

3

Masculinity and Gay-Friendly Advertising: A Comparative Analysis Between the Italian and US Market

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1 Introduction

It is acknowledged that advertising has a social and cultural influence on contemporary society (e.g. Cook 1992; Goddard 1998; Hermeren 1999; Kelly-Holmes 2005). Advertising also has an effect on women's and men's identity formation, as well as their wider representation in different media (e.g. Goffman 1979; Cortese 2004; Parkin 2006; Cronin 2000; Carter and Steiner 2004). Every day we are surrounded by images which refer to

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specific gender models and are accompanied by a language which draws on discourses which legitimize gendered social relations, identities and the notions of masculinity and femininity. Adverts and commercials contribute towards common representations of gender which often refer to stereotypes, assigning individuals to pre-established roles. Such representations are socially and historically determined (Connell 1995) and embedded both in images and words. Socially sanctioned male and female behaviours in society are mirrored in printed adverts and commercials because gender in itself is a meaning system influencing visual and verbal codes.

Because they both reflect and reproduce current social and cultural values, it is interesting to think about the many changes which have occurred in advertising through time, especially in recent decades. There have been numerous changes in advertising since Erving Goffman's touchstone study on gender in adverts in 1979. His semiotic analysis revealed how these texts were reflections of specific social themes and values. If adverts are still the results of cultural practices based on shared meanings it is clear that customs and habits have been deeply transformed. As a consequence, images of femininity and masculinity must be considered in light of cultural expectations which are continuously changing (see MacKinnon 2003; Whitehead 2002; Talbot 2000). More recent adverts demonstrate a change in thought, if not a "de-gendering" process, that is to say, nowadays we witness an ideological recycling of fixed notions of femininity and masculinity towards an idea of multiple femininities/masculinities.

Starting from these premises the analysis of adverts alluding to the LGBT community should take into account also the debate on different theoretical perspectives dealing with "queer masculinity" (Kirsch 2000; Penney 2013; Poole 2014). Keeping in mind the recent debate within Queer Studies our aim here is to analyse how the recent fluidity of gender roles and expressions in Western society has been affecting the advertising world by considering a relatively new market segment: gay and lesbian consumers (see Tuten 2005; Tsai 2004). This is a segment that has been identified as "dream consumers" (Wardlow 1996) and seen as good targets for advertisers due to having fewer financial responsibilities and large disposable incomes (although Badgett 2001 disputes the idea that

gay and lesbian consumers are as affluent as they are sometimes portrayed).

Thus some recently printed adverts and commercials have represented non-heterosexual orientations in a positive way (see Baker 2008). However, the appearance of LGBT people in advertising raises further issues. For example, it is important to avoid treating gay consumers as a homogenous group with monolithic preferences and perceptions because, as scholars have already underlined, there are differences between and among gay men and women, for example the socio-political nature of lesbian identity (see Clarke 2000; Stein 1989). While adverts featuring positive representations of LGBT people can be viewed as raising visibility and thus part of the fight for social rights and legitimization (Chasin 2000), we also need to bear in mind that the primary motivation for advertising is to sell products and make profits—and this may result in discourses within advertising which conflict in subtle ways.

In this chapter we look at the representations of masculinity in gay-friendly printed adverts and commercials, focusing on the tensions between marketing and socio-political discourses that occur within them. We also offer a comparative perspective between gay-friendly advertising in Italy and in the USA, starting from two specific campaigns: “Findus Piramide” which consists of a series of commercials for the brand Findus broadcast in Italy in 2014 and Tiffany’s campaign “Will You?” appearing in commercials and printed adverts in the USA in 2015. Bearing in mind that advertising reflects culturally specific practices and discourses, our goal is to foreground differences between two social contexts by analysing the extent to which Italian and North American cultures react differently to gay-friendly advertising and to map out the possible reasons for that. Despite the fact that in the North American context it is possible to recognize a recent and interesting theme, that is to say, representations of gay families, we have decided to choose examples where the focus is on the couple. This is due mainly to the fact that in our context (Italy), because of the lack of a legal recognition of gay couples and the lack of legislation for gay people who want to adopt a child, brands have not yet created adverts for gay families with children.

