

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

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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 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.