

Off The Straight & Narrow

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Here are some questions that might help open a discussion with classes after screening *Off the Straight and Narrow*, as well as some suggestions for further reading and viewing. Neither the questions nor the reading lists are comprehensive, but offer a place to start developing a critique of gay images on television. Some of the readings deal directly with television images, while others deal more generally with lesbian, gay and bisexual representations in a range of media.

The following sections correspond to the video. Click on a video still to jump to discussion questions and resources. Also available: [Short biographies](#) of *Off the Straight and Narrow* interviewees, and a [web site resource list](#).

General Introductory Reading:

Alwood, E. (1996). *Straight news: Gays, lesbians and the news media*. New York : Columbia University Press.

Creekmur, C. and Doty, A. (1985). *Out in culture: Gay, lesbian, and queer essays on popular culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Fejes, F. and Petrich, K. (1993). Invisibility, homophobia and heterosexism: Lesbians, gays and the media. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 10, 4. 396-422.

Hamer, D. and Budge, B. (Eds). (1994). *The good, the bad and the gorgeous: Popular culture's romance with lesbianism*. London: Pandora.

Russo, V. (1987). *The celluloid closet*. New York: Harper, 2nd Ed.

Streitmatter, R. (1995). *Unspeakable: The rise of the gay and lesbian press in America*. Boston: Faber and Faber.

What are stereotypes? What kinds of stereotypes do people associate with gays, lesbians and bisexuals? Should we do away with stereotypes, and if so, how might GLBs be represented?

What do we think of as "positive images?" What would "positive" lesbian, gay, and bisexual images look, sound and act like? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of only showing "positive images" of gay people?

Bronski, M. (1998). *The pleasure principle: Sex, backlash and the struggle for gay freedom*. New York: St Martin's Press.

Dyer, R. (1977). *Notes on stereotyping*. *Gays and Film*. New York: New York Zoetrope. pp. 27-39.

Gross, L. (1996). *Don't ask, don't tell: Lesbians and gays in the media*. In P. Lester (Ed.) *Images that injure: Pictorial stereotypes in the media*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

[See also Riggs, M. (1991) *Color Adjustment*. San Francisco: California Newsreel. Video: 88 mins. While Riggs does not deal here with gay images at all, his analysis of positive African American images provides a useful framework to consider positive images of gay people.]

In what ways are today's images of gay people similar to those of the late 1960s and 1970s? In what ways different? Do we see the changes as progress? Towards what?

Alwood, E. (1996). *Straight news: Gays, lesbians and the news media*. New York: Columbia University Press. Parts 1 and 2

In what ways might we imagine a more inclusive representation of HIV+ people and people with AIDS? What dominant television ideologies would need to shift in order for this to be possible?

Cummings, K. (1995) *AIDS Mothers*. In C. Siegel and A. Kibbey (eds.). *Forming and reforming identity*. New York: New York University Press.

Netzhammer, E.C. and Shamp, S.A. (1994). *Guilt by association: Homosexuality and AIDS on prime-time television*. In J. Ringer (Ed.) *Queer words, queer images: communication and the construction of homosexuality*. New York: New York University Press. pp. 91-106.

Patton, C. (1990). *Inventing AIDS*. New York: Routledge. [This is more appropriate for instructors and graduate students than undergraduates.]

Roth, N.L. and Hogan, K. (1998). *Gendered epidemic: Representations of women in the age of AIDS*. New York: Routledge.

What are some of the limitations placed upon lesbians, gays and bisexuals when they appear in contemporary dramas and sitcoms? What do these limitations protect the television world from?

Gross, L. (1994). What's wrong with this picture? Lesbian women and gay men on television. In J. Ringer (Ed.) *Queer words, queer images: communication and the construction of homosexuality*. New York: New York University Press. pp. 143-156.

Hantzis, D.M. and Lehr, V. (1994). Whose desire? Lesbian (Non)sexuality and television's perpetuation of heterosexism. In J. Ringer (Ed.) *Queer words, queer images: communication and the construction of homosexuality*. New York: New York University Press. pp. 107-121.

