

2011 Winning Essay by Nicholas Derda

After reading a rather poorly written article about lesbian and gay advertising in a collection of essays for my Consumer Culture seminar, I decided that I would investigate this subject further for our final research paper. My hope was that I would be able to answer the questions that the author of this article had left me wondering.

Realizing that this topic was very broad, I decided to first find several advertising campaigns that I was interested in to use as a springboard for my research. After finding print and web ads from several magazines and different companies' websites, I began my search for secondary sources. I first turned to the Galileo search engine to see if we had any books on the topic in the Christopher Center. This quick search revealed that there were little to no resources in the stacks on this topic.

I next turned to Academic Search Premier to find articles. Before doing a broader search, I decided to look for the sources that were cited in the original article that I had read. While the article may not have been up to par, the sources the author had used were much more academically rigorous and introduced me to several of the central critiques surrounding the inclusion of lesbian and gay people into advertising.

After a search of the magazines and companies that I was interested in resulted in very few results in the EBSCO database, I decided to start entering more generic terms. This was problematic given the wide range of words and phrases used within the context of Gender and LGBTQ studies (e.g. "gay," "lesbian," "homosexual," "queer," etc). Using an ample assortment of search terms allowed me to find several very useful books and articles, which I ordered through Interlibrary Loan. Having learned to narrow my search criteria in several library help sessions during my past semesters at Valpo, I searched for articles in newspapers and magazines, like the New York Times and Business Week. These sources were helpful as they gave me a more straightforward, less jargon-filled survey of the topic from a business perspective.

When it looked as though I had exhausted all my search options within the EBSCO system, I turned to Google Scholar to find more sources. This search led me to several more books and articles. Rather than ordering all the books I found right away through ILL, I decided to look at them first on Google Books in order to determine which ones were worth ordering.

While I waited for my ILL sources to arrive, I conducted several searches on Google to see what people on blogs, LGBTQ websites, and electronic magazines, or "zines," as they are often referred to, had to say about this topic. While these may not have been traditionally "reliable" sources, they served my project well I was doing a cultural study where it is essential to know not just what scholars in the "ivory tower" have to say about the topic, but also how this is being discussed within the context of popular culture.

Having done research mostly in the humanities in the past, I was surprised when books oriented toward marketers and business students arrived in addition to the many critical critiques of advertisements from scholars in the humanities. At first this was frustrating because I was unfamiliar with many of the terms being thrown around in the business texts. Conveniently one of the books had a glossary of terms, which made reading these texts much more feasible.

Following a thorough skimming of the sources I had ordered, I realized there was a serious gap between what marketing scholars and researchers in the humanities had to say about this topic. I decided that I

would try to put these two strains of thought in conversation with each other within the context of my paper, trying to answer one key question: why were marketers making these advertisements the way they were when scholars in the humanities found them so problematic?

The paper that resulted from my research was an intensive postmodern cultural study that integrated a wide variety of sources, ranging from comments left by Youtube users to scholarly journal articles. This project most definitely showed me the complexity of the relationship that exists between disciplines (i.e. the humanities and business) and the discrepancy of interpretations that exists between popular culture and academia. In approaching this topic from an interdisciplinary lens, I believe, my paper helped to contribute to the ongoing scholarly conversation on this topic that has often been bifurcated between the humanities and business studies.