We have focussed on mainstream advertising rather than adverts aimed specifically for an LGBT audience. The Italian case study is from a

food company campaign aimed at the general public and for which the chosen commercial is only one from a series for the same product while the American example is from a jewellery company and is also part of a wider campaign of printed and broadcast commercials about engagement rings.

Before starting the analysis it is useful to consider in more detail what is meant by the term *gay-friendly advertising*. While two main typologies have been identified (the so-called “gay window advertising” (Bronski 1984) and the more recent and explicit “out of the closet” commercials and printed adverts (Kates 2000) aimed at the LGBT market), we divide LGBT advertising into three main areas:

1. the use and abuse of gay images for the heterosexual market. This means that gay images are used for heterosexual consumers and usually depict various caricatures of gay men (e.g. gay men as effeminate), drag queens (nowadays more accepted in the mainstream imagination), transvestites presented through a comic register or lesbian chic (almost used as a pornographic heterosexual image). Two examples of this kind are from the car brand Renault which in its Italian 2009 campaign presented a commercial with a drag-queen father protagonist and in 2010 portrayed a female couple flirting and blinking at the heterosexual consumer.
2. gay window advertising, which is allusive, non-explicit and non-direct; it leaves the viewer in doubt about the presence of homosexuality. In this case advertisers do not reference a homophobic sensibility, while on the other hand, they use subtle signs that could lead gay consumers to recognize themselves as the target of the message. The message is encoded: gay symbolism and codes are used for minimum risk of alienating the heterosexual consumer (see Choong 2010). In this case we have two levels in reading the adverts: one for the LGBT market and the other for heterosexual consumers. For example, Volkswagen’s 1997 advert for the Golf, titled “Sunday Afternoon”, managed to be memorably ambiguous with a pair of representative twenty-somethings who may or may not have been a couple, driving the car looking for old furniture.

3. “Out-of-closet advertising” which is explicit and direct, addressing the gay target immediately without leaving any doubt. The product is sold for a gay market segment, like for example, Chevrolet commercial for the 2014 Winter Olympics Opening Ceremony which features gay families together with heterosexual ones. This example could also be representative of a fourth category, that is adverts where an explicit use of LGBT people in a positive context is used also for a general market.

Taking into account commercials and adverts aimed at the LGBT community there is another distinction to be drawn: the one between commercial advertising and social campaigns. On the one hand, social campaigns are created by institutions (e.g. charities, pressure groups or political parties) in order to promote awareness and understanding about equality issues relating to gender and sexuality. On the other hand, commercial advertising refers to homosexuality for marketing reasons, aimed at (certain types of) gay consumers to connect the brand to a specific target, for example, younger and progressive consumers.

Having acknowledged this, our main question is does gay-friendly advertising advocate cultural change? In order to answer this question we will start from the assumption that advertising is connected to the brand and to the product’s valorization (i.e. to say the meanings added to the product beyond its characteristics, see Floch 1990 and Kapferer 2000). In order to positively represent a product, typically controversial topics will be avoided. However, the representation of controversial topics has been used in advertising to convey specific valorizations to the product. For example, in the 1980s Oliviero Toscani and the brand Benetton proposed a series of printed advertising campaigns which directly referred to social issues such as AIDS and terminally ill patients, a kiss between a priest and a nun, and a war cemetery (see Semprini 1996). Benetton/Toscani tested conventional advertising breaking advertising rules with a series of “catastrophe” adverts recycling photographic material of TV news footage and newspapers (oil-stained birds, an Albanian boat full of would-be immigrants on the Italian coast and a burning car in a street, see Falk 1997).

It is also worth considering how the adverts relate to the concept of normativity (see Kates 1999; Wiegman and Wilson 2015). If a core aspect

of Queer Theory is to take a critical stance towards the idea of fixed and stable identity categories, which are then viewed through a lens of normativity, we are interested in the ways that the adverts uphold and/or challenge models of mainstream masculinities (see Baker 2008; Milani 2014). In order to analyse our case studies from a linguistic and discursive point of view with a special attention to the ideological and cultural aspects of adverts we have found an approach that considers semiotics to be fruitful.