Moritz, M.J. (1994). Old strategies for new texts: How American television is creating and treating lesbian characters. In J. Ringer (Ed.) *Queer words, queer images: communication and the construction of homosexuality*. New York: New York University Press. pp. 122-142.

Torres, S. (1993). Television/feminism: Heartbeat and prime-time lesbianism. In H. Ablove, M.A. Barale & D.M. Halperin (Eds.) *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge. pp. 176-185.

Why are bisexual characters most often portrayed as youthful, indecisive, or in crisis? Why are bisexuals so rarely represented on US television?

Bryant, W.M. (1997). *Bisexual characters in film: From Anais to Zee*. New York: Harrington Park Press.

Garber, M. (1995). *Vice versa: Bisexuality and the eroticism of everyday life*. New York: Simon Schuster.

Knopf, M.J. (1996). Bi-nary Bi-sexuality. In D.E. Hall and M. Pramaggiore (Eds.) *Representing bisexualities: Subjects and cultures of fluid desire*. New York: New York University Press. pp. 142-164.

Pramaggiore, M. (1996). Epistemologies of the fence. In D.E. Hall and M. Pramaggiore (Eds.) *Representing bisexualities: Subjects and cultures of fluid desire*. New York: New York University Press. pp. 1-8.

How is the concept of "diversity" usually handled by television shows? In what ways do the Latino and African American characters discussed in the video (Pedro Zamora in *The Real World*, Ricky Vasquez in *My So-Called Life* and Carter Heywood in *Spin City*) challenge television's usual ways of talking about diversity?

Beam, J. (1991). Making ourselves from scratch. In E. Hemphill, (Ed.) *Brother to brother: New writing by Black gay men*. Boston: Alyson. Pp. 261-262.

Hemphill, E. (1995). In *Living Color: Toms, coons, mammies, faggots and bucks*. In C.K. Creekmur and A. Doty (Eds.), *Out in culture: Gay, lesbian, and queer essays on popular culture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. pp. 389-401.

Mercer, K. and Julien, I. (1988). Race, sexual politics and Black masculinity: A dossier. In R. Chapman and J. Rutherford (Eds.) *Male order: Unwrapping masculinity*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Does *Ellen* represent progress in gay television representations? Discussions of *Ellen* often go quickly to the assertion by straight audiences that the show was canceled because it was "not funny any more." Get people to consider the idea of "insider humor" and the place for shows which are funny to only a minority of audiences. Compare representations on *El* coverage of Andrew Cunanan's murder of Gianni Versace, both occurring in 1997. Did it matter Cunanan was a "gay serial killer"?

Crowley, H. (1997). Homicidal Homosexual. *The Advocate*. September 7.

Flint, J. (1998). As gay as it gets? *Entertainment Weekly*. May 8, pp. 26-32.

Handy, B. (1997). Roll over, Ward Cleaver and tell Ozzie Nelson the news. *Time*. April 14, 1997, pp. 78-86.

Barbato, R and Bailey, F. (1998). *The Real Ellen Story*. 42 mins. World of Wonder Productions.

The Value of Queer Images

Does it matter if gays are on TV? In what ways might it matter, and for whom? Would more gay improvement?

Queer Readings

What do we mean by queer readings? Why might these be important to lesbian, bisexual and gay a plethora of lesbian, gay and bisexual images, would queer readings become obsolete?

Doty, A. (1993). *Making things perfectly queer: Interpreting mass culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Dyer, R. (1986). *Judy Garland and gay men*. In *Heavenly bodies: Film stars and society*. New York: St Martin's Press.

Gross, L. (1996). *You're the first person I've ever told: Letters to a fictional gay teen*. In Bronski, M. (Ed) *Taking liberties: Gay men's essays on politics, culture, and sex*. New York: Masquerade. pp. 369-386.

Henderson, L. (1993). *Justify our love: Madonna and the politics of queer sex*. In C. Schwichtenberg (Ed.), *The Madonna connection: Representational politics, subcultural identities, and cultural theory*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Kielwasser, A.P. and Wolf, M.A. (1992). *Mainstream television, adolescent homosexuality, and significant silence*. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*. pp. 350-373.

Weiss, A. (1993). *A queer feeling when I look at you*. In *Vampires and violets: Lesbians in film*. pp. 30-50.