that American Capitalism can offer those who have the courage.

Putting the Queer in QVC: Home Shopping and the Gay Male Entrepreneur

The trope of queer affluence has found its way to what must surely be one of the last bastions of what one would think would be rather conservative television—the home shopping cable channel called QVC (which stands for Quality, Value, Convenience). For several hours each month flamboyant hairdressers such as Chaz Dean and Nick Chavez sell hair care products they have developed and/or bear their name. Pretty boy

entrepreneur Scott Vincent Borba teaches viewers and show hosts how to apply his skin care products that also bear his name. Suze Orman sells her books and FICO kit. The same channel where women call in at two in the morning and talk about buying a baby doll for their collection is suddenly pitching products using queer men and women. Queerness and queer affluence unfolds in what is perhaps the strangest of all venues—the home shopping via television experience. I will now turn and focus on reality-television-star-turned-author-turned-children's book author-turned QVC apparel brand—Carson Kressley.

For this analysis, I watched an hour-long segment on QVC called *PERFECT with Carson Kressley* which aired live on March 5, 2007. The show featured Kressley with QVC hostess Lisa Robertson. The function of the hostess is to create a rapport with the guest, ask questions, make commentary, and essentially stand-in for the at home viewer. Because the show is literally done/performed live, both hostess and guest must be skilled at impromptu speaking, and the hostess (and hence the viewer) can never predict exactly what will come out of the guest's mouth. Thus, QVC provides not only a platform to sell particular goods to particular markets, but it also functions simultaneously as entertainment.

In the beginning of the segment, Lisa introduces Kressley to the audience by going over his credentials. She never says the words "Queer Eye," but instead says things like "when he made people over on *that* show" as though she is unable to say its title but at the same time telling the audience—"you know who this guy is." After introductions they begin showing various pieces from his clothing line. All the pieces are "made over" basics. What makes them made over is "the details" that have been added

such as color swatchs underneath collars of shirts or shirt sleeve cuffs. The line is fairly standard fare. It is not long before queer comments start to fly. At one point, Lisa makes the comment that a pair of pants has a "straight cut" to which Carson replies, "How ironic is that?" Lisa nervously laughs. After several pieces of women's wear have "sold out" (which everything appears to do on QVC), they bring out a male model to show off some of Carson's male pieces. This is where Kressley can no longer be contained. He immediately comments that the model is "Man Candy" and looks "extra cute." In a jokingly-but-not maneuver, Lisa jumps in between Carson and the male model and says "I'm separating you two" as though she is saving the model from Carson's advances. Throughout the episode Carson stands in an exaggerated pose, as though he has thrown his lower back out—one hand on hip, with the same hip cocked to the side—a very effeminate stance that he maintains throughout. One caller named Lisa calls in and because the host has the same name Carson says he wants to be Lisa too. And he continues this gag throughout the segment saying "I'm Lisa." It is a campy performance to say the least.

The importance of Kressley's celebrity is not the individual ads, but the cumulative star text that develops as we consider the body of texts he has appeared in as one. It is a success narrative with a queer celebrity at its center. Kressley's celebrity is staged in consistent ways across the texts in which he appears but the queerness is always managed because he is always selling something. The success of his persona on *Queer Eye* as the arbiter of fashion to straight (male) subjects is picked up in lesser-niched programming---mainstream television commercials. For example, Carson appears in ads aimed at straight women for Caress body wash. Here he falls back to "the queen in

shining armor" trope of the gay male as confidant to straight women, literally appearing in an on-line episode for the product as the fairy Godmother character from Cinderella. In 2004 Pepperidge Farm employed Kressley to tap the youth market for their new Goldfish product. According to Steve White (New Television 2004) Vice President of Youth Snacking at Pepperidge Farms, Kressley "has great credibility with young adults—our core target for this product—plus he's dynamic, fun, genuine and very positive in everything he does. That image is totally consistent with the Goldfish brand." So Kressley's queerness has proved profitable in a variety of mainstream venues. To be sure, we recognize Kressley to be queer in each text in which he appears. But we should give pause to a version of queerness, even though it bursts at the seams at times, is rendered marketable enough that it can be used to sell crackers to teenagers. Like Ellen and Suze, Kressley's celebrity persona is always linked to products. In every text in which he appears, he becomes the queer spokesperson for consumerism.

