Lessons from the Lezbaru: Examining the History of LGBTQ+ Movement to Embrace Marketplace Diversity

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ABSTRACT: This research provides a historical analysis of the evolution LGBTQ+ consumer marketplace with a consideration of the interwoven role of the LGBTQ+ social movement. It employs a historical analysis of the LGBTQ+ classification as it evolved through the social movement and applies segmentation theory to consider whether the LGBTQ+ market can be considered a singular consumer market. It advocates for the market recognition of a viable lesbian consumer segment that is distinct from other identities recognized within the movement and the community. Finally, it draws lessons from marketing history to provide guidance for marketers looking to reach lesbian consumers in the respatialized LGBTQ+ marketplace of today.

KEY WORDS: LGBTQ consumers, segmentation, LGBTQ social movement, lesbians, diversity

The term LGBTQ+ is intended to emphasize a diversity of sexuality and gender identity-based cultures and may be used to refer to anyone who is non-heterosexual or non-cisgender, instead of exclusively to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. The LGBTQ+ social movement, per its acronym, brings together gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender individuals, those who define themselves as queer, and those who define themselves as questioning binary notions of gender and sexuality, all united by societal stigmatization and cooperative movements to counteract it.

In recent years, the LGBTQ+ rights movement in the US and other developed countries has made enormous gains in social acceptance and may have met its original goals. For decades, the fear of losing a job or career was one of the most powerful threats to LGBTQ+ well-being. It forced LGBTQ+ individuals to hide their sexuality at work by spinning elaborate lies about their lives and relationships outside of work. It affected where people socialized and with whom. It ruptured relationships when people were quietly advised by sympathetic bosses that their "roommate" had to move out if they didn't want their careers to be derailed (Bokat-Lindell, 2020). In June 2020, the conservative-leaning United States Supreme Court invoked Title VII of the Civil Rights Act to rule that "An employer who fires an individual merely for being gay or transgender defies the law." This rather unexpected win for the LGBTQ+ movement follows the 2015 U.S. Supreme Court's constitutional ruling that legalized same-sex marriage nationwide. National trends indicate a rapid and significant increase over the last three decades in public support for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in the United States.

Over the past three decades, corporations have evolved from a covert "nod and a wink" to LGBTQ+ consumers through coded advertising to influencing the treatment of the LGBTQ+ population in public policy. Drawing on Ragusa's (2005) taxonomy of corporate treatment of the LGBTQ+ population, corporations have shifted from the Corporate Pursuit of the 2000s to Corporate Advocacy in the current decade. Some companies, such as Procter & Gamble with its commitment to be a "force for good" for LGBTQ+ consumers, have moved to a stage unforeseen

by Ragusa in 2005 - Corporate Activism. In response, LGBTQ+ individuals have shown impressive brand loyalty to companies that are visible supporters or advocates of LGBTQ+ equality in their advertising. While some legal issues may be of more interest to one subset of the LGBTQ+ population than another (e.g. provision for transgender-related care among health insurance plans, adoption laws for lesbians who are more likely to have children than gay men, funding for AIDS research and treatment for gay men), the LGBTQ+ population recognizes the need to come together as one community to fight for equal rights at a macro level.

Since the early 1990s, marketing agencies have promoted the "LGBTQ+ market," touting higher-than-average household incomes, attractive buying habits, and strong brand loyalty with the latest estimates of buying power of $917 billion (National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, 2017). However, while the diversity of the LGBTQ+ umbrella term has proven powerful in the social and political spheres, it poses challenges delineating a valid LGBTQ+ consumer segment. This research suggests that the "diverse by design" membership of the LGBTQ+ community, that evolved through decades of the LGBTQ+ social movement to maximize power and influence, defies the segmentation principles underlying its designation as a singular "LGBTQ+ market." Hence, the efficacy of corporate treatment of the "LGBTQ+ market" based solely on corporate advocacy and political identity rather than on marketing activities tailored to specific needs, wants, and behaviors is likely to erode as LGBTQ+ individuals continue to receive increasing social legitimacy and redefine their social identity as members of a stigmatized group.

Additionally, an analysis of marketing history would result in few marketers being accused of trying to defy the laws of segmentation by developing marketing campaigns to reach LGBTQ+ consumers; in practice, the term "LGBTQ+ market" has been applied to marketing activities exclusively targeting gay male consumers – more specifically, white, affluent, gay males (Tsai, 2012) – to the exclusion of other LGBTQ+ identities.

This research applies a historical lens to trace the origins of the marketplace diversity that exists within the LGBTQ+ community, provide support for the viability of a distinct lesbian consumer market, and offers direction for marketers interested in creating marketing activities that will resonate with lesbian consumers. Specifically, this research provides a historical analysis of the evolution LGBTQ+ consumer marketplace with a consideration of the interwoven role of the LGBTQ+ social movement in the United States. It employs a historical analysis of the LGBTQ+ classification to trace today's LGBTQ+ social movement back to its pre-Stonewall 1960s roots, considering its co-existence with the women's rights movement, and the LGBTQ+ social movement's deliberate creation of a marketplace to gain social visibility and legitimacy. The article applies segmentation theory to consider whether the LGBTQ+ market as it exists today can be considered a singular consumer market. It advocates for the market recognition of lesbians as a viable consumer segment that is distinct from other identities recognized within the movement and the community. Finally, it draws lessons from marketing history to provide guidance for marketers looking to reach lesbian consumers in the respatialized LGBTQ+ marketplace of today. While the author fully recognizes that there is vulnerability in the use of any label to describe members of the LGBTQ+ population, terms will be used throughout the article, when referencing consumers, social movements and marketing entities, as they were most-commonly applied in the historical era under consideration and as most suited to their definitive purpose in the article.