2 Semiotics of Advertising

Semiotics has been used to analyse different typologies of social discourse, such as journalistic, political or media discourse, including advertising discourse. A useful methodology for advertising texts is the model envisaged by Algirdas Julien Greimas (1917–1992) directly connected to Structural Analysis (particularly to L. T. Hjelmslev's theory). From this perspective, advertising has a narrative structure and can be interpreted as a sort of fairy tale or dream world. In any commercial a subject wants to achieve a goal and this occurs through the relationship between a Subject and an Object of value which the Subject wants to acquire (we are referring to Greimas's actantial narrative schema where actants are narrative roles; see Greimas 1987, 1990). The Subject is aided by a Helper in carrying out this operation, for instance, in the fairy tale Pinocchio, the Blue Fairy transforms the protagonist (a puppet) into a child, that is to say, permits the actant Subject (Pinocchio) to achieve his Object of value (being a real child). In advertising a Subject (represented by the protagonist of the printed ad or commercial) wants to obtain a specific objective, or in semiotic terms, an Object of value (seduction, beauty and success). In order to achieve this goal they need a Helper, which in advertising is represented by the product, the magic object of the fairy tale world. The actantial model can be summarized in three couples of six actants: Subject/Object, Helper/Opponent and Sender/Receiver. The Sender is the narrative role requesting the establishment of the junction between Subject and Object (e.g. the King asks the Prince to rescue the Princess) while the Receiver is the narrative role for which the quest is being undertaken (e.g. at the end of the fairy tale the King recognizes the success of the Prince's action).

In advertising, the value is given to the Object through a series of discursive and textual semantic operations. Thanks to these mechanisms, Object (product/brand) determinate values not necessarily substantial to the product (e.g. freedom, youth and success) are given. The advertised object, in its substance, becomes thus marginal, the important issues are the values that the brand/agency assigns to it or “charges” it with. For example, in order to analyse these mechanisms, Jean Marie Floch outlined a semantic model which he defined as a “grid of consumption values” (see Danesi 2013). Analysing car advertising, and then applying the same schema to other product typologies and services (furniture, hypermarket users and underground travellers), Floch created a first opposition between “basic values” and “use values” that characterize the object. With the term “use values” he means practical and utilitarian values which represent everyday actions, while “basic values” refer to existential values related to desires and troubles (existential matter). From this opposition between basic and use values Floch outlines four types of valorization of the object: (1) practical valorization, which corresponds to utilitarian values (in the case of cars to comfort, stability and reliability); (2) utopian valorization, which corresponds to existential values (e.g. identity, adventure and vitality); (3) ludic valorization, which is the negation of practical valorization (such as luxury, class and speed); and (4) critical valorization, which represents the negation of utopian valorization (based on the relationship quality/price or innovation/cost). The semiotic square is a graphic representation of a semantic micro-universe; it can be considered both from a static point of view (semantic aspects) and a dynamic point of view (syntactical aspects). Floch’s categories can be so represented in Fig. 3.1 (see Floch 2001: 120).

We will refer to this schema in our analysis of the case studies here presented.

3 Analysis

Case Study 1: Findus Piramide Campaign 2014–2015¹

As with many other countries in the early twenty-first century, attitudes to and laws around LGBT people are changing. While homosexuality has

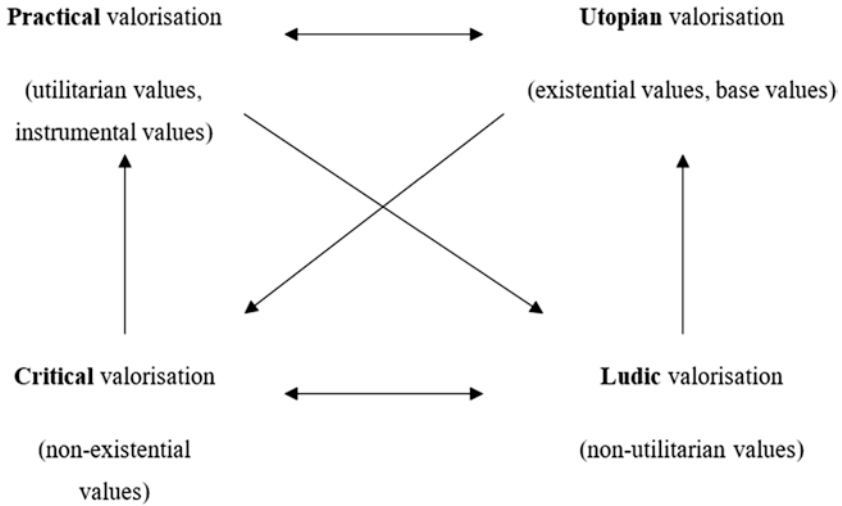


Fig. 3.1 The semiotic square

been legal in Italy since 1887, it was only in June 2016 that a law allowing civil unions for same-sex couples was passed. According to a Eurispes survey in 2016, 71.1% of Italy's residents identify as Catholic.² The Catholic Church opposes same-sex unions, believing homosexuality to be a "moral disorder".³

