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Dating Across Difference: A Rhetorical Analysis Of Interracial Same-Sex Relationships In Targeted Media Outlets

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DATING ACROSS DIFFERENCE: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF
INTERRACIAL SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS
IN TARGETED MEDIA OUTLETS

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INTERRACIAL SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS
IN TARGETED MEDIA OUTLETS

by

VICTOR SANTANA-MELGOZA, B.A.

THESIS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine how interracial same-sex relationships are constructed and communicated within gay themed media outlets, specifically magazine publications, and the possible effects such construction may have on various consumer populations through the frame of cultivation theory. I studied three major gay publications and surveyed 90 articles for both textual content and visual representation. Categories were then created and articles were grouped by relevance to each category. Through iterative processes, the number of useable articles fell to 68. Articles were mainly captured using online sources. Through this medium of online reading, other access points were created that would not have been seen through typical paper copies. Gateways to other media (YouTube videos, online slideshows, etc.) were created and were able to provide broader insight into specific topics and types of media consumption. Results indicated a severe lack of visual representation of both people of color, and interracial couples. Further examination found an absence of coverage on the topic of interracial relationships. This lack of representation has the opportunity for negative impact for consumers of all races/ethnicities since media has been shown to have a significant influence on consumers.

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Chapter 1: The Problem

As users of media in all forms, different kinds of messages, both explicit and implicit, are presented to consumers to interpret, critique, and internalize at different levels. From television programming and film, to different forms of advertising and social media, all play a role in how we interpret the world, both real and imagined. In the realm of magazine publications, these messages have been studied from their choice of content, to their use of ad space, and creation of visual representations. One of the biggest critiques regarding media, specifically in advertising, has been the sense of false reality that is created, and then adopted by consumers. This critique is relevant in gay-themed media as well. With the creation of gay-themed publications that began mostly in large-city White urban population centers, such as San Francisco and New York, there has been a narrative sold to the rest of the LGBT community of what gay life is ‘supposed’ to look like. Additionally there has been a lack of content and representation from different points of view, from female and trans voices, to rural and poor narratives, and a lack of presence from people of color. Gay-themed publications continue to overlook themes that do not have the same impact for some communities as they do to White, urban, upwardly-mobile, and educated populations. As this study specifically focuses on the lack of representation of interracial couples, and the discussion of interracial dating, there is a chance to examine gay-themed publications from different marginalized points of view. From the assumption that the narratives presented in gay-themed magazines are ‘reality’ for the rest of gay community, there exists an opportunity for disconnect, and isolation from already marginalized communities, and further pushes aside other important topics that may not be important for the target audience, but nevertheless is an entry point to many in the gay community.

The following thesis will examine the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, relationships, and mass media. While there has been significant research as individual topics, and research done on the connection of two or three of these topics, there is a lack of research within the communication literature that examines the impact when all five topics are combined. I use

the medium of magazines to research the representation (or lack thereof) of interracial relationships among gay men in targeted¹ mainstream media², in this case magazines. I also argue the term ‘mainstream’ in its general use, is covert for heterosexual, and often White audiences. What this study has discovered as a pattern is that gay-themed magazines with a large circulation³ also tend to target a specific market that of White men between the ages of 35-50, in an upper-middle class socio-economic status. While this may be the target market it also has the ability to create the perception of a ubiquitous reality in which the supposition of racial minority stories, opinions, and experiences are no different than their White counterparts. In terms of interracial dating, the data highlight two clear trends, 1) a severe lack of men of color in general, but more significantly lacking in terms of interracial relationships, and 2) when interracial relationships are represented, a White man must be part of the equation. Using cultivation as a theoretical framework, I argue that while media can play a significant influencer in shaping perception through continuous imagery, there is also a perception of reality that can be constructed when there is a lack of representation, or if that representation is only told in one fashion.

The purpose of this study is to gain insight in how interracial gay male couples are both represented and discussed within gay-themed magazines. As the literature will show, there are possible reasons why interracial couples are not represented with any sort of frequency in mass media. There is an additional complexity when discussing gay imagery in mainstream and gay-themed publications, compounded by racial minority representation in both markets. My analysis will attempt to answer the following research questions?

1) How are relationships constructed and communicated in articles from mainstream gay-themed magazines?

¹ For purposes of this study, I use target specifically in reference to the LGBT community.

² Unless otherwise noted, mainstream media refers to LGBT themed publications with a large circulation.

³ 150,000+ circulation

2) How are interracial relationships constructed and communicated in articles from mainstream gay-themed magazines?

The importance of this research, as the literature will show, is there is a significant lack of research when exploring the intersections of interracial representation within gay mass media. This also opens a wide agenda for research along the theme of dating across difference, by which I mean the study, and possible impact, of representations of romantic relationships, where partners do not share significant social identities (i.e. race/ethnicity, social class, age, HIV status, ability/disability, national identity, etc.). This study adds to the discourse of research within the communication discipline, as well as the growing field of queer studies.

This thesis contains the following chapters:

1. The Problem: This chapter will provide a basic framework to outline the significance of this study, as well as the overarching issue the study attempts to address. The reasoning behind the research is also given, as well as the research questions themselves. The chapter ends with a brief explanation of the importance of this research, and a discussion on each chapter.

2. Literature Review: This chapter breaks down the different aspects of the study beginning with the theory from which this study will examine the data. The intersections of race, sexual orientation, media consumption, and possible effects of that consumption are addressed in this chapter. A summary is given to provide the reader an opportunity to tie all the variables together and to provide structure and direction for the rest of the study.

3. Methodology: The methodology chapter details the specific steps in data collection, sorting and categorizing, and analysis. This chapter provides an explanation of the media used

for the project, the reasoning and justification for using the specific publications, and the pilot study that was conducted to pre-research the topic and decide on preliminary categories. A brief discussion of the limitations for the data collection is also provided.

4. Findings and Analysis: This chapter discusses in full detail the different categories and analysis done on each section. Specific examples are used to offer clarity of meaning for each category as well as offer critique. Each section provides insight into the nature of the category, the specific visual representation and topic data related to the research questions, and an analysis of the specific category using a communication frame.

5. Summary: This chapter restates the premise for the study, its significance and possible effects. An overview of the findings is discussed and real-world implications consumers of media must contend with, and the capacity for negative impacts of such consumers. It concludes with recommendations for practical usability, as well as opportunities for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter will discuss a background of the existing studies that are available as it relates to the intersections of mass media's influence of interracial relationships, and the presentation of racial minorities, and gay men. The theoretical framework used to create the argument for this study begins with cultivation theory. In this chapter, I will examine the use of cultivation in different studies, as well as a critique of the theory itself. Next, I will discuss both the history of representation of gay men in mass media, and the influence it has had in shaping public opinion about the use of same-sex characters in media such as films, television, and advertising. I also offer a small review over the concept of homonormativity and its influence in both gay presence in mainstream media, and the gay political agenda. Next, I discuss both the representation of racial minorities in mass media, and the influence they have in self-perception and self-esteem. Finally, I examine the discourse surrounding the lack of interracial relationships portrayed in mass media, and offer a possible explanation and solution to this issue.

The purpose of this chapter is to not only examine the use of cultivation theory when examining mainstream gay media, but to also consider the multiple facets of the analysis. While there have been studies done on different aspects of this particular study, there is a lack of literature when combining the intersections of possible influence of the lack of representation of interracial gay male couples in mainstream gay media.

CULTIVATION THEORY

Cultivation analysis suggests that mediated content, particularly in film and television, influence perceptions of self and others. Thus, it is logical to assume print media may do the same. Chia and Gunther (2006) assert that the effects of cultivation theory can be examined by all media lenses. They argue that since media such as film, print media, and the Internet all distribute similar cultural values and ideologies, they have the same ability to influence consumers. In their study examining the perceptions and misperceptions on social norms about

sex created by different forms of media, Chia and Gunther build on previous studies that have shown positive correlation between sex-related media, and estimates of sexual practices among the general population. Their study yielded similar results among their specific researched population. While parts of this study may better fit Agenda Setting Theory first developed by McCombs and Shaw in 1968, as parts of this study and its interpretation involve the salience of some topics and not others, I specifically chose to use Cultivation Theory because I not only wanted to concentrate on what was being shown and not shown, but also study the possible implications of such representation and lack of representation.

Ever since Gerbner (1970) asked the question, “What common assumptions do message systems cultivate over and above those apparent in single or selected messages or individual and selective responses?” and, “How does the cultivation of these collective assumptions shape the conduct of public affairs?” there has been much debate over the effects of media consumption, and public perception (Gerbner, 1970; Potter, 1986; Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn, & Zoino, 2006; Chia & Gunther, 2006; Kahlor & Morrison, 2007; Niederdeppe, Fowler, Goldstein, & Pribble, 2010; Callanan, 2012). According to Callanan (2012), starting with Gerbner’s initial study on the correlation of television violence, to perceptions of violence in real life, there is a large body of research that supports the idea that increased exposure to violence on television, “elevates public’s fear of criminal victimization...and distorts the reality of crime.” Since then, Gerbner’s original cultivation analysis has been used to study other areas of television consumption (Hesse-Biber, Leavy, Quinn, & Zoino, 2006; Kahlor & Morrison, 2007; Niederdeppe, Fowler, Goldstein, & Pribble, 2010).