Queer Celebrity/Queer Affluence: A Conclusion

One could argue that any celebrity text is a version of a success narrative and thus comprised of some degree of affluence. But success takes on new dimensions when queerness is factored in. I have shown in pervious chapters that a cultural stereotype exists that links queerness with affluence and success. This stereotype developed over time and popular culture and has changed in response to it. Whereas the film noir queer was demonized for his inappropriate consumption, the queer of today is championed as a master consumer, and is held up as a shopping role model for all of society to follow. His (and now her) excess patterns of consumption that once rendered him 'the evil queen' are now rendered palatable (and now include queer women) by an American Culture that

thrives on excess. What we learn, then, is that what was deemed threatening to the social order at one time, can become embraced by the same culture once that culture finds a way to strip the figure of its threatening qualities and package it in a way that can produce a profit. Just 'new and improved' enough to command the gaze of shoppers, the queer celebrity spokesperson is barely queer at all. Though visible as lesbians and gay men, their queerness becomes an accessory to the business of commodity culture. If our culture has reached a place where mainstream audiences are able to identify with queer spokespeople, and as I have shown, this version of queerness is narrowly defined as affluent and always linked to commodity culture---what kind of room does this kind of queer visibility leave for the possibility of politics? If it is true that queerness has transformative qualities, how, in light of these recent depictions, is this potential shaping up?

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Figure 2 is a picture that, for me, is worth more than a thousand words. It is the image that inspired this dissertation. It pulls together in a single advertisement so many of the issues I have discussed. The ad shows two attractive shirtless men in an intimate embrace. The second man is clearly focused on arousing the first man—the main subject of the ad. The first man has a look of near contempt as his ear is being nibbled. The ad copy reveals his thought: "I'd rather be shopping." In what has all the makings of a hot a gay sex act—we find instead: boys interrupted. The man's facial expression and the copy underscore the logic of queer affluence at work in the ad—his impulse to consume is all consuming. Shopping becomes an extension of one's sexuality for these guys. With this logic in place why bother with politics when shopping offers a world of freedom and democracy? As I have shown throughout this dissertation, capitalism makes a space via the marketplace for (some) queers. If you can pay, you can play in this world. Interestingly, the ad for the website (www.buygay.com) lists a series of products sold on the site (of course "gay" products always consist of sex toys, lubes, and porno) as well as two items which cannot be bought or sold: pride and pleasure. By consuming these "gay" products, by making a purchase on this website, the viewer of the ad is not only shopping, but he (or she) is participating in a supposed political act: buying gay (read: supporting the gay community.) Sexuality and shopping have merged. The ad is symbolic of queer representation as I have examined it in this dissertation. Today, queerness has become commodified and politics too seems to have become synonymous with consumption. To conclude, I would like to consider some of the broader political implications of my project and show how queer affluence can seen to be invested in

contradictory missions: insisting that queers are different at the same time pointing queer people towards assimilation in mainstream culture.

Queer Affluence: What a Difference

Queer affluence conceals what queers have in common with straight people. Queer scholar Michael Bronski (1998) points out that "the media-hype image of 'lifestyle' homosexuals portrays them as cultural elitist and pleasure seekers unencumbered by the everyday realities and burdens that contextualize human existence" (p.157). He goes on, "They share, then, many of the same economic anxieties as heterosexuals, although these similarities are almost never addressed or discussed in the mainstream media" (p. 157). In his reading of the popular *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, queer critic Gustavus Stadler (2005) echoes Bronski's concerns regarding the perception of difference embodied in queer affluence:[i]

> To be queer means not only to be good at making straight people's lives happier but to have the time to do so—for another fantasy these shows serve as a platform for is the unactionable, momentary sigh of envy to live 'like that,' with no children to worry about or wake up to at five a. m., no haranguing in-laws, no looming divorce rate statistics, nor prospective wedding locations and meals to suss out. In the twisted logic that is no doubt rarely as complete or systematic as I am portraying it, being queer means having time to read magazines, go to museums, and hone one's salon conversation. (p. 111)

And so queer affluence and the supposed 'freedom' that it offers adds to our difference from rather than similarity to mainstream culture. But this difference for many is illusory.