In Italy, adverts for the LGBT community are not common, becoming an object of discussion after Guido Barilla's declaration in 2013 that implied that the market of his brand of pasta was only for the traditional heterosexual family. This declaration had many effects worldwide especially in the North American market where Barilla is one the major Italian brands. When adverts for the LGBT community are shown they result in controversies. For example, the Tiffany's campaign that we analyse in part 3.2 was at the centre of political debate and controversy in Italy. The advertising campaign of the Findus Piramide (Pyramid) product aroused a series of strong reactions in Italy.⁴ The advert introduces Luca, who invites his mother to the apartment he shares with his flatmate Gianni. After surprising her with his skill in whipping up a delicious (frozen) meal, Luca says (translated to English) "Mum, there is another little surprise. Gianni is not just my flatmate, he is my partner". The mother replies fondly "Darling, I already

knew” and touches her son’s hands. The coming out is not unexpected for the mother who seems more interested in the product and its novelty (reading in-between the lines what the advertiser wants to underline is that the product itself helped the mother to positively accept her son’s sexuality). But to what extent does this “coming out” reflect the real-life experiences of LGBT people? And does the advert’s use of a political issue feel like an overly exploitative commercial strategy? Therefore, the questions which drive our analysis of this commercial is what social and cultural valorizations are conveyed through the representation of a homosexual couple in the Italian context? Related to this, we ask who is the target advertisers aim at by their allusion to homosexuality?

We will start from the analysis of the narrative structure of the 30-second commercial. It begins with an introductory still shot (with the brand image overlapped to the shot) where a voice-over—external to the story—says: “Findus *Quattro salti* presenta...” (Findus *Quattro salti* presents...”; see Fig. 3.2).⁵ The same voice-over closes the “frame” story effect at the end with a new still shot, that visually shows the product, that is to say two different types of packaging, while declaiming the brand’s claim: “Findus, il sapore della vita” (Findus, the flavour of life). The story is developed within these initial and final shots. The main sequence is represented from the audio track perspective by a dialogue between two young men and the mother of one of them, a dialogue where we witness the coming out of the son. From the visual point of view the shots of this sequence seem to tell another story—apparently more neutral and banal—from the dialogue. The relevance of the dialogue over the actions represented is highlighted by the technical characteristics of the shots.

First, it is important to underline that the shots are trembling and blurred—which is technically caused by the low depth of field. Faces do not appear in the shots (see Fig. 3.2), and at the centre of the shots, perfectly in focus, is the product in its manifestations: the packaging, the plastic pyramid where the food is contained and cooked and the product’s image in the dish. The subjects in the scene are identified only through their hands, the only body part which is sharpened through the close-up shot or extreme close-up (e.g. when the mother’s hand is tenderly overlapping her son’s hand). The fact that faces do not appear could be interpreted as a form of censorship, since we are dealing with a controversial



Fig. 3.2 Still of Findus advert

(for some) issue (homosexuality) but the same technique of not shooting the faces of the protagonists (a sort of visual rhetoric figure of *reticentia*) is used also in another commercial dedicated to the same product (where the issue of homosexuality is not at stake). What equates both commercials is the theme of seduction reflected in the product, in fact in the second one a young man seduces his girlfriend with his culinary skills, by cooking the pyramid, that is the product.

