

Way Out of the Closet

Do gays feel accepted enough to depict their dark interests on TV?

By Gene Edward Veith

**From: *World Magazine* (www.worldmag.com)
January 26, 2002 (Vol. 17, Num. 3)**

Reprinted with permission

Where once broadcast television had just three channels, plus PBS, cable and satellites now offer scores, even hundreds of channels for every taste.

History buffs, animal lovers, sports addicts, and amateur gourmets have their own channels. Specialized channels cater to children, women, and golfers. In the works now, as part of the crusade to bring homosexuality into the mainstream of American life, is a channel for homosexuals.

It is likely to be a pay channel, so it would not be available to basic-cable subscribers; it is likely to be a digital service, so it would not replace an existing analog channel; and it is likely to carry "limited" advertising, according to one of the originators of the idea, who spoke with Knight Ridder TV writer Gail Shister. Unknown is how low the network brass is willing to go in depicting the gay culture's interests in homosexual pornography.

TV Guide reports that MTV and Showtime, both owned by the media conglomerate Viacom (which also holds CBS, UPN, and Nickelodeon), are developing the gay channel, possibly to launch later this year (QuickTakes, Jan. 19). Other networks, such as HBO and USA Networks, and Cablevision, have also been studying such a venture. Canada already has a specialty channel for homosexuals, PrideVision.

But according to TV Guide columnist J. Max Robins, Viacom's initiative seems closer to fruition because MTV and Showtime already have experience hawking homosexuality. "Look at the success Showtime has with programming like *Queer as Folk*," said a Viacom insider quoted by Mr. Robins, referring to the soft-core homosexual soap opera on the premium movie channel. "And MTV has a long history of being out in front on gay issues and marketing to that community."

Parents might not be aware that MTV, a specialty channel ostensibly for teenagers, has been pushing homosexual themes on programs such as the reality show *Real World*, the dating game *Singled Out*, and the underaged sex show *Undressed*.

"Whoever does this could win big," said one industry analyst quoted by Mr. Robins. Another said, "It's about time somebody had gone after that audience with a network. It's an

important segment of the audience that has traditionally been underserved. The money is certainly there to support it.”

This is based on estimates that 6 percent of the population is homosexual, around 15 million people, with a combined annual spending of \$250 billion to \$350 billion. The specific population figures may or may not be true, but the fact remains that homosexuals indeed have disposable income.

Advertisers are reportedly eager to sponsor gay programs. But depending upon whether mainstream advertisers support the channel, the programming would need to be toned down. Support from homosexual niche advertisers (who have nothing to lose in the mainstream market) would free the channel to be more sexually explicit. As one industry insider quoted by Mr. Robins delicately put it, “You wouldn't have the content issues that you're inevitably faced with if you go the ad-supported route.”

The need to weigh such decisions reflects the conflict in strategy among homosexual activists. On one hand, the agenda has been to make homosexual behavior seem normal. We are just like you, they say to mainstream America. Same-sex “families” have the same family values that heterosexuals have. Homosexuals adopting children and calls for homosexual marriage—as well as the nonthreatening images of homosexual friends on TV sitcoms—advance the view that their lifestyle is innocent, wholesome, and socially positive.

But the gay lifestyle is different from that of mainstream Americans, driven by a desperate, obsessive promiscuity and destructive and self-destructive behavior. This is evident in Showtime's *Queer as Folk*.

Many homosexuals, having gained social approval for their sexual practices, are chafing against having to portray themselves in terms of uptight, bourgeois heterosexuals. They want to flaunt their promiscuity, their transvestism, their pederasty. They oppose the legal and moral restrictions that would come with homosexual marriage and are demanding their sexual freedom on their own terms.

So whether the gay channel consists largely of talk shows, Ellen re-runs, and innocuous-seeming “just like you” propaganda—or feature hard-core homosexual pornography—will be telling. Do homosexuals think they need to work more on being socially acceptable? Or do they feel accepted enough already so that they feel free to indulge publicly their darker interests?

Either way, they have come a long way. According to the pop-culture maxim, nothing really counts until it gets on TV.