One example of communication research using cultivation theory outside the realm of television violence is a study published by Niederdeppe, Fowler, Goldstein, and Pribble (2010) examining the effects of public perceptions about cancer prevention, and the overall media coverage about cancer itself. The authors conducted content analysis of media coverage, and an analysis of the results of the 2005 Annenberg National Health Communication Survey, designed to “capture national trends in media exposure, health cognitions, and behavior” (p. 241). In the

two studies, the researchers found there was a correlation between higher consumption of local television coverage of cancer prevention and higher instances of ‘fatalistic’ beliefs about cancer prevention. In other words individuals tended to have more pessimistic attitudes, and a feeling of helplessness about cancer prevention the more viewers watched television programs and ads about cancer prevention.

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006) used cultivation theory to study how the consumption of mass marketing of thinness and beauty ideals impacted women’s social psychology and development of eating disorders. They argued that using cultivation theory in combination with other theories including gratifications and uses, social comparison, and objectification theory, a “nexus of influence” was. In their research, they studied different industries that produced media messages aimed at thinness and beauty that included the American food industry, the diet and weight-loss industry, the fitness industry, and the cosmetic surgery industry. Two assumptions of cultivation theory they posited were 1) “cultivation theory relies on an ‘additive’ model of influence,” meaning the more a viewer consumes media, the more they are influenced by it, and 2) media influence only goes one way, and women’s resistance to mass mediated images is not considered” (p. 216). Hesse-Biber and Leavy’s findings suggest that since women consume messages of ideal weight and body type through various forms of media, and these same messages are ‘cultivated’ by different industries, there is a positive correlation between consumption and internalization of such messages.

Kahlor and Morrison (2007) found mixed results regarding the issue of rape myth. They studied the effects of the acceptance of rape myth among regular television viewing college-aged women. While the results of their study showed that the more television the participants of the study watched, the more likely they believed rape accusations were false. The study also showed there was no support of cultivation theory as it related to the higher frequency of television viewing to an overestimation of rape in society. In fact, Kahlor and Morrison debate the validity of cultivation theory, which is worth mentioning. Kahlor and Morrison argue that, similar to Hesse-Biber and Leavy, there are general assumptions made about Gerbner’s initial framework

of cultivation analysis. They are 1) “television-influenced perceptions of reality are cultivated via television over time” (p. 731), and 2) the consumers of television represent a homogenous view of reality, and this view is consistent with dominant societal values.

Kahlor and Morrison are not the only critics of Gerbner’s cultivation theory. I offer an alternative view on cultivation theory to acknowledge the body of literature that critiques the theory I use for my analysis. Potter (1986) presents a fairly in-depth analysis and critique of cultivation theory. He begins with the observation that there have been studies conducted that contradict the initial analysis from which the theory derived. He points to a difference in methodological approaches that create different results. Potter also points to Gerbner’s assumption that all participants view reality in the same way, and that reality as a concept is not “unidimensional.” Potter goes on to introduce the idea that different demographic populations will offer different results. He argues that different identities that include race, gender, and socio-economic status will also influence different results. Potter borrows from social learning theory in which he argues that the more consumers of media identifies with characters, the more they have the ability to be influenced. Thusly, if there are no characters that represent the reality of the viewer, the less likely they are to be influenced by what they view/consume.

One study that does make use of the racial/ethnic variable is Callanan’s (2012) study on perceptions of crime risk and media consumption. Callanan uses Gerbner’s original 1976 cultivation study and analysis for a basis to study the differences in perceptions along racial/ethnic differences. She argues there may be differences in perception among different races/ethnicities and that 1) there has been empirical evidence that demonstrates the difference in access to institutions including education, health, and social services, and 2) since racial minority media production is significantly lower than White production, that production is created from a White perspective, and so targets White, middle-class audiences. Callanan’s findings showed that there was a difference in how White’s and people of color perceived fear of crime, and neighborhood crime risk when consuming crime-reality programming.

Another example of using Gerbner's theory in different forms of media is a study by Vergeer, Lubbers, and Scheepers (2000) in which they made use of newspapers as their medium, to examine whether different forms of media had an effect on public perceptions toward ethnic minorities. They argue that newspapers have given much coverage of the migration, and intolerance, of racial minorities across western European countries and that has shaped public opinion. Other differences, other than medium, Vergeer, Lubbers, and Scheepers use in their study were the observation of different demographical information including gender, political affiliation, and education. They found that education seemed to be the greatest factor in predicting perception. The other variable that the researchers found was specific publications. While two publications (*Volkskrant*, and *Gelderlander*) yielded results that suggested perceptions of ethnic minorities were less threatening, readers of *Telegraaf* suggested the opposite. The rest of this chapter will present the different layers in which this study must sieve through in order to reach some sort of analysis about the implications of the lack of representation in gay-themed publications surrounding interracial dating and communities of color as part of those interracial dating narratives.

GAY REPRESENTATION IN MASS MEDIA

I begin this study with a historical analysis of gay male representation in media advertising from the early 1900's up to its current form. This presents the first layer in which to study the nuances of gay representation. There has been a long history of gay men shown in different ways, both positively and negatively in media advertising. From the first representations as extremely covert and often tongue-in-cheek, to the very obvious, especially in gay-themed publications, to the mainstreaming of gay representation in the broader media, these images have been used to narrate the story around what the gay community should see as normative. Again, this lens of historical advertising sets up the argument of what is later

identified as a hegemonic culture through which only White, urban, wealthy gay men can possibly relate to.

Gay male representation in mass media in its current form has grown tremendously within the past decade (Branchik, 2007), and overall acceptance of lesbian and gay couples has allowed for more well-rounded, and some would argue assimilated, images and portrayals to exist in mainstream media, even though bisexuality and transgender couples are still fairly absent from media. Even the notion of gay men's lives in general in advertising has grown and become more prominent in mainstream media. Along with frequency, content and subtext has also changed throughout the years. Branchik (2007) examined how the portrayal of gay men has changed throughout the decades, beginning in 1917, and analyzed through 2004. Branchik used the model of Minority Depictions in Media developed by communications scholar Cedric C. Clark⁴ (1969), originally to discuss how Black/African-American's have been portrayed in media, and adapted the model to discuss how gay men have been portrayed. Clark's original model includes four distinct themes in advertising history and exist on a continuum:

Non-recognition: A given minority group is not acknowledged by the dominant media to even exist.

Ridicule: Certain minority characters are portrayed as stupid, silly, lazy, irrational, or simply laughable.

Regulation: Certain minority characters are presented as enforcers or administrators of the dominant group's norms.

Respect: The minority group in question is portrayed no differently than any other group. Interracial relationships would also not appear extraordinary⁵.

Branchik used this model and developed his own adaptation continuing with the chronological themes, which include:

Targeted Recognition (through the Late 1920s)

⁴ Cedric C. Clark is now known as Syed M. Khatib

⁵ Where interracial couples find themselves now

Ridicule/Scorn (1920s to 1970s)

Cutting Edge (1970s to Mid-1990s)

Respect (Mid-1990s to present)

In Branchik's study, he discussed the earliest ads, used in mainstream publications, centered on covert or tongue-in-cheek advertising. Markers such as the color red were used to denote gay characters, but usually such markers were only understood by gay men. The second phase, Ridicule/Scorn, showed gay men as uninterested in women, or worse, as a person to stay away from. Still the overt notion of being gay was not presented, but more hinted at in the copy of the ad. Part of the reason, Branchik's argues, is because up until 1958, all gay-themed material was considered obscene. The Supreme Court case of *ONE v. Oleson* allowed for such material to be distributed.

By the 1970s the first images of recognizably gay-themed advertising was initiated, primarily in gay publications, but large companies started to understand the growing open recognition, and economic gains to be made in targeted marketing. Companies such as Samsonite, Hyatt, and Gardenburger all started to create ads where recognizable copy and images were used to cater to a specifically gay male audience. From the mid-1990s onward, according to Branchik, there has been a level of respect and integration in media advertising and representation of gay men. Not only are more major companies choosing to create targeted marketing campaigns aimed at gay men, but gay themed advertising is also starting to appear in mainstream markets that are not gay-themed focused. Companies such as Target, Burger King, J.C. Penny, Amazon, and even Oreo cookies, all have incorporated gay themes as part of their standard marketing campaigns. Another example of the study of gay representation in the media is done by Fouts and Inch (2005) where their research found that only 3 characters of the 125 central characters studied in 22 television situational comedies were gay. Out of the three characters, all were portrayed in their mi-30s, two were White, the characters Will and Jack from the show *Will and Grace*, and one was Black/African-American, the character Carter Sebastian

Haywood from the show *Spin City*. Additionally, Fouts and Inch found that gay characters addressed their sexuality far more often than straight characters.