How can we interpret the audio-visual story of this commercial containing a direct allusion to homosexuality? Let's start with the voice-over. It is contemporarily meta-diegetic and extra-diegetic—it is the voice of the brand which authenticates what is within the story frame, that is to say, the diegetical part of the dialogue during the preparation of the meal. From the point of view of Greimas's actantial model this voice in the introduction has the role of the Sender: it invites the Subject—both the viewer of the commercial and the protagonist of the story—to achieve a goal. In the conclusion the same voice acquires the role of the Receiver and this confirms the success of the Subject's mission: the product (the Helper) has obtained the desired effect in helping the Subject to achieve his goal, that is to say, to convince the mother that the product is good (and that he is able to cook by himself following the national stereotype of the Italian mother cooking for her son).

What is interesting is that the voice-over—the brand that is both Sender and Receiver in this story—ratifies the novelty of the product, but only incidentally, as an unexpected consequence of what has occurred in the social sphere, that is to say, the gay couple's coming out. From the beginning the voice-over clarifies that at the centre of the viewer's attention is the product and not the social issue.

In order to corroborate this hypothesis there is a further aspect present in the dialogue sequence between mother and son, the fact of listening to voices without looking at the speakers' faces. Listening to voices without seeing faces is a typical cinematic strategy of the thriller genre and through this audio-visual technique it is possible to create tension towards a revelation or discovery (*anagnoresis*). In this commercial the shots are never focused on the speakers' faces, therefore they do not reveal the identity of the subjects in the dialogue, but only focus on the product. The real surprise, the revelation or *anagnoresis* of the story, is not the boy's outing but the novelty of the product. The mother asks her son: "Allora Luca, qual è la sorpresa?" ("So Luca what is the surprise?"). And consequently, the viewer also asks himself, what is the surprise? It is the revelation of her son's homosexuality—that she is clearly aware of, as witnessed by her answer: "Tesoro mio, l'avevo capito" ("Darling, I already knew"). The product is both at the centre of the shots and of the story. The gay couple and the revelation to the mother—a second *agnoresis*—is additional (in the dialogue the boy says "Mamma c'è un'altra sorpresa", "Mum, I have another little surprise") which guarantees the product a specific thematic characterization, that is to say, a valorization. The issue of the gay couple and their coming out is utilized to delineate the young and transgressive character of the product. The mother's reaction to her son's coming out could perhaps be seen as unusual, considering that some Italian parents may find it difficult to accept homosexuality. It is not by chance that recently Agedo and CondividiLove, two private associations for LGBT rights, produced an advert for 2015's Coming Out Day entitled "Amore dimmelo" (My love, please tell me) where parents talk about the coming out of their sons and daughters (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9O3EOmmVNdc>).

The novelty of the Piramide Findus product is represented through a theme, a series of values, which belong to a determinate consumer target.

This is the answer to our initial question: who are the targets advertisers are aiming at through the allusion to homosexuality? The answer is probably highly educated, socially progressive young consumers and gay people, who could be the consumers of a ready-made meal. The idea is to market something new (a product) and link it to a contemporary social debate. The key terms which refer both to the consumer and to the cultural/social issue are novelty, transgression, youth and difference.

If we want to identify which marketing strategy is utilized in this commercial according to Floch's semiotic square and his valorizations we can map out a positioning between the utopian and ludic, because on the one hand it defines a specific consumer's identity (the product's image characterizes the consumer's existence, his self-perception), but also recalls the novelty and the transgression of a stereotyped social order (highlighted by the final claim "Findus the flavour of life"). This positioning of the product underlines how the presence of the gay couple in this commercial shows a normalization of this issue. This representation does not hurt the sensibility of the conservative audience; on the contrary it helps to sell the product. Notably, the advert represents the gay couple in a homonormative context, constructing them as similar to traditional heterosexual couples, putting them in a domestic family setting in a comfortable-looking and tastefully decorated home. Although we do not fully see the faces of the couple, they are clothed in a similar way, appear to be the same age and have similar body shapes. The family is thus signified as respectable members of the middle-class with only sexuality being a marker of difference from the norm.