Rad to be Trad: Queer Affluence and the Politics of Assimilation[52]

It is impossible to examine queer affluence as an organizing principle in media images or in celebrity personas without witnessing the politics of assimilation at work. By assimilation, I mean an agenda manifested in rhetoric (i.e. discourse) that makes palatable a version of queerness that is safe, and therefore does not challenge the status quo. As a tool of capitalism, assimilation works through homogenization by denying differences. Daniel Harris (1997) writes:

> Progress in gay rights is often won at the expense of our indigenous, unacculturated idiosyncrasies as a minority which must be toned down or erased altogether in order for us to achieve complete social acceptance. Gay liberation and the gay sensibility are staunch antagonists. The stronger we become politically, the less of a distinct ethnic identity we are able to maintain in the face of assimilation, much as aboriginal tribes, untouched by Western culture, once forfeited their native customs and adopted foreign varieties of religion and dress. (p. 84)

Harris, like me, sees assimilation partly as a project that transpires as large companies market their wares to queers or make use of queer images to sell their products to the masses. Harris says, "The cultivation of the gay market necessitates its destruction, the erasure of the borders that once set it apart from mainstream America in whose image we

[52] "Rad to be Trad" (Radical to be traditional) is a phrase that Richard Goldstein (2002) uses to capture the political strategy of conservative homosexuals, which he dubs *homocons*, who actively pursue and endorse assimilation into straight culture. (p. 11)

are allowing ourselves to be recreated" (p. 82). Part of assimilation is about making *us* more like *them* so that they will like/approve/stop hating us. There is another side of assimilation, a slippery side, that has to do with the fact that as boundaries erode between what used to be gay and straight, what was niche, becomes mass. Grooming products that used to be bought by gay men are now bought by all men. And, so assimilation has a real value in terms of dollars and cents. Assimilation makes some people money.

In terms of representation, assimilation and normalcy go hand and hand. Steven Seidman (2005) says that the image of 'the normal gay' has become the dominant image of queer people in popular culture. The normal gay is fully human and equal to the heterosexual, but "…is expected to be gender conventional, link sex to love and a marriage-like relationship, defend family values, personify economic individualism, and display national pride." (p. 45). While on the surface that may sound laudable, it is equally problematic. The images offered in popular culture simply do not speak for enough queer people and therefore they perpetrate a mythology of queer people that is simply false. The trouble with normalization, and this is key, is that it is divisive among the queer community. Alienation fills those who do not fit the image. Seidman succinctly explains the logic of assimilation:

> Only normal gays who conform to dominant social norms deserve respect and integration. Lesbians and gay men who are gender benders or choose alternative intimate lives will likely remain outsiders. And, as we will see, the normal gay implies a political logic of tolerance of minority rights that does not challenge heterosexual dominance. (p. 45)

The brilliance of assimilation is that it makes it seem as though society has changed, in this case, there are more 'positive' queer representation then ever, and therefore, a radical politics is unnecessary. The denial of the political is a maneuver pulled off at the same time new markets are created. Again, some people literally profit from assimilation.

We can see the denial of the political in many facets of popular culture. When asked if she is comfortable being a gay icon Ellen says,

> I'm very uncomfortable with it. An icon is something that somebody else makes you. I didn't choose to be anything other than a comedian. I just happen to be gay, and I didn't feel like keeping it a secret, so I announced it. I didn't intend for it to be an announcement even. It all turned into this whole big political thing. (Ressner, 2004, p. 8).