Non-stereotypical gay racial minorities portrayed in gay media are still something being wrestled with in the dialogue of mass media and identity politics. According to Teunis (2007), “Whiteness in the gay community is visible, palpable, if for no other reason than that images of men of colour are absent” (p. 269). Teunis details the sexual objectification and construction of whiteness within the gay male community, and asserts that the lack of representation of people of color in gay media serves as a launch pad to regulate them to sexual stereotypes, there for the gratification of Whites. He gives several examples of the lack of, and topic specific, representation of people of color in various forms of advertising. Teunis found that men of color were most commonly featured in one of two sections, music, and HIV. Latino men were represented as musicians, and Black men were represented in HIV ads. Other examples include local San Francisco-based gay publications, *Bay Area Reporter* and *Bay Times*, where both magazines offered limited representation of men of color. Specifically, the *Reporter* mentioned race as an issue once during their February African-American history issue, and another advertisement using images of Black men as part of an HIV/AIDS protest.

INFLUENCE OF GAY IDENTITY IN MASS MEDIA

The introduction of gays in mainstream media has been an ongoing process as discussed in the previous section. According to Papcharissi and Fernack (2008), communication scholars have critiqued the lack of gay and lesbian characters in mainstream media. But with the increasing support and acknowledgement of gay characters, this reflects the trend of greater tolerance and acceptance (Fejes & Petrich, 1993). They further argue that while gay portrayals have become more recurrent, the idea of gayness is still something that is purposefully created in such a way that straight audiences find acceptable. One example is the situation comedy, *Will & Grace*. Fejes and Petrich (1993) argue that while two of the four main characters are gay, Will

and Jack, Will's relationship with Grace reproduces a sense of heteronormative behavior. They also argue the sidekick characters of Jack and Karen promote a subversive idea of heteronormativity, but because they are portrayed as childish and immature, the message is lost to humor. The introduction of 'normalized' gay characters, such as Cameron Tucker and Mitchell Prichett of *Modern Family*, reproduces a sense of unremarkableness and further centers the idea of gayness into what is termed homonormativity. King (2009) uses the term 'homonormativity' to describes the mainstreaming of gay politics. This type of mainstreaming has also called into question if gay specific, and separate, material such as magazines such as *Out*, *The Advocate*, and *Instinct*, is even relevant in today's market.

Critiques of homonormativity, such as Croce's (2014), discuss the inclusion of gay sexualities only serve at the pleasure of heterosexual ideologies, in that it creates a sense of 'conditional acceptance' as long as they play the role of 'good citizen.' He further argues the neo-liberal gay agenda readapted their own interests into a package that was similar to 'traditional' values in order to gain acceptance. King (2009) complicates the argument by adding race and ethnicity into ideals of homonormativity. She claims from her analysis of the media coverage of Sheryl Swoope's⁶ story, that because of the silencing of her race within gay media platforms, and the homophobia within heterosexual Black/African-American culture, there does not seem to be a place for discussion of people of color's inclusion into gay normativity. Implications of a lack of space for people of color to be part of the homonormative narrative by which White 'traditional' families try to attain acceptance reinforces a marginalization and invisibleness into the gay narrative. The question stands, if there is no room for the presence of communities of color to exist in the widespread gay media, where does their normalcy and narrative exist, and by whom are those narratives consumed.

⁶ Sheryl Swoopes is a famous women's basketball athlete who came out to the public in 2005

RACIAL MINORITY REPRESENTATION AND INFLUENCE IN MASS MEDIA

There have been several studies regarding the role of media consumption targeted population perception and internalization (Vergeer, Lubbers, & Scheepers, 2000; Rivadeneyra, Ward, & Gordon, 2007; Lienemann & Stopp, 2013; Thompson-Spires, 2011; Adams-Bass, Stenson, & Kotzin, 2014). These specific studies research different aspects of the perceptions of reality of people of color based on the frequency and content of media consumption. Studies have found that minimal ethnic representation had a direct influence on self-esteem, as well as a feeling of lack of voice in the mainstream public conversation.

In an earlier study conducted by Merskin (1998), she analyzed the perception of American Indian representation in both film- and television programming. She makes use of the term ‘symbolic annihilation’ to discuss the problematic images represented in media. She points to the stereotypical representations throughout advertising including sports logos, and commercial products, such as Land O’Lakes butter. Merskin’s study included a survey to 74 different tribally affiliated American Indians and their perception in representation. Her findings concluded that while film portrayals tend to portray American Indians in a positive light, television representation was severely lacking, and contributed to a perpetuation of stereotypes and beliefs about American Indians. Merskin also asserted a lack of representation or “seeing oneself portrayed” (p. 335) had a negative impact on self-image.

Another study, using Latino adolescents as the researched population, argued a possible link between media consumption and self-perception in regard to ethnic identity. Rivadeneyra, Ward, & Gordon (2007) conducted two studies using high school students, and college students respectively. In both groups and studies, they found a direct correlation between frequency of television viewing, and negative social- and self-esteem. The literature they examined found that Latino representation was lacking and used, Latinos were often portrayed negatively as stereotypical images and characters. Through surveys, research participants self-reported their television viewing habits in regards to programming, frequency and length, and time periods. While the high school population studied only targeted the television programming they

watched, the college participants also measured their consumption of English-language popular magazines. In both studies, participants with a stronger ethnic identity indicated a lower self-perception and lower self-esteem the more media they consumed.

Finally, a study using Black/African-American youth by Adams-Bass, Stevenson, and Kotzin (2014) measured the rejection or acceptance of stereotypes of Black/African-Americans in the media. Their study included 113 Black youth ages 14-21 and collected data through the Black Media Messages Questionnaire which measured categories such as racial socialization, racial identity, Black history knowledge, body image and self-esteem, as well as demographic information. This study used Gerbner's original media platform of television viewing solely. Results indicated women and older youth witnessed a higher frequency, and more negative images than their male and younger counterparts. Other demographic differences included participants from higher income brackets were less likely to endorse negative stereotypes. Additionally, higher television viewing, among all demographics, directly translated to greater perceptions of importance in areas such as physical attraction.

INFLUENCE OF INTERRACIAL RELATIONSHIPS IN MASS MEDIA

There is a significant lack of representation of people of color in mass media and in mainstream gay media. Part of this may be due to what Thompson-Spires (2011) refers to as "unconscious anxieties" (p. 293) and her research focuses on perceptions and attitudes of Canadian television shows exported to the US. She argues that since Canadian television has a multicultural mandate to portray racial minorities in "more accurate" light, as opposed to the US's optional inclusion of racially diverse characters, this positions Canadian television shows as a model for inclusion. But, while multiculturalism is set as a goal in Canada, Thompson-Spires also contends that interracial relationships, both platonic and romantic, are often downplayed or when shown, never discussed.

The invisibility of interracial relationships as almost a taboo subject, maybe due to the anxiety of White producers, but there is research that indicates that prolonged exposure to interracial relationships within the mass media had the capacity to encourage positive attitudes toward such relationships among White audiences. In a study conducted by Lienemann and Stopp (2013), personal involvement and attitudes toward interracial relationships improved after prolonged direct and indirect exposure to friends, the Internet, movies, television shows, etc. This may be one possibility in providing insight into 1) why publications do not include interracial relationships, and/or 2) attitudes toward such representations in given media outlets.

SUMMARY

As discussed the intersections of race and sexual orientation in mainstream and gay-themed media can be complicated, and often times overlap each other. With the evolution of gay male representation in advertising media, we still see a singular narrative that consists of mostly White, affluent men, with very little representation of men of color. Additionally, there has been an evolution of people of color in media representation, but what is possibly more telling is the research that exists that give narrative to communities of color and how they interpret and internalize the few, and often stereotyped, messages and portrayals they have of themselves. Finally, with the lack of representation of interracial couples in mainstream media, this also presents challenges in how individuals may see themselves depicted, or more often, do not see themselves represented. With the lack of attention paid to the topic of interracial dating among hegemonic gay-themed publications, there creates the capacity to influence both general audiences and individuals in marginalized spaces. The next chapter will explore the specific methodology, and data used in order to conduct the analysis of this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter will provide insight into the process I took in analyzing the topic of interracial representation and discussion within mainstream gay media. There were several steps I took to get to a place of analysis that included questions of which medium to select, which magazines to use, which articles to include the analysis, and finally what categories to create. This analysis has narrowed the scope to magazines, specifically regarding the presence of the representation of interracial couples, while also examining newer publications that make use of different forms of media platforms, while using cultivation theory as the prism to analyze the data. I will discuss the magazines I chose to use, pertinent information about each magazine, justification of using the magazines, and finally the steps I took in order to reach a place where I could analyze the data.