Case Study 2: Tiffany's "Love Without Limits" Commercial 2013

While in Italy adverts for the LGBT community have only recently been shown, Corporate America spends billions of dollars each year targeting members of the LGBT population in the market place, believing in the lucrative potential of this marketing segment. Corporate policies have included a public stance as advocates for equal treatment for LGBT individuals under the law and businesses have given financial donations to gay

causes (see Oakenfull 2013). These brands have been recognized as progressive and are aimed at the so-called “pink dollar” (a term which describes the apparent purchasing power of the gay community). Out of the closet marketing on the American market began relatively early, as can be seen from a 1994 Ikea commercial which utilized a quasi-documentary format (giving the appearance of a real couple and real life) about a gay couple shopping for home furnishings. The tagline of the commercial was “It’s a big country. Someone’s got to furnish it”. Four years later, in 1998, Virgin Cola presented a campaign entitled “Say Something” which represented a gay marriage.⁶ The 1990s were a period where the coming out of celebrities in the US became more common, so there was a public recognition of sexual identity in spite of the anti-gay conservative politics of the time. In the current context, same-sex marriage was legalized in June 2015 in the US. In 2011 a Gallup poll found that 42% of Americans identified as Protestant and 23% as Catholic.⁷ The US has a longer history of LGBT representations in contexts like advertising, and is not as influenced by the views of the Catholic Church as Italy, but we also note that conservative Christianity opposes rights for LGBT people in the US too and same-sex marriage was legalized only recently.

The commercial we have chosen for the analysis is part of a wider Tiffany campaign begun in 2011 that is still ongoing at the time of writing, focussing on love relationships and inclusiveness. All the adverts in the campaign have the title “Will You Marry Me?” (2011, 2013, 2015). In its 2011 advert Tiffany presented a commercial made of a series of interviews about New York love stories told by different couples (including one gay couple, one interracial couple, one senior citizen couple and one African-American couple). It is a short film (6.32 minutes in length) directed by Edward Burns. This campaign has been the starting point for a series of adverts and commercials for Tiffany’s products until the recent campaign “Will You?” planned by Ogilvy & Mather, New York (launched in 2015, 1.14 minutes in length) where different kinds of couples are shown (including an interracial couple, a gay couple (see Fig. 3.3) and a couple where they was a significant age difference).⁸ This commercial was preceded by a print advert campaign about real-life couples amongst which there was a gay couple.



Fig. 3.3 Still from 'Will You?' Tiffany advert

The commercial we are analysing is entitled “Love without Limits”, produced in 2013 by Blakeley Jones as copy-writer; Matt Reamer as photographer; and Karlin Lichtenberg as director—all part of the VCU Brandcenter in Richmond. The commercial is about an engagement ring specifically produced for men. Can it be seen as a smart marketing decision by the brand, or is it a sign of changing times and shifting cultural values? In this advert it seems that the video and the audio tell the viewer different stories that run in parallel: on the one hand a voice-over telling a story of love and on the other images which run shot after shot building up a visual love story. The soundtrack and the images are built up as two parallel narrative lines, a verbal story and a visual one and never overlap until they converge at the end of the commercial through the image of the product. It is the product which links the audio-visual stories. The voice-over expresses essential concepts and values of an absolute and true love connected to the brand in order to characterize the campaign “Will You?”. Only at the end does the voice reveal for whom the product is, a gay couple. The revelation of the main target consumer occurs when the brand Tiffany appears on the screen and the voice-over states the

commercial headline: “The first engagement ring for men”. It is at this moment that the voice-over and the images converge. The visual story shows a man dressing up for a ceremony, wearing a shirt and a tie, reading aloud from a letter and then grabbing a small gift box before going out. The commercial features a series of close-up shots of two major objects (a gift box and a piece of paper containing the speech he is going to read aloud, see Fig. 3.4), and of a series of medium-long shots focussing on the subject. The editing of the different shots is suggestive of the subject’s tense mood and focuses the viewer’s attention on the two objects that become the co-protagonists of the scene. In the second sequence of the commercial the gift box is revealed to be a ring case while the letter is a declaration of love. We could call the first sequence of the commercial “preparatory” (where the subject acquires competence), and define the second sequence as “performative”, where the subject makes clear what was virtually presented in the first part of the commercial. We can also observe a topological distinction⁹: the space of the first sequence is a closed one, it is a house in which the subject acquires the competence (the gift and the letter), while the space of the action and of the identification and agnition (both for the viewer who understands the target of the commercial and for the subjects involved in the action) is an open one. Moreover, this space is public and the couple is visible to everyone present in that

