



Ads for HIV Meds Upset Viewers of Great American Family Channel

Watch actress Alexandra Billings, who is living with HIV, offer a response filled with love, inclusion and holiday wishes.

December 27, 2022 By [Trent Straube](#)

TV commercials for prescription meds are about as common nowadays as ads for fast food. But for some viewers enjoying holiday movies on the Great American Family channel (GAC TV), encountering ads for [HIV meds](#) featuring same-sex couples felt like getting a lump of coal in their Christmas stockings. They took to social media to complain about the [HIV](#) ads, and the network apologized.

“Love the movies! But have you removed the very non-family friendly aids drug ad with 2 men kissing,” a viewer asked GAC TV via social media.

“Unfortunately, we don’t have control over local commercials,” the company responded, “and we sincerely apologize.”

[Transgender](#) actress Alexandra Billings, who has been living with HIV for decades, used that online dialogue as an opportunity to discuss [HIV stigma](#) and history. [As LGBTQ news outlet The Advocate reported](#), Billings tagged GAC TV and wrote:

“Dear @gactv

“I have been living with HIV for over thirty years now. I buried most of my friends in my twenties and I live with an illness that gets more and more difficult to manage and navigate with each passing year.

“The stigma of this disease is alive and well, as long as there are humans who attempt to pass off misinformation, fear or ignorance as normal conversation and acceptable social behavior.”

“I remember when my best friend Ginger died. She was 24 years old and had been sick for a few years. Back in the 80’s, when this first appeared, you got sick and you died. There was no

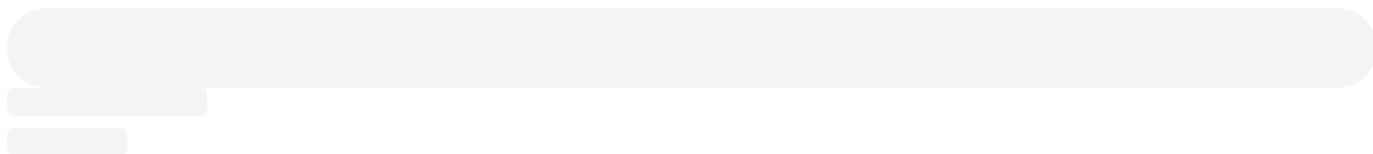
treatment. There was no alternative, and there was no hope. Because funeral homes were terrified to put us in the ground because no one really knew how you got this thing, and because family members ostracized us and because the main stream of society was working off misinformation there was no where to put her dead body. So my friend Gloria and I sewed her up, put her in the back of our Volkswagen and dropped her off at the Cook County emergency room exit in Chicago, Illinois in the middle of winter.

“I’m not assigning blame. And I’m not trying to suggest this is all of who you are. Your channel professes love, tolerance and family, and I simply don’t see any of those attributes in your response to this viewer.

“I only hope this holiday brings everyone at your channel clarity of heart. And that as you continue to tell stories about love and tolerance, and the American family, that you allow everyone into that divine space...and not just the humans you believe deserve to be there.

“Happy holidays, and may everyone in your family find inclusion and grace and, moreover, be both safe and healthy.”

Here’s the Instagram post by Billings:



[View this post on Instagram](#)

A post shared by Alexandra Billings (@therealalexandrabilings)

According to The Advocate, the Great American Family network (formerly Great American Country network) also received complaints about commercials for RuPaul's Drag Race, a reality TV show starring drag queens, that aired during prime time.