DESCRIPTION

While the focus of my study was mainstream gay media, I had to decide which medium I would focus on. I felt the more ubiquitous medium that would serve this initial study would be magazines. I then had to consider which magazines I would use. I decided to focus on magazines that met three main criteria, 1) ones that were geared for a wide audience, 2) ones that were currently in publication, and 3) ones that had a high volume circulation. The first publication I decided to use was Out Magazine. Out was chosen based on its subscription circulation, and its history within the gay community. According to Paige Popdan, Integrated Advertising Sales & Marketing Manager (personal communication, May 7, 2015), Out Magazine began publication in 1992 as a lifestyle and entertainment magazine, and currently has a circulation of 900,000 of subscriptions, including digital subscriptions, Out is one of the most widely circulated gay-themed publications. According to The Mailing List Finder, Out's average reader is 42 years old, with an average household income of \$110,200, holds at least an undergraduate degree, and is employed in a professional and/or managerial position.

The next magazine I used in this study was The Advocate. While published by the same company as Out magazine, Here Media, Advocate's focus is primarily on news and politics. The Advocate is an older publication, first published in 1969 (Highleyman 2007), Michael Torree, Integrated Advertising Sales & Marketing Coordinator at Here Media, reported a smaller circulation of 450,000, for both print and digital subscriptions (personal communication, May 7, 2015). The reader demographics, as found at The Mailing List Finder, are similar to Out, but have higher rates of college degrees and professional positions. The average age of readers is 44.2, and the average value of their investment portfolio is \$227,400.

The third magazine I included in the analysis is Instinct. Instinct is a magazine specifically targeting gay men, and, according to its Facebook page, is "the nation's leading gay men's lifestyle and entertainment magazine." While the magazine started publication in 1997, a few years after Out has the smallest, circulation of 1110,000 as of 2013 (Echo Media), but also appeals and caters to a demographically different market. According to The Mailing List Finder, Instinct's readers are a median age of 35 years old. Their average income is \$75,000, but has the highest rate of college attendance/completion at 93% (compared to 73.5% for Advocate, and 68.6% of Out readers).

Instinct represents a dissimilar demographic of readership, and makes use of different multimedia platforms in significantly different ways than both Out, and Advocate. Instinct also represents a newer form of media consumption and targets a different demographic, that of the millennial generation⁷. Another reason for including Instinct is that by targeting a different demographic, by using different media platforms, and by serving more as an aggregator for other articles as opposed to creating original material, it provides broader access to stories that would not normally be consumed in other forms or by other publication sources.

⁷ For this study, the millennial generation is defined by people born between 1980 - 1995

PILOT STUDY

I first began the process of collecting data by writing down keywords I might use in both search engines and index articles. These words included 'interracial relationships,' interracial,' 'relationships,' 'boyfriend,' 'relationships,' 'love,' date,' 'dating' and 'couple.' I purposefully stayed away from articles about marriage equality or the politics surrounding the issue because I wanted to focus on the discussion of relationships themselves, and not as a political identity. I started with a preliminary search for five articles from all three magazine, 15 total, and used that as preliminary data. From there, I was able to determine which preliminary categories may exist in such a search. My preliminary categories included Top 10, Narratives, Op-Ed/Advice, Relationships Maintenance, and Dating across Difference. I chose these categories based on the general themes I came across.

DATA COLLECTION

From there I researched the EBSCO search engine, using the Articles and Databases function. UTEP subscriptions only included The Advocate. From there, I performed an index search that included 2010-2015. Using the initial keywords, and by reading the abstract for any article that matched the keywords, I was able to gather 30 articles. I emailed both Out and Instinct magazines and asked their customer service if there was any database they kept previous issues, and if I could have access to that database for research purposes. Instinct did not respond; Out did respond telling me that no such database existed, and that I had the ability to purchase single copies. As this proved to be financially impossible, I decided to use keyword searches through both the Out and Instinct website. With both Instinct and Out magazine, I used keywords to initially find possible matches, and then briefly scanned the article to see if it served a purpose in the research. I used 30 articles from Out and Instinct as well in order to keep consistent with the original amount of articles I used from the Advocate index search. In total, I was able to pull 90 different articles pertaining to the concept of relationships.

After examining articles from Instinct's website, it became clear that most articles were small summaries of other articles from other publications. Instinct also had articles that used mostly photographs, and some articles linked to YouTube video. After some consideration, I decided to keep the articles as part of the analysis because they represent another form of mass media using magazines as a launch point for further reading. It also represents Instinct's ability to use their own platform to extend viewership of articles and other media, that readers may not otherwise have access to, or be informed about. I also bought a hardcopy version of the magazine to make sure the magazine did offer some in-depth coverage about news and other related items. I found the publication did create original content, and was able to use one article from the purchased magazine toward the analysis

After several iterative rounds, I narrowed my analysis to 68 useable articles. I also re-categorized the articles into five separate categories including Narratives, Relationship Maintenance, Op-Ed/Advice, Top 10, and Nonpolitical Marriage. An explanation of each category is provided in the following chapter. From there, I started the formal analysis of each category.

ANALYSIS

After narrowing down each category, I read each article and, if applicable, followed links to original material, YouTube videos, or other added material, such as online slideshows. As I read, I noted any mention of interracial relationships and any pictures or photos used as part of the story. From there, I counted how many times each category made use of interracial couples in the body of the article, used interracial couples in their photos, and made note of the race⁸ of each person in each photo, with particular interest in the races/ethnicities of each person in interracial couples that were found.

⁸ While race cannot be judged simply by skin color alone, this analysis used skin color as a way to determine between lighter (perceived as White) skin and darker (perceived as people of color) skin tone.

LIMITATIONS

Two major limitations arose from conducting the data collections, 1) access to articles in chronological order, and 2) financial constraints. As mentioned above, since both Out and Instinct did not keep specific databases pertaining to back issues, the search engine proved to be a more difficult process in collecting data. The articles that are used in the analysis do not follow a chronological path like The Advocate, so articles were chosen based on what was presented from online searches. Both websites only went as far back as 2012. Financial constraints also presented a restraint in the collection of data. As stated, since neither Out or Instinct are subscriptions held by the University, and each publication did not keep a specific chronological database of which to pull articles per issue, the only alternative was to purchase each back issue individually, with no guarantee that any one issue would have any useable articles. If I were to have purchased each article, to create my own index search, starting with 2010, the total cost would be over \$600, which was simply not feasible.

SUMMARY

In summary, there was much consideration of which medium, and within that medium, which specific publications to use for this research study. From there the pilot study was useful in being able to set up the initial categories. Using an iterative process to sort through useable and nonuseable articles was helpful in creating more specific categories in which to conduct the analysis. The next chapter will speak in detail of what the analysis found, and the significance of those findings.

Chapter Four: Findings

After reviewing roughly 90 articles about relationships from three different sources, I was able to use 68 of them for analysis. Overall the findings showed that there was a significant lack of representation of both men of color, and interracial relationships. Also, in nearly every instance when there was an interracial couple visually represented, a White man was part of the couple. Moreover, when interracial dating was introduced as a topic, it was portrayed as a challenge to overcome, and told from a White/Black perspective.

I categorized the articles into five sections, Nonpolitical Marriage, Top 10, Op-Ed/Advice, Relationship Maintenance, and Narratives. Most articles contained a mixture of photographs, and text. Different media was provided within the online versions of each article. Several online versions contained hyperlinks to related articles or primary sources, while others attached links to YouTube videos, or online slideshows. Each online article also included a commentary section to provide another outlet for readers to interact with other consumers and the articles themselves.

Each section were similarly patterned in that there was a considerable lack of attention paid to 1) dating across difference and 2) a purposeful inclusion of different points of view, such as communities of color. Again, this promotes a hegemonic view of relationships that only concern themselves with the dominant paradigm. While each section had an opportunity to address the topic of interracial dating, very few took advantage of that opportunity.

NONPOLITICAL MARRIAGE

The first categorized section, I have called Nonpolitical Marriage. I elected to use this category to focus on the different ways mainstream gay magazines have chosen to construct the idea of relationships, specifically the idea of marriage. This section differs from other articles that deal with marriage equality, since these specific articles deal with little to no mention of political or legislative topics of marriages. These articles mainly focus on the marriage ceremony

itself, and the couples' participation in them. These nonpolitical marriage articles make use of both text and photographs. Closely related to wedding announcements and articles found in other mainstream media such as newspapers and other social and lifestyle related magazines, the articles in this category mostly discuss the ideas of marriage as a commitment, as well as discuss details of the wedding celebration themselves. Most articles discussed various reasons the interviewed couple decided to get married. While some couples shared they did decide to get married as a form of political stance, the articles themselves do not address any specific legislation, or any ongoing or pending litigation taken by the couple. In order to assist in the creation of the marriage narrative, each article makes use of both text and pictures. Some online articles made use of different forms of multimedia such as of online slideshows, other related articles, and blog entries. Each article also contained specific details of the wedding ceremony such as wedding date, wedding attire, guest list, wedding location, and any special significant details.