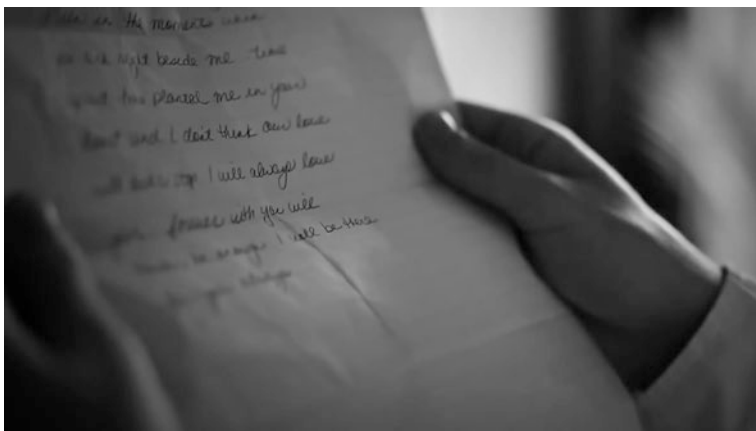


Fig. 3.4 Still from ‘Love without Limits’ Tiffany advert

space. The space, which is a shrine, has a glass window opened to the external world and can be seen as a metaphor of the coming out and at the same time of a desired recognition of the relationship. The idea of public recognition for gay couples is a recurring one in Tiffany's printed adverts and commercials clearly referring to the social and political context of those years.

At the beginning of the commercial the viewer is unlikely to realize that the man is gay, for 46 seconds (over the 1 minute of the entire commercial) he could be heterosexual. The truth emerges only at the end, as a revelation, like in the Italian commercial. However, the inclusion of a gay couple in a campaign about engagement rings and their story told as a love story developing through time can be considered as a means to affirm that any form of love is true and love can express itself in different forms.

The turning point in the commercial takes place inside the shrine, the background being the Virginia War Memorial, known as "Shrine of Memory" in Richmond, Virginia, built in 1956 and dedicated to fallen soldiers from WWII to the Gulf War; a monument famous for its architecture and importance to American history. This choice of location is significant as it indexes a change of attitude towards homosexuality in the US military which has come into being in the last few years. In June 2013 Chuck Hagel, at the time Secretary of Defense, acknowledged equal rights for same-sex military couples. In January 2014 President Obama positively remarked the Supreme Court ruling in favor of legalising same-sex marriage nationwide and welcomed the end of a policy which banned gay and lesbian service personnel in the army.

The gay target audience is made clear in the last 15 seconds of the commercial, and becomes an "out of the closet" example where there is no ambiguity about addressing the gay market. The ring, the product, mediates the revelation for the viewer. From the point of view of the actantial structure the product is the instrument (the Helper) for obtaining the value object (love, engagement). In the commercial the man is at the centre of the stage, looks at the engagement ring and turns when a second man enters the scene. The traditional marriage proposal is put on the stage with the man proposing on his knee (see Fig. 3.5). At this point the brand overlaps with the image of an embrace between the two men.



Fig. 3.5 Still from 'Love without Limits' Tiffany advert

Looking at Floch's valorizations we can say that they are used in a very similar way if compared to the previous case study. Once again we have a utopian valorization of the product and the product mirrors the gay couple's life. In this example the utopian valorization is aimed at a gay target, as a matter of fact the product is very specific.

The commercial is in black and white, so that we do not have a chromatic effect or, following Greimas's idea, we have a non-colour effect. Black and white gives an aura of nostalgia to the commercial and represents a timeless action; moreover, it renders the images essential and clear; the actors' faces seem endowed with more character. Similarly, places are shown in a shadow and light effect. Therefore, the use of black and white creates a romantic atmosphere and charges the action with pathos. We believe that the advert offers a new representation of masculinity which is now possible in the North American context due to increased acceptance of gay identity, although this representation partly conveys an idea of homonormativity (Duggan 2002: 179): "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption". In Fig. 3.3 the couple are both handsome, well-groomed, white, middle-class men. Apart from the fact that they are

touching, they resemble the heterosexual models of hegemonic masculinity from numerous mainstream advertising campaigns such as Banana Republic, Marlboro cigarettes or Lacoste aftershave.