Ellen's dismissal of the political, a thread that I have already pointed out is absent in her celebrity persona, truly makes her not only "the user friendly lesbian," but a very rich lesbian. The playing down and uneasiness with the political aspects of queer life is all about assimilation. She is totally unthreatening. Similarly, television star T. R. Knight came out amid a controversy when his co-worker Isaiah Washington called him a "faggot." America had a debate with itself for a microsecond about whether or not "faggot" had reached the status of the ultra-taboo "N Word." T. R. Knight was at the center of that conversation. Throughout the controversy Knight was rendered "a normal gay" and thus can be seen in terms of queer affluence (he's white, he's gay, he's on a hit show, his contract was renewed, his salary increased to six figures per episode) and assimilation. Knight's spread in the June 19, 2007 issue of *The Advocate* is laden with the language of assimilation. On the cover, outdoors and wearing a plaid shirt, blue

jeans, and carrying a dog around his neck, Knight is the All American Boy. Copy on the cover actually says: "A Boy and his Dog." Even at the age of 34, this gay man is still considered a boy.[53] The article inside the magazine begins with a large headline that insists: "T. R. Knight is just a regular guy." The second main page of the article is assimilation incarnate. A quarter page photo shows Knight in a pajama top, robe, eating a bowl of children's cereal Trix—he looks like an overgrown child—again a boy. A large excerpted quote runs down the side of the page: "I was raised to be modest—that's where I focus, rather than being 'proud' of something." Reading this quote out of context, which is easy to do since it is literally taken out of context by the editor, we can make the inference that Knight is talking about gay pride and by extension gay politics. Mainstream culture, the article reassures us, has nothing to fear from T. R. Knight's queerness. In just the past year alone several high profile celebrity men have come out of the closet including Lance Bass (from boy band NSYNC), Neil Patrick Harris (from *Doogie Hauser, M. D.*), and David Hyde Pierce (from *Frasier*). As more celebrities venture out of the closet, it will be interesting to see what attempts are made to minimize and assimilate their queerness.

Recently, a disturbing trend has emerged in the figure of the homocon—the politically active, aggressively assimilationist, socially conservative homosexual. Log Cabin Republicans and writers like Andrew Sullivan are prime examples. These activists are invested at fitting into mainstream culture at all costs. Richard Goldstein (2002) writes about the problems with the emergence of the gay right:

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[53] I am making the point that by using 'boy,' the article rhetorically constructs Knight in an infantilized fashion. And that for me, is about rendering him asexual—he's a boy, not a man with sexual desires. Of course all the photos in the spread feature him alone (or with this dog) and the article reveals that he is single.

> The many variations that don't fit the mold—bull dykes, sissies, trannies, and fairies, to name just a few queer types—are an embarrassment to the gay right. And so are queers, proudly known as 'sluts,' who don't conform to the monogamous model. The gay right is not just an ideology; it's an attitude toward difference. Homocons may pose as nonconformists, but they push a single, morally correct way to be gay. (p. 12).

And for Goldstein's homocons, the correct way to be gay, ironically, is to emulate straight culture. This has become easier to do as the distinction between gay and straight becomes more and more blurred in terms of aesthetics. The problem is not that it is hard to tell gay men from straight men, the problem is the politics, or lack there of, that goes along with this mainstreaming strategy. To clarify my point, I want to look at two "dossier" articles that recently ran in the magazine *Details*. One titled, *With Gays Criticizing Straights Like Never Before, Heterophobia is Rampant. Whatever you do. Watch Your Back* (Demenco 2006*)*, the other, *Who Says All Gay Men are Stylish? The idea that homosexuals are fashionable is bull—the proof is everywhere* (Wheelock 2007). The purpose of both articles is identical: to point out that even though gay guys are presented as the arbiters of taste and style they are no better than straight guys when it comes to all things fashion (read: consuming). According to Demenco (2006), popular culture pits gay guys against straight guys which creates hostility for each amounting to homophobia on the straight guy's part and heterophobia on the gay guy's part. He concludes that "… Both are stuck playing cartoon characters. And in the end, their homophobia and heterophobia make them perversely complementary shadowboxing partners—each lashing out at an enemy who's not really there." (p. 163). This is a