Articles within the nonpolitical marriage section all contain a form of narrative. This form of storytelling includes aspects of time, space, conflict and resolution. As a mass media function, these articles also serve to both inform the public of various narrative paradigms that exist within the targeted audience, and has the capacity to bond the targeted audience together in displaying images, and stories which make experiences normalized and realized for public consumption.

As an offspring to these informative narrations, specific stories are then conveyed, in this instance, the story of marriage. As mini-narratives, these sections only focus on one aspect of the relationship, ideas and ideals are then communicated to a large audience which then has the opportunity to shape concepts, form opinions, and change perspectives. Through the use of multimedia consumption, not only is there an opportunity to reach different audiences, for example across generations, the interactive process of multimedia technology, such as discussion boards, comment sections, and video links allows for consumers to further bond with other

consumers, creating a snowball effect of consumption, such as when an article is shared through different social media platforms.

One example of the different aspects of media consumption is in a mini-series that detailed the marriage of Michael Turchin and former N*Sync singer, Lance Bass. The couple chose to air their wedding as part of an E! Network 90-minute special entitled, *Lance Loves Michael: The Lance Bass Wedding*. The first article entitled, “Lance Loves Michael: Inside America’s First Televised Gay Wedding” served as an informative question and answer session discussing the reasons why the couple decided to allow their marriage ceremony to be broadcast on cable television. In the interview, Turchin and Bass discuss the desire to increase visibility on marriage equality, and to normalize the idea of gay marriage. The online article hyperlinks to other related articles about previous stories about Bass and his engagement to his fiancé, and the decision to air the nuptials. There are also various pictures that further emphasize the significance of their relationship. This article serves to inform the public about the upcoming broadcast of the wedding, and provides context of the reasoning.

The second article, “When a Kiss Is More than a Kiss: Why the Lance Bass & Michael Turchin Wedding is a Milestone” was written after the wedding ceremony. In this article the author, Aaron Hicklin, describes the television special itself, offers context about other television same-sex relationships, and how they have been portrayed, and editorializes the importance of the broadcast. One sentence in the article both explains, and exemplifies the significance of the wedding by saying, “the most radical thing about the Bass-Turchin wedding...was just how unradical it all seemed.” The online article also makes use of multimedia storytelling through the online slideshow of different pictures from the wedding special.

Another example of an article discussing a televised marriage was in Out Magazine’s, “First Look: Teen Gay Wedding.” The article discusses the significance of the young couple, who are both 19 and black. The episode was filmed for a Canadian broadcast show entitled: *My Teenage Gay Wedding*. As this article is used as a means to distribute the story to a wider audience, there is not much text other than a small paragraph giving a synopsis of the couple, the

challenges they faced as a young couple, and their journey to get married in Washington, D.C. There are three links to different multi-media platforms. The first hyperlink is to Scoop Entertainment, an online LGBT youth blog site, specifically addressing the needs of Black/African-American community. The second hyperlink is to the *My Gay Teen Wedding* website that categorizes all their episodes, of which this is one of them. And the third hyperlink is to a YouTube video of still photos of the couple's wedding.

Lastly, there were two articles that dealt with mass weddings, providing another example of the informative nature of the nonpolitical marriage. Instinct Magazine's, "Fort Lauderdale Celebrates 'Love is Love' with 100 couples at a Sunrise Wedding on Beach," and Out Magazine's article, "110 Gay Couples Married during World Pride Week at a Toronto Castle." Both articles discuss a mass wedding ceremony in their respective city. Out's article relies heavily on gathered interviews as the primary source to shape the story. In Out's article, three couples were interviewed, two male couples, and one female couple. Each interview gave insight into the couple's process of getting married, how long the couple had been together, and if the marriage would be recognized in their country of residence.

Instinct's article makes more use of photos to tell the story. There are several pictures of couples, and the celebrities that attended the event. This again serves to inform the public of both an international event, and the unusual circumstances of a mass wedding, but also adds to the overarching narrative of same-sex relationships.

Out of the 11 articles I used for this section, there were eight different White male couples, two interracial couples, and one Black couple. One of the articles that made use of an interracial couple, "Rahway NJ City Councilman Bob Bresenham Jr. Married Rolando B. Ceniza" although there was no mention, or recognition, of the fact they were ethnically different; the other article that included an interracial couple "Vows: Kunal Ghose & Jason Aronne" discussed cultural difference, but in terms of the wedding ceremony itself. The article made no mention of the impact of such differences. The article, "First Look: Teen Gay Wedding," did use the word Black to describe them once within the text of the article, but mostly focused on their

family situation, and the age. The article about the Toronto-based mass wedding, interviewed three couples. The two male couples were both white. The Fort Lauderdale-based mass wedding made heavy use of pictures. Out of the pictures of male couples, one couple was White/White, another couple was White/Asian, and another couple was White/Latino.

One could argue living in a “post-racial” society; the couples do not see their interracial statuses as important, or even relevant to their marriage. There are two problems I see with this exclusion of analysis of interracial partners: 1) by not mentioning the significance of their interracial status, the assumption is there is nothing of significance to report, and 2) the lack of a discussion on interracial relationships could be seen as another way to “whitewash” the issue. By this I mean, with a mostly white writing staff, catering to a mostly white audience, the concept of interracial relationships is subjugated to a ‘no relevance’ status. The question remains how these articles would be different if they were written for an audience composed of mainly people of color. Additionally, in the area of dating across difference, there is only one article that makes significant mention of the difference in age from one partner to the other. In the article detailing the marriage between Stephen Fry and Elliot Spencer, the difference in age (Fry 57, Elliot 27) made worldwide news, and was covered in some form in each of the different magazines I used in this analysis.

From a communication standpoint, the lack of representation of interracial relationships, especially those that do not incorporate any White individuals, has the potential of downplaying, or even eliminating the significance of the perspective of people of color. This also has the possibility of making the person of color narrative invisible, and further conveys the hegemonic narrative.

Top 10

The next section I categorized for the purposes of analysis is entitled Top 10. These articles are listed in the form of tips, short suggestions, etc. The content provides less in-depth

information, but discusses different aspects of relationship themes in short, pithy lists. All articles contained within this category follow a general format that includes an opening explanation of the article, subhead for each point made, and brief explanation under each subhead. While news stories theoretically remain unbiased, and show each side of any given story, Top 10 articles purposefully do not use the unbiased approach, and make use of strong opinions on any given subject. All language is written in an informal style and personalizes the article by making use of the word ‘you’, such as the article, “You Just Said Yes, Now What?”

Top 10 articles have the capacity to serve as an informative function of mass media. While television news channels serve to inform the public about newsworthy items, Top 10 can function in the same way, albeit in a short, often comical way. Through the use of humor, audiences are able to consume information, and possibly internalize the material, in a way that may make it more ‘digestible’ for them. This also has the ability to form opinions about different aspects of relationships. Again, through the use of multimedia of online versions of the article create an opportunity for the reader to interact with the article, thus providing another opportunity to internalize the content of the article.

One example of the use of multimedia within the context of online articles is Instinct’s article, “20 Signs Your Boyfriend is Gay.” This short article serves as a pass-through to a YouTube video that addresses a topic regarding relationships. In the video, a presumably gay man, and a straight woman, discuss the possibility of detecting ciphers in assisting a straight women to determine if her boyfriend is gay or not. The article provides little content and lets the video serve as the article itself, in this case as a Top 10 style article.

Two articles make specific mention of relationships, “6 Dating Dilemmas for Gay Men and How to Avoid Them” and “6 Bad Signs of a Good Relationship.” Each article provide a list of determining codes to use to examine if how to avoid possible problems before entering a relationship, and signs of what to look for in determining whether or not the reader is in a good relationship.

The article, “In Case of Emergency,” discusses the measures same-sex couples should take when preparing for crisis situations. While the content of the article is different from the previous examples, the format of the article remains the same, beginning with a brief introduction to the article, the list of ideas, and a closing paragraph. Even though the tone of the article is more serious, there is a brief inclusion of a possible zombie apocalypse, and what to do in case of such an emergency. More serious areas the article tells the reader to consider are things like keeping extra copies of medical, insurance, and financial information, and keeping extra cash on hand.

There were also two articles that used the theme of marriage to create suggestion lists for readers. Both articles provide insight into what couples should consider for their marriage ceremony. In these cases one article, “You Just Said Yes, Now What?” provides a timeline of what engaged couples should consider as they get closer to the date of the wedding ceremony. The other article, “Honeymoon Homework,” offers advice to readers about what to consider when planning the honeymoon after the wedding.

Out of the six articles I considered for this section, there were 24 images used throughout the different articles. In this sample, there were eight images with only one person; all images that only one person in the photograph used White men. No single images made use of a person of color. There were four images with groups of people. In all images ranging from two to three people per image, there was only one person of color, and that person was a Black/African-American male. Interestingly, one image of a single Black/African-American male, and two White males, was used in two different articles from two different magazines, *Out* and *The Advocate*⁹. There were also three articles, with 10 images combined, where no pictures of people were used at all. The images in these articles ranged from pictures of a ring, a cake, and a bank vault.