4 Conclusion

From the case studies analysed it is clear that the use of gay couples results in new masculinities being represented in printed adverts and commercials, both in the American and the Italian context. Advertising mirrors what is socially accepted in the context where it is presented, thus reflecting contemporary social values in the two different cultural contexts through fictional representations. The Italian example underlines a somewhat muted form of social acceptance of gay relationships, evident from the fact that there is no physical contact between the couple, and the partners are not shown to be married or engaged. Certainly there is a market for engagement rings and gay marriages in Italy but there is still social and political resistance; Italy is one of the most resistant countries within the European community against gay marriage and same-sex relationships recognition. This helps to explain why the Tiffany commercial was not shown in the Italian media. Moreover, the Italian commercial encloses the issue of homosexuality in a family atmosphere with narrative tension being created around whether the mother will show her acceptance of the son's relationship. The mother acts as a mediator with the rest of the world (and the commercial's audience). The need for a mediator figure is not present in the American commercial where the acceptance of cultural, ethnical and racial differences has probably grown more than within the Italian context. Here, nobody but the couple themselves are required to "accept" the relationship, and instead the tension arises from whether the engagement ring will be accepted.

From these examples we can affirm that the representation of gay-friendly advertising is connected to marketing strategies but structured differently according to the cultural context and the acceptance of LGBT issues. In the Italian advert the representation of the same-sex couple is still presented in an implicitly controversial way, while in the American advert we have a clearer assertion of homonormativity, due to the different

political and social contexts. Moreover, in the Italian example, the representation of homosexuality is connected to the selling of a general item (food), while in the American example, the representation is strictly connected to same-sex marriage. So, in the first case study homosexuality is “used” to promote a product which has nothing to do with LGBT issues, while in the second case study marketing strategies are connected to these issues.

From a queer perspective notwithstanding the differences among the two case studies, the representation of homosexuality in both adverts is homonormative, proposing once again a traditional model of masculinity which mirrors heteronormativity. If this representation is connected to marketing strategies, and acceptable social values, it is, however, a first step in the introduction of LGBT issues in a commercial domain, and thus in the social sphere. But it should be seen as a beginning towards a wider range of diverse representations of queer people, rather than an end.

Notes

1. The campaign was produced by Havas Worldwide and planned by Havas Media, Milan.
2. <http://riforma.it/it/articolo/2016/02/01/litalia-e-le-religioni-nel-2016>
3. *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the pastoral care of homosexual persons* http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19861001_homosexual-persons_en.html
4. Different newspapers commented on the ad, for example, *Il Fatto Quotidiano* (B. Ballardini, “Findus, 4 schiaffi a Barilla” “Findus 4 slaps to Barilla” June 11, 2014 where the title clearly refers to Barilla’s chairman’s declaration that gay families did not represent his company’s values prompting a boycott of Barilla’s products), *Il Giornale* (G. Masini, “Findus sfratta il capitano per far posto alle coppie gay” “Findus fires the Captain to give a job to gay couples” August 11, 2014 where the title refers to the previous testimonial of the brand who was an old sailor), *Il Corriere della sera* (E. Tebano, “Il posto del barbuto capitano Findus? L’hanno preso due ragazzi gay” “The place of bearded Captain Findus? It has been taken by two gay young men) both referring to the old image of the sea captain used for the brand, which was traditional and part of a classic image of

masculinity, changed with the representation of a gay couple, but only for these new products.

5. “Quattro salti” is the name of the product line.
6. For more examples of LGBT commercials and adverts see www.commercialcloset.com
7. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx>
8. In Italy this campaign has caused a strong reaction by the Conservative Party (NcD Nuovo Centro Destra) who affirmed that the printed ad showing the gay couple cannot be utilised because it will contrast with the identity of Italian people (meaning being gay means being anti-Italian). See M. Winkler’s article “Tiffany, la campagna gay-friendly? Per il governo è passibile di denuncia” *Il Fatto quotidiano* Jan 13, 2015.
9. Greimas’s (1989) visual semiotics distinguishes between *figurative* and *plastic* levels of analysis of an image. Figurative categories permit the identification of objects, figures and representations carrying a recognisable signifier (the figure of a man, an object). The concept of plastic signifier is used to analyse images from the point of view of three main subcategories: *topological* categories (*rectilinear* like upper/lower or felt/right and *curvilinear* like peripheral/central and closing/enclosed), *chromatic* categories (colours, brightness and saturation) and *eidetic* categories (shapes and forms).

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