classic assimilation strategy. Gay guys and straight guys are more alike than different. And the real political issue of homophobia, which is institutionalized in so many aspects of our society, is reduced to "being parked on the couch in sweats." The article trivializes the political issue by situating it as a match about consumption, and then further trivializes it by suggesting the match is ridiculous in the first place. Any antagonism between gay men and straight culture (represented by straight men) is illusory. Wheelock's article is equally troubling. It attempts to equalize gay and straight men by problematizing 'the queer eye.' It does this by showing pictures of Carson Kressley, Elton John, and other openly gay celebrities wearing embarrassingly terrible outfits at public appearances. With crazy queens staring up at the reader off the page, the article poses a rhetorical question: "If you were picking teams, kickball-at-recess—style, for a fashion championship, who would you call first dibs on: Lance Bass, George Clooney, Alan Cumming, Jay-Z, Rufus Wainwright, or Brad Pitt?" (p. 114-115). Of course the article thinks the straight men in the list are the answers. In addition to this kind of playful homophobia, the article concludes on a particularly sour note which underscores the way class interests are apart of, yet erased, by present day queer visibility, as indicative in the following quote from Vice President of Men's Fashion at luxury retailer Saks Fifth Avenue.

> There have been so many times when I wished I was a lesbian and didn't have to care about what I wore…why can't I put on dirty sweat pants, a pair of Birkenstocks, a flannel shirt, and think, Which baseball cap will I wear today? It must be nice to buy all your clothes at outlet stores (p. 115).

This kind of stereotypical remark, I assume is meant to be funny, but it, like the shadow-boxing non-enemies of Demenco's article, reflects an attitude that says that since the playing field between gays and straights is now level, straights have free license to point out the things about gay culture that they never really liked in the first place. The problem, of course, is that the playing field is only level in the pages of fashion magazines or other spaces where things are being bought and sold.

The Affluencers: A Conclusion

Queers continue to be targeted as top-shelf consumers and continue to be in great demand. Damon Wolf, founder of a major marketing firm, is quoted in Barker (2007):

> We don't consider the gay and lesbian market a niche anymore. We can't. It's made it to the mainstream. Financially speaking, the market has surpassed the mainstream. According to a study released in January, the buying power of gays and lesbians in the U.S. will reach $660 billion by the end of this year. By 2011, the study projects, that number will climb to $835 billion. And demographically, gays are more likely to spend more on luxuries and travel, because so many fall into that sought-after group marketers call "dinks"—dual income, no kids.

The city of Dallas, Texas is openly courting the spend-happy affluent gay market. "It's not about being politically correct, it's about being economically correct," said Phillip Jones, President and CEO of The Dallas Convention and Visitors Bureau. According to Jones (Curry 2007), "…gay travelers spend an average of $100 more per day than other travelers and plan four to six trips a year." Similarly, Garcia (2007) writes an article with a headline that shows how economics easily trumps politics: "Study: Legal marriage would snag N. Y. $184M." In other words, the issue of gay marriage can be flipped

around from a political, human rights issue to one of simple economics. With capitalism knowing no borders the linkage of queerness and affluence is being exported. According to *The Advocate* (Thai Credit 2007) a credit card company is beginning to target Thailand's 'pink baht' market-- "a growing group of big spenders—gay men and lesbians." Niwatt Chittarlarn, CEO of the company says, "One day you sit down with your friend and he influences you to appreciate fusion food, yoga, male cosmetics or stylish spectacles," he said. "Men living in big cities like Bangkok, Singapore, and Kuala Lumpur are now adopting a more fashionable lifestyle." And apparently, just like here in the United States, the gays are there to help feed the market's unending hunger for more consumers by leading the way to the store.