⁹ Both *Out* and *The Advocate* are published by Here! Media

In terms of interracial dating, there was not a single article within the sample that brought up the topic of any sort of cross-identity, other than social class, and no article that discussed the theme of the negotiations of interracial relationships. From a communication standpoint, the topic again becomes invisible, and thus unable to have an informative effect on audiences. The visual impact of these articles also presents the idea that interracial relationships 1) must be told in a way that a White person must be part of an interracial relationship, and 2) the interracial relationship is told in a White/Black paradigm.

Op-Ed/ADVICE

The next category I chose to create in this analysis is named Op-Ed/Advice. This section is probably the easiest to locate and identify in any magazine, as they are headlined as Op-Ed and or Advice. Typically, Op-Ed¹⁰ is a device used by publications to express opinions, which can often be poignant and somewhat provocative. These articles are typically written by writers not part of the paid staff of the publication, but contracted out. This also provides more latitude in the content and style of the piece. Topics in Op-Eds can vary widely from perspectives on specific political issues such as marriage equality, to personal stories of coming out, or living with HIV, and relationships.

The advice sections are closely sectioned with Op-Ed pieces in that they do not offer information such as news, but offer a personal interaction with the reader, similar to Op-Eds. They also vary from the Top 10 category since advice columns concentrate mostly on interpersonal relationships as opposed to a wide variety of topic areas. Readers have the opportunity to submit a question for response by a member of the staff, a celebrity guest, or sometimes the author remains anonymous.

Both Op-Ed and advice columns serve as both an interpretive function as well as function as gatekeepers. Similar to editorials, Op-Ed/Advice columns seek to discuss relevant topics from

¹⁰ Op-Ed was originally short for 'Opposite the Editorial Page'

a specific point of view. It is through the author's lens which these topics are elucidated. In the case of relationships, readers are given specific ideas to think about different aspects of relationships; which also has the capacity to shape and form opinion about the discussed topics. In addition, these columns serve as a form of gatekeeping. Using agenda setting theory as a premise, Op-Ed/Advice columns decide which facets of relationships readers 'should' think about, and which facets authors deem unimportant, taboo, or not relevant.

One example of a leading Op-Ed writer within the queer community is Michael Musto. Musto is a syndicated writer and has appeared in many gay-themed publications, including *Out*, and *Advocate*. He is a former columnist with *The Village Voice*, and has been an important commenter on queer culture for the past 30 years. Musto uses humor to discuss the challenges of relationships from a casual observer point of view. Some of his columns make use of his own personal stories in the realms of queer culture, including dating. There were five different articles by Musto found in the pulled columns, coming from *Out* and *Advocate*. Two articles, "Still Single in the Age of Gay Marriage" and, "Dating a Closet Case: How Do You Handle That?" were personal stories about Musto's own life and dating history. In one article, he speaks about the challenges of dating someone who was not out of the closet. The other article dealt with the idea of being single in the age of marriage equality. The other three Op-Ed pieces from Musto were question and answer pieces with personal friends, on a variety of subjects. "Love Advice for Gay Twentysomethings: How to Hook Up-and Break Up" "The Worst Boyfriend I ever Had: Sorties From the Dark Side" all used an opening statement or question to elicit responses. While most articles used humor, there were some instances where serious life events occurred such as becoming HIV+, burglary and theft, and infidelity.

Out of the four advice columns I used, all came from *Instinct*. Each column offered advice on different aspects of relationships. One article, "Should We or Shouldn't We?" discussed the issues to take into consideration about whether or not to get married. The author offers in-depth suggestions regarding income taxes, federal benefits, travel, and divorce. "Man to Man: Love Me, Love My Dog" did make use of submitted questions, and used a format similar

to a Dear Abby column. The question is stated, and then an ‘answer’ is given by an anonymous columnist. As Instinct makes use of different media sources to then offer to readers, an interview with Neil Patrick Harris was summarized from an original column that appeared in Glamour magazine. The author does categorize the interview in an advice-like column. Topics used from the original magazine include ensuring a long lasting relationship, and tips on maintaining interest in a relationship. Another example of the use of multimedia in Instinct’s online articles is “‘Awkward Kissing’ Couple Mark Miller & Ethan Give Relationship Advice...After 5 Months.” In this advice column, the author, Nigel Campbell directs attention to a YouTube video where the couple offers advice for maintaining a long distance relationship.

Out of the 12 articles I used for this section, 9 used photos of only White men, one article made use of cartoon images where Whiteness can be perceived, and two articles made use of interracial couples, one cartoon and one photo, both of which made up of one White man and one Black/African-American man. Arguably, this might be the best place to place a column about the idea of interracial relationships. No article within this section made mention of interracial relationships, or dating across difference of any kind. Furthermore, of the different articles that I used in this section, all authors were White men. The significance of this lack of representation of people of color from an author standpoint is that it further promotes a hegemonic narrative, and again regulates readers on what and how they should think about relationships from a White perspective.

RELATIONSHIP MAINTENANCE

The area I have entitled Relationship Maintenance is intentionally broad as to be able to capture any article having to do with the theme of relationships and different aspects of them. Articles in this category are usually found in the body of the magazine, and are typically one of the featured articles. Sometimes these articles are designated in a special category, such as Love or Relationships, but that is not always the case. As this category varies widely in the style and

specific topic within the area of relationships, I have categorized them into four different subheadings including Commentary, Studies, Personal Narratives, and News. Under the subheading of commentary, these articles provide the author's opinion on a subject matter related to relationships. The author gives personal examples and anecdotes as to why he came to the specific opinion. Similar to Op-Ed columns, articles under the commentary subhead are completely subjective, and present themselves that way. The second subsection is categorized as Studies. This section deals with reports on research that has been conducted on the topic of relationships. Some articles are playful, and others are more serious, but all deal with some sort of research and method section that produces results. I have categorized the third section as Personal Narratives. These articles are personal stories told by the author. Longer than simple anecdotes, these articles delve deeper into mindset of the author, and often end with a 'lessons learned' part. The final subsection is called News. Articles in this section are general news stories all centered on the theme of relationships. These articles present themselves as standard news stories that report various aspects including legal issues same-sex couples must face, relationships involving individuals with HIV, and adoption. These stories are told without any creative license or humorous anecdotes, but offer information about a subject.

Since this section deals with the broadest range of articles, it also contains articles that serve multiple communicative functions. Some articles are written as a form of distraction. These articles are purposefully used to offer a respite of mundane or stressful ordinary life. The news articles in this section serve an informative function. These articles serve to inform the reader about a specific topic. These articles also have the ability to satisfy curiosity, and better understand and make sense of society and the world as a whole. Some articles in this section also serve as a bonding function, such as articles found under the subhead of personal narratives. These stories offer a chance for readers to feel connected to the author and by extension other readers. In multimedia format, commentary sections of these articles also have the capacity to bond people together in the same virtual space, all connected to the personal narrative story.

Commentary

Examples of the Commentary Section include editorials such as, “When You Hear, ‘I’m In an Open Relationship,’ How do You Respond?” “Do You PDA?” and, “Monogamish.” All articles are written from the author’s point of view, and offer their own opinion on the subject matter. All articles were written by single men, and present personal views, and often judgment. While the PDA and open-relationship articles are more light hearted (both of these articles come from Instinct magazine), the Monogamish article is harsher in tone, with a more political agenda. This article makes the argument that ‘traditional marriage’ does not have to be normalized in gay community, and more significantly, the gay community can offer insight on alternative forms of being in relationships.

There were two commentary articles that addressed interracial relationships directly. The first, “Would You Date Him? Many Wouldn’t Because of Something He Was Born With,” is an article written by Adam Dupuis. Dupuis, a White man, shares his history with grappling with this topic, but does not overtly state his own opinion. Rather, he ends his article with a list of questions for readers to think about including, ‘Have you told someone to his face that you would not date him because of his skin color and what was his reaction?’ and ‘Is skin color the same as no fats no fems?’ He also makes use of two YouTube videos that interview Black/African American men about their experience of dating white men, and their perspective on interracial dating. The second commentary, “Is Gay Porn Racist? ‘Why Are Whites Always the Bottom in Interracial Porn?’” discusses and hyperlinks to an article written in the Huffington Post. The article featured in Instinct uses excerpts from the original article to further the question about interracial portrayal in gay male interracial pornography. Questions to the reader are asked about their opinion on the article and the position it takes on why Black/African American men are used as the active member in interracial¹¹ gay porn. The Instinct article summarizes the original article in its main points about the reasons, studies, and interviews.