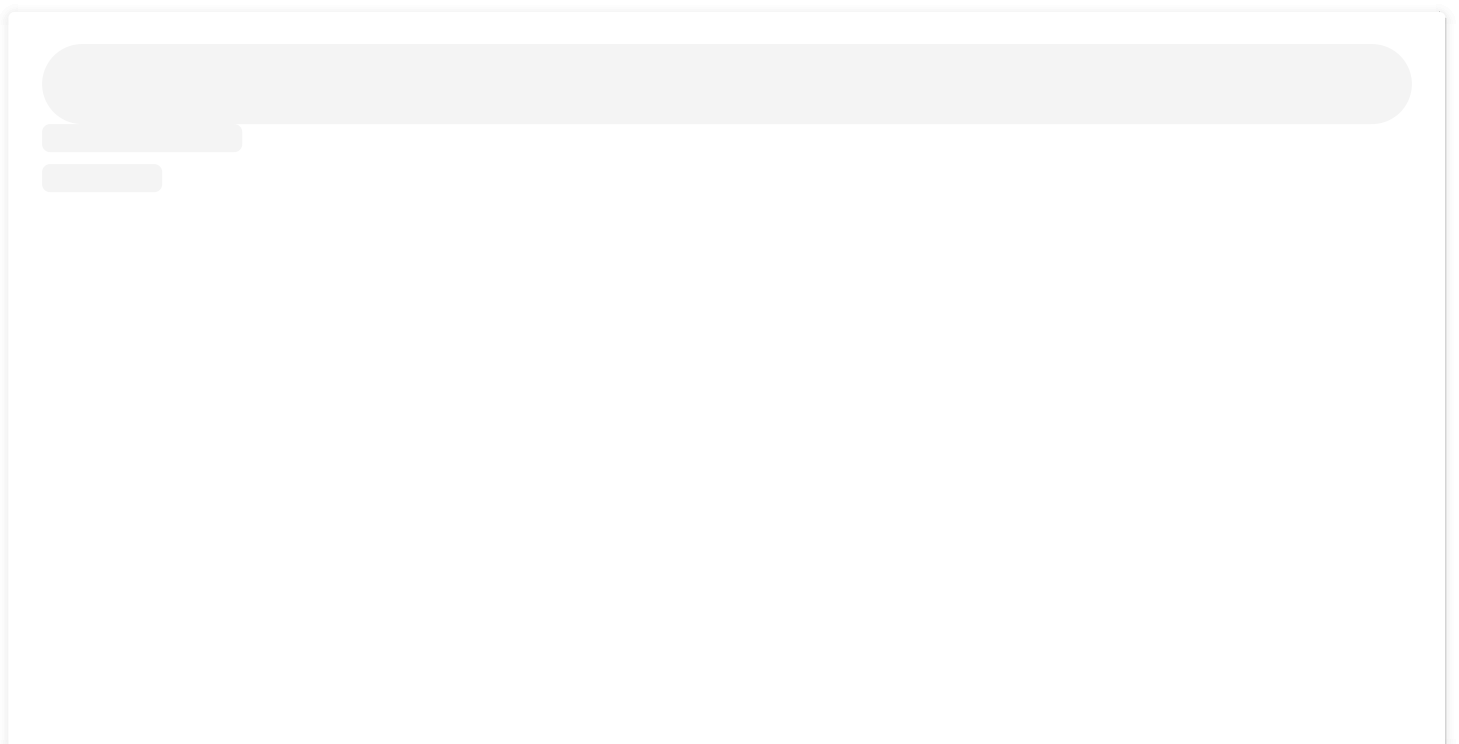
One could argue that complaining about HIV ads with same-gender-loving couples does not amount to HIV stigma or homophobia. Indeed, it could be argued that any advertisements containing the slightest bit of sexual content are inappropriate for prime time. After all, how many of us, when gathered in front of the TV with family members, yearn to encounter commercials about erectile dysfunction?

But could this dustup over HIV ads be about something bigger? This dialogue unfolds shortly after actress Candace Cameron Bure, of Full House and The View, left the Hallmark Channel, where she appeared in 25 movies over 14 years, according to People, and signed a contract with GAC Media, the network's parent company.

Normally, this would amount to little more than standard entertainment industry gossip. But Bure will serve as chief executive officer at her new home, meaning that she will also develop new content. In a November Wall Street Journal article titled "[Candace Cameron Bure Wants to Put Christianity Back in Christmas Movies](#)," Bure said, "I think that Great American Family will keep traditional marriage at the core."

That comment came on the heels of the Hallmark Channel's announcement of its first Christmas rom-com featuring a same-sex couple; that film, The Holiday Sitter, debuted December 18.

Celebrities and pundits, both conservative and liberal, chimed in, adding to the growing controversy. Once again, Billings—who recently appeared in the Amazon series The Peripheral and ABC's The Conners and is known for rolls in HBO's Transparent and Broadway's Wicked—offered insight and context through a post on social media.





[View this post on Instagram](#)

A post shared by Alexandra Billings (@therealalexandrabilings)

In a December 8 video on TikTok and Instagram (and posted above), Billings said:

“Hey human,

“When I was really young, I was a TV baby—and I mean this television set was my entire life. And this was back in the day when there were four channels.... So I grew up believing that I was deserved to be silenced because I never saw myself reflected in art, ever. And not just silenced but shamed as well.

“Candace Cameron Bure has...said in her own words that she is going to make movies that celebrate traditional marriage and the traditional family. And by definition—her definition—that excludes the queer experience.

“Now look, I couldn’t care less how this woman feels about me, but that’s not the point. The point is, here is a group of people—actors, crew members, audience members—that are supporting the ideology that the LGBTQIA+ community is not part of the American experience when it comes to love and marriage. We’re just people behaving badly, right? If we just knocked it off—you know, stop it—we would be accepted. Love the sinner, hate the sin.

“So, since we’re not a community of people, we’re just a group, it’s okay to annihilate us, get rid of us, silence us for good.

“Look, I know these people are doing the best they can with what they know, but what they know could fill a thimble. So we need to help them through this portal of understanding. And that’s just not about turning off your TV. This is about telling people that there is a group of humans that are supporting bigotry and prejudice through the guise of art. You have to speak up.

“What I am is not a choice. It’s a divine blessing—just like you.

“Let’s remember what the holidays are really all about: Compassion, love and inclusion for everyone. Not just the people you feel deserve it.

"I hope this helps."



[View this post on Instagram](#)

A post shared by Alexandra Billings (@therealalexandrabilings)

To learn more about Billings, check out her memoir, *This Time for Me*, which she promoted in the above post. The book was nominated for the POZ Awards 2022, in the [Best in Literature](#) category. The winning book was *The Viral Underclass: The Human Toll When Inequality and Disease Collide*, by Steven W. Thrasher. The winners were announced earlier this month. For a complete list, see [POZ Awards 2022 / Winners](#).

In related year-end news, see "[2022 Top HIV New Stories](#)."

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