Recently, Bravo TV published three images on their website called The Affluencers (see Figures 3, 4, 5). These images are advertisements designed to entice companies to advertise on the Bravo Channel. I see The Affluencers as the present day end point of the evolutionary trajectory of representations I have laid out in this dissertation. These are not people, though they are gendered, they are commodities, (notice they come out of Barbie-style boxes) whose only function is consumption. Are The Affluencers pictured queer? Perhaps they are, but to the companies who buy them, and with the strategies of assimilation in place, that is a moot the point. What we are witnessing, and queer affluence is just one manifestation of this, is a larger cultural move whereby we are all turned into equal-opportunity consumers. Gone are the days of appropriate and inappropriate consumption. As the boundaries between queer and straight continue to erode in the mass media, The Affluencer becomes *the* representational figure—a figure who is virtually no different than any other—a human

shopping machine. Queer affluence should trouble us, or at least raise suspicion. The future promises to show us more representations of queer affluence and more openly queer spokespeople. As we encounter these images we must interrogate the version of queerness represented and figure out ways of consuming (images and products) that subvert or resist assimilation. The problem with queer affluence is that whether it is a strategy maintaining difference or one insisting on assimilation—in both instances queerness is so intimately tied to consumption that we risk being placed in the mass produced purple or orange box of the Affluencer. And that is truly confining.

Figure 1: The Epitome of Queer Affluence-- A Gay Couple Appears in a *Dallas Morning News* Valentine's Day Spread

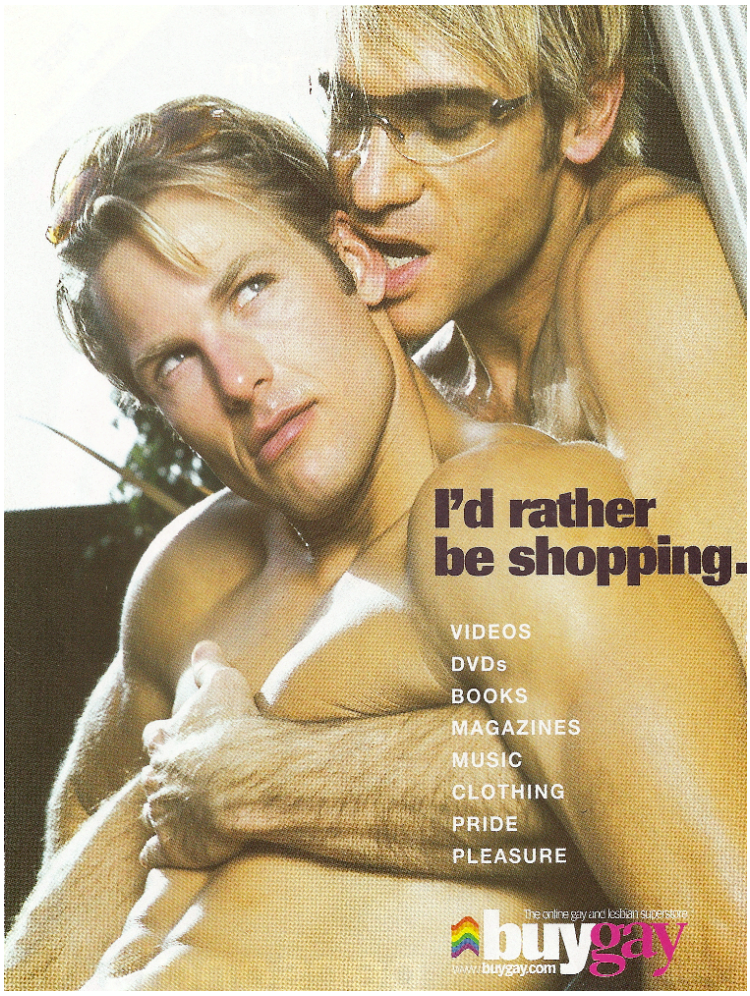

Figure 2: *I'd rather be shopping.*

Figure 3: The Affluencers

Figure 4: The Affluencer

Figure 5: The Affluencer

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