¹¹ For purposes of this study ‘interracial’ means White/Black couples unless otherwise noted

Studies

Three articles were categorized as studies. Two of the articles, “Wear This for a Hotter, Healthier Relationship,” and, “No Longer Invisible” detail specific statistical data, such as “57% of those who reported sleeping naked said they felt happy, compared with 48% of pajama wearers.” from the Hotter, Healthier Relationship article. Also, more serious data is shared such as, “21.5% of men and 35.4% of women living with a same-sex partner experienced intimate-partner physical violence in their lifetimes...” from the No Longer Invisible article. One article, “Finding Tru Love,” offers no statistical data, but speaks more broadly of a new prophylaxis method called PreExposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), and the option provided beyond condom use.

Personal Narratives

There were six articles that fit into the Personal Narrative subsection. Stories in this section offer a glimpse into the author’s life relative to relationships. One article, “Tales From the Threshold: Precious Findings,” appeared in Out magazine in January 2015 as part of a four-part series dedicated to one couples road to marriage, again, told from the author’s (one of the men within the relationship) point of view. In the Precious Findings article, the author details his experience after losing his wedding band went missing. “The Ex-Files: Should Dating Cold Cases Always Remain Closed?” author Mikey Scott shares his story about re-dating an ex-boyfriend and the challenges, and ultimate downfall of the re-entered relationship. Three articles dealt with the topic of dating someone who is HIV+, told from a HIV- perspective. “The Dating Gamble,” “No Second Chances,” and “You Think You’re Worried?” provided insight to the stigma, fears, and stereotypes of serodiscordant (HIV+/HIV-) relationships. Authors share their stories and barriers to engaging in these dating scenarios.

One article, “Love in Putin’s Russia,” details the story of one reporter, David Monteleone, who travels to Moscow to understand the lives of gay Russians. The author describes how difficult it is to find openly gay spaces and the trouble of finding gay bars. Monteleone meets different individuals who all are affiliated with the gay community including

a nightclub owner, developers for several gay Russian websites, expatriates from America and several European countries, and a gay rights activist. Each shares their own perspective of what it means to be gay in Russia. Each also discusses the idea of openly dating. From finding men in nightclubs, to maintaining a low profile in public Monteleone makes the direct comparison of pre-Stonewall era America.

News

The News stories incorporated eight separate articles, covering six different areas, adoption, legal wills, a wedding announcement, Michael Sam, and jewelry. “Babies Without Borders,” reports on the phenomenon of gay male couples that travel to India in order to adopt a baby through surrogacy. The article reports that many gay male couples find it difficult to adopt a baby through traditional means, and find easier, alternative methods through clinics in India offering surrogate mothers. “Without a Will, Still a Way,” informs readers about legal cases involving same-sex couples and the dealings with estates after one person dies. To make the point, the author details one story about Rock Hudson’s former boyfriend. The article offers some advice on what couples should do in order to protect their money, belongs, and place of residence, in order to pass it on to their partner.

There were five articles within the news subsection that mentioned and discussed interracial relationships. One short article, found in The Advocate from 2011, reported on the announcement of an interracial gay couple being shown in the Wedding Announcement section of a South Carolina newspaper. “‘You’re Cute for a Black Guy’ Skewers Gay Dating World,” is another article about a short documentary, entitled, ‘You’re Cute for a Black Guy.’ The article previews the short film (7:36 minutes), by Cameron Johnson. The article itself describes the film as a documentary that features first-person interviews with Black men talking about interracial dating. The reader provided an opportunity to view the short film in its entirety. Three articles detail the relationship of Michael Sam and fiancé Vito Cammisano. Sam, the first NFL player to

come out as openly gay, is Black/African-American and all articles are directed at his interaction with other members of the Black community questioning his choice of his partner's ethnicity.

There was also one news article that shared the news of a gay-owned jewelry company announcing their new line called, 'Get Your Heart On'. While the article itself did not deal with the topic of dating itself¹², the YouTube link did show three couples that were shown to be in relationship with one another. More significantly, one of the couples in the video is interracial, and is the only use of an interracial couple in the entire study that does not include a White man.

Out of the 22 articles I categorized in the section of relationship maintenance, there were 26 pictures, and five videos that included men. Out of the 26 photographs, there were six photos of White/White relationships, and one White/White/White polyamorous relationship, with some couples used in more than one photo. There were three photos of Black/White relationships, although there were multiple photos of the Sam/Cammisano relationship. There was also one photo of a Black/Asian couple. Of the five videos, there was only one (jewelry commercial) that showed couples. In that video, two of the couples were White/White and the other couple of Black/Asian.

As for articles detailing interracial relationships, there were seven articles that dealt with this issue directly, although three of those articles covered the same topic of the Sam/Cammisano relationship. Two of these articles were told from an explicitly White point of view, while three of the videos made use of Black/African American narratives. Again, the ideas of interracial relationships are all told as a Black/White construct. There is no mention of other ethnicities in relationship with White men, or interracial relationships that do not include White men. More broadly, in terms of 'dating across difference,' there were some articles detailing experiences and challenges for those who are HIV+. Additionally, there were articles told from an HIV+ point of view. As HIV continues to be relevant, especially among gay men. One explanation of this is that new HIV infection rates continue to impact White gay man in large numbers. According to

¹² The article was focused on the risqué images of the couples wearing the jewelry

the latest CDC data (2013), White men make up 30% of all new diagnosis annually. The fact that HIV+ men's perspectives are used in these publications is important, as it keeps the topic relevant. Interestingly, both the articles used in this analysis were from The Advocate, with an older demographic readership.

The minimal representation of people of color in a broad spectrum furthers the argument that through the invisibility of persons of color in news, commentary, studies, and personal narratives there creates an absence and furthers the hegemonic agenda. In addition to the small amount of acknowledgement to the issue of interracial dating, and kept in a Black/White paradigm, all authors of articles in this analysis present as White, with the videos showing Black men as the authors of their own narrative. Interestingly, the "You're Cute for a White Guy" is more of an announcement of a film, and the only direct commentary on interracial dating, "Would You Date Him?" was done in February, coinciding with Black History Month. This presents a problem when there is little diversity represented, and situated in a space of mass consumption, there is a great capacity to shape opinion, direct focus onto different issues, and homogenize experiences.

NARRATIVES

The last category I named as Narratives. This category describes articles that make use of stories to describe relationships. These articles can be written by the couple themselves, or written as interviews. All stories in this section use stories of individuals who are currently in relationships. Most articles follow a similar pattern. The articles begin with an introduction of each partner, usually with their profession and individual age. Then the article discusses how the partners met, how long they have been together, where they live, and if they have any children. Sometimes there is mention of a special conflict the couple may have gone through. Most articles are no more than 500 words and show picture(s) of the couple.

As with the News subsection in Relationship Maintenance, this section serves two primary communicative functions. The first is informative. While these are not specifically news items, they share a similar idea of presenting the couples as newsworthy because of the significance of their relationship, be it through profession, celebrity status, or the rare subject matter the couple represents. The second function is bonding. By sharing narratives about different couples, the reader has the opportunity to see themselves in the portrayed couple. Since most of the narratives are based around marriage, the stories serve to normalize marriage equality, and have the capacity to build stronger alliances among different communities to advocate for this issue.

Out devoted its entire February 2015 issue to couples, called the “Love” edition. In it, 12 couples are highlighted. Seven couples are male/male relationships, two articles are dedicated to female/female relationships, and one article discusses a bisexual woman’s relationship to her heterosexual male partner. One article discusses a blended family where a gay male couple becomes surrogate fathers to a lesbian couple and share child-raising duty among the four of them. In the last page of the Love edition, there is a brief interview with Ernst Ostertag and Röbi Rapp, the first gay couple to be legally registered in Germany, and the focus of a docudrama, *The Circle*. This article makes more use of photos, specifically to show the couple in their earlier days¹³ and present day, as well as the actors that played the couple in the movie.

Three articles are populations specific. “#27 Bi Stories: Why a Bisexual’s Sexual Orientation is Still Important Even if They’re in a Relationship” shares 27 short stories about individuals currently in relationships. All stories are told from a first person perspective, and share a common narrative of challenges they face. Challenges discussed in the article include being regulated to either a straight or gay identifier, being misunderstood or not believed in both queer and straight spaces, and the feeling of needing to hide either side of their sexual orientation for fear of reprimand. Each interviewee displays a sense of strength in their sexual orientation,

¹³ Ostertag and Rapp met in 1957

and a desire to be open with all the partners they have. Another article, “Gay Warriors,” show pictures of several couples, all of whom serve in the armed forces. In all photographs, the person serving in the military wear their uniform. Each couple is posed and looks directly into the camera with no sense of shame or lack of pride.

One article has very little text, but is made mostly of photos of couples in relationships. “New Tumblr: Boyfriend Twin ‘Because What’s Sexier Than Dating Yourself?’” Individuals within the featured couple share a remarkable similarity to each another, without being siblings. The way that the photos function as a narrative is not by showing the same couple in different situations, but rather, to show photos of different couples together to display the similarities of each couple. By using different couples, the story is developed beyond just one, and told as a narrative that this phenomenon is more common than just one couple.

Finally, “A Letter to My Partners,” is written as an open letter by Mikel Wadewitz as a declaration, and story about a polyamorous relationship he was in at one time. While the specified audience is for his boyfriends, Wadewitz shares his experience in a narrative form for all to read. The article is written in letter-type language; making use of the pronouns, ‘you’ and ‘I,’ but Wadewitz shares his thoughts, feelings, and story in a linear story format. He begins with sharing his relationship with his boyfriend, the meeting and introduction of a third man in the relationship, the challenges faced by the threesome, and the eventual dissolution of the relationship.”

Out of 26 male couples photographed for the different articles, 21 couples featured were both White, five couples were interracial with one White person, and no couples contained only persons of color. Of the interracial couples that each had one member who was White, there were two that were White/Black, two couples that were White/Latino, and one couple that was White/Indian. Again, the impact of the visual representation of couples is significant because the implication that interracial couples do not exist without White involvement is the narrative that is told over and over again. Interracial couples are regulated to less than 20% of all images in this

category. Without more significant recognition of interracial relationships, especially those without White members, the hegemonic narrative continues to present a White perspective.

SUMMARY

From the 68 articles used from multiple media outlets, there is a consistent lack of representation of men of color and interracial couples. After separating the articles into five main categories: Nonpolitical Marriage, Top 10, Op-ed/Advice, Relationship Maintenance, and Narratives, each category seemed to show consistent results. Most articles made use of multimedia, either using hyperlinks to other articles, or links to online slideshows, and/or YouTube videos. There was a significant absence of the use of interracial couples, and even fewer articles with a direct examination of the issue, aside from visual depictions. Moreover, almost all depictions of interracial couples involved a White man, and the vast majority of depictions involved a White/Black-African American paradigm. From a communication perspective, examining these articles through the prism of cultivation theory, it is clear the possible impact of such a lack of representation can have on racial minorities and those in interracial couples, specifically those not in an interracial relationship with someone who is White. The next chapter will provide a summary of the first three chapters, as well as the findings portion of this chapter. It also contains any recommendations for the applicability to use this research to provide information for mass media outlets as a whole, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5: Summary

As we have seen, through the intersections of race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and mass media, there is a picture that is painted about the lives of gay men, gay men of color, and gay interracial couples. In general, people of color's experiences are not told at the same frequency as White people; there is a lack of discussion about interracial relationships as a topic itself, and when discussed, it is told from a Black/White context. In the first chapter, the groundwork was laid to enter the conversation regarding interracial relationships as seen through the medium of gay-themed magazines. The three publications chosen have a high circulation rate, but a fairly narrow demographic. A broad assessment of the study showed two main trends that included the lack of representation and narrow framework in which that representation exists. The purpose of the study was to examine both how relationships, specifically interracial relationships, were both communicated and constructed through mainstream gay magazines, which was examined in the previous two chapters.

Through a multi-layered literature review, I started with cultivation theory as a framework with which to examine the publications. The fundamental logic of cultivation theory, as explained by Gerbner (1970), is that perception can be influenced by consumption of media. Through various studies, this has been used as a foundational theory in different forms of media studies and tested on how perception is influenced by such consumption. Two key terms that help explain cultivation theory are mainstreaming and resonance (Griffen, 2012). Mainstreaming is a term to describe the general outlook created by the consumption of specific messages given by the media, such as violence on television. The term 'resonance' has to do with messages being internalized, and then validated when seen in real life.

There were arguments given for the reasons for which I used cultivation theory, as well as a small section on research where findings were not significant using cultivation as a theoretical base. Since this study dealt with different aspects of mass media, I provided

clarification on the diverse parts of the intersection of the argument that included representation and influence of gay men, people of color, and interracial relationships in the media.

The concepts of homonormativity and hegemony were also introduced as pillars in which to frame the argument about the way interracial gay relationships are constructed, and the greater role they play in such relationships. If we believe that media has the power to influence perceptions, the idea of hegemony is a natural fit. Hegemony plays an interactive role with cultivation in that it replicates the social ‘norm’ of dominant identities. With the mainstreaming of images that show 1) a lack of representation and general narrative of people of color, 2) a lack of representation and general narrative of interracial relationships, and 3) interracial relationships discussed only when a White person is involved, this supports the idea that the White, urban-living, upwardly mobile, 30-40 age group is the normal experience of all gay men. Cultivation theory also intersects when examined through the lens of homonormativity. With the constant consumption of relationships being presented in mainstream media as “just like straight relationships’ this has the opportunity to influence mainstream straight perception, and gay perception, that relationships are not “normal” unless they follow the straight paradigm. The most critical aspect is that the hegemonic display of relationships in gay-themed magazines have the potential to further isolate and marginalized populations that 1) are not represented in any significant way and 2) offer limited perspective to individuals that do not come from the same experience, especially since these publications are so wide spread, fairly available and accessible to a larger audience in a way that more racially targeted gay-themed magazines do not.

This also says nothing about the actual way media acts a major point of socialization, especially within the gay community. For example, if a young Hispanic man from Hatch, NM is interested in having a relationship with another man, and his only outlet are magazines, whether in print or online, such as *Out*, *Instinct*, and *The Advocate*, there is little evidence to show his perspective, or lived experience. It further has the opportunity to give either negative or limited information in regards to interracial dating. Since more often than not, gay adolescents do not learn “how to be gay” from their parents unlike other marginalized groups, such as people of

color, then these outlets become the learning mechanisms in which to learn about LGBT culture. Because of this, the consumption of both mainstream could be a major factor in learning gay culture. Furthermore, such a lack and limited representation can have a great impact on individuals who do not feel they are represented in either media group. As we have seen in communities of color, limited representation can have a negative impact on racial self-esteem, and so it is logical to assume the lack of representation of gay people of color, interracial relationships and other disconnected groups has the ability to shape a sense of negative sexual identity self-esteem.

CONCLUSION

The topics I chose to examine the construction of relationships were told through five different areas including Narratives, Relationship Maintenance, Op-Ed/Advice, Top 10, and Nonpolitical Marriage. The findings showed a significant lack of representation of people of color in general theme of dating, and little direct conversation about men of color's perspective, and even less on interracial dating. An interesting trend was noticed. When interracial relationships were discussed, they were always told from a White perspective, with the exception of YouTube videos, which were then all told from Black perspectives.

As cultivation theory suggests, when media consumers are given messages, there is a capacity for those consumers to be influenced, and internalize such messages. Additionally, when there is a lack of representation, or when the representation is given within a limited perspective, that too has the capacity for influence. With the restricted representation of men of color, and interracial relationships, one can infer there is an opportunity for individuals to perpetuate stereotypes about people of color, and of interracial relationships.

I would argue as the topic of marriage equality becomes more mainstream and integrated into larger society, two possibilities exist for the future of the representation and discussion of interracial relationships, or any other kind of relationship that is not based on White socially-

mobile urban communities assimilation of gay culture to the point of irrelevance, and the disappearance of 'other' forms of relationships altogether.

The main tenant of homonormativity is that the LGBT community has become so much like the straight community, there is no need to distinguish between the two, other than gendered partner selection. Critics of homonormativity argue that there is a fundamentally different culture between the LGBT community and straight communities and to assimilate into straight culture beyond recognition, does a disservice to the history of the LGBT movement, and further separates anyone who does not fit into the straight standard of normality. The relevance of publications such as Out, The Advocate, and Instinct become obsolete.

Since these types of magazines already cater to a specific demographic, once marriage equality becomes fully integrated, where do these publications go from there? Communities that are already not represented or discussed in any significant way may soon find themselves absent altogether in regards to the discussion of relationships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was limited by several factors including access to, and breadth of publications. There is opportunity to take this research further by examining a wider range of magazines, including racially targeted gay men's magazines. This study also only examined the specific lens of interracial relationships. Other topic areas about dating across difference could include age, gender, sexual orientation, HIV status, socio-economic status, and national identity. Additionally, since this study only researched men's lives, there is opportunity to study different experiences based on gender/sex. Further opportunities would be to create both qualitative and quantitative studies about the impact of such messages (or lack thereof) based on the research.

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Vita

Victor Santana-Melgoza has made a career of diversity activism, education and outreach, and has been active in the field of social justice education for over 15 years. He is an award-winning diversity trainer and professional facilitator with his consulting firm, DiversityTalks, and has spoken in front of a variety of groups around the country. Victor has worked for social change throughout his life; from his time teaching communities about HIV/AIDS prevention to advocating for minority populations on college campuses, and providing organizational analysis and consulting for private sector and nonprofit organizations.

Victor has been published in *The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education* magazine, and has been asked to contribute to *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*, and the *Journal of Ethnicity and Inequalities in Health and Social Care*. He holds a B.A. in organizational communication, and has taught courses in communication, gender studies, and university success, with a particular research focus on interracial relationships, communication of social change, and positive deviance.

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