Separating the Movement from the Market

A 2017 Gallup poll concluded that 4.5% of adult Americans identified as LGBTQ+ with 5.1% of women identifying as LGBTQ+, compared with 3.9% of men. (Newport, 2018). A 2016 survey from the Williams Institute estimated that 0.6% of U.S. adults identify as transgender. (Flores, 2016)

There are many challenges in estimating the size and composition of the LGBTQ+ population, starting with the question of whether to use a definition based solely on self-identification or whether also to include measures of sexual attraction and sexual behavior. A 2011 Williams Institute report states that 8.2 percent of Americans reported that they had engaged in same-sex sexual behavior, and 11 percent reported some same-sex attraction. It's likely that these numbers vastly underrepresent the actual number of LGBTQ+ individuals in the United States and other countries. All such estimates depend to some degree on the willingness of LGBTQ+ individuals to disclose their sexual orientation and gender identity, and research suggests that not everyone in this population is ready or willing to do so. Despite potential underrepresentation, it's clear that the LGBTQ+ population in the United States, as in many other countries, is substantial and can reward marketers who employ effectively targeted marketing activities.

However, to derive a meaningful consumer segment, marketers must question whether the shared social and political dimensions that bind the LGBTQ+ community can provide the homogeneity required to form an effective consumer segment.

Drawing on various aspects of marketing theory on segmentation, to be considered valid and meaningful, a consumer segment must contain individuals who are similar to one another and distinct from the consumers in other groups with respect to their responsiveness to potential marketing offerings and appeals (Dickson and Ginter, 1987). A consumer segment is generally defined using meaningful segmentation criteria that can be demographic, psychographic, geographic, benefits sought, or behavioral. At its simplest demographic levels, the LGBTQ+ population includes individuals who vary based on sex/gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity.

Designating the entire LGBTQ+ population as a market segment assumes that every member of the segment possesses a common set of preferences and behaviors. Focusing solely on the treatment of gay men and lesbians as a single consumer segment, Bhat (1996) argues that sexual orientation can serve only as a "descriptor" of a segment defined by demographics rather than as a "base" of segmentation. He adds that using a descriptor as a base for segmentation results in "stereotyping," i.e., presuming that everyone who fits the segment behaves in the same way. Over 20 years ago, the concept of a one-size-fits-all identity based on LGBTQ+ stereotypes was already being criticized for suppressing the individuality of gay and lesbian people (Simpson 1996).

To cast judgement on whether the LGBTQ+ population can be defined as a consumer segment, it may be helpful to understand (1) how these distinct identities were drawn together over the past half century as political and social allies in the pursuit of civil rights and (2) how the markets' focus on LGBTQ+ consumers was designed as a strategic necessity of the evolving "gay" social movement, and (3) how these collective identity groups have meaningful distinctions that undermine efforts to conceptualize the marketplace ecosystem as equivalent to the political. Marketers must understand the evolution of the consumer market as a strategic tool of the social movement to understand the fallacy of a consumer market labelled the LGBTQ+ market.

1960s: Beyond Gay - A Matter of Sex

The Dictionary of American Slang reports that the term "gay: was first used by homosexuals, among themselves, in the 1920s. The term emerged in the 1940s and 1950 as underground slang referring to homosexual women and men but did not enter mainstream usage until the 1970s.

In the late 1940s and continuing through the 1960s, thousands of LGBTQ+ employees were fired or forced to resign from the federal workforce because of their sexuality. Dubbed the "Lavender Scare", this wave of repression was also bound up with anti-Communism "Red Scare" and fueled by the power of congressional investigation. In 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower signed an executive order banning gay men and lesbians from all jobs in government. As a response, the Mattachine Society of Washington, D.C. was founded in 1950 to battle anti-gay discrimination in general and the federal government's exclusionary policies in particular. The first lesbian support network Daughters of Bilitis, founded in 1955. In 1975, the Civil Service Commission announced new rules stipulating that LGBTQ+ people could no longer be barred or fired from federal employment because of their sexuality (Adkins, 2016). All told, between 5,000 and tens of thousands of LGBTQ+ workers are estimated to have lost their jobs (Bokat-Lindell 2020) during the Lavender Scare.

The social movements of the 1960s, such as the Black Power and anti-Vietnam war movements in the US, the May 1968 insurrection in France, and women's liberation movements throughout the Western world, inspired the origins of the gay liberation movement. The first public protests for equal rights for gay and lesbian people were staged at governmental offices and historic landmarks in New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. between 1965 and 1969. The Stonewall riots of 1969, when a group of transsexuals, lesbians, drag queens, and gay men as patrons at a bar in New York resisted a police raid, led to a new radicalism within the gay social movement. Immediately after Stonewall, the gay liberation movement shifted to a more organized political form. Groups such as the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and the Gay Activists' Alliance (GAA) were formed to demand equal treatment under the law for gay men and lesbians. They used the word "gay" in unapologetic defiance as an antonym for straight ("respectable sexual behavior"); "gay" encompassed a range of non-normative sexualities and gender expressions, including transgender sex workers, and sought ultimately to free the bisexual potential in everyone, rendering obsolete the categories of homosexual and heterosexual.

However, while the Stonewall riots of 1969 shifted the trajectory of the gay rights movement, many lesbians experienced the gay rights movement of the 1960s and 70s in tandem with the ideologies of Second Wave feminism that underpinned the women's movement (Sender, 2004). For many lesbians, the term "gay" referred only to gay men and represented the patriarchal underpinnings of the gay social movement that neglected the perspectives and concerns of lesbians. What followed was a movement characterized by a surge of gay activism and feminist consciousness that further transformed the definition of lesbian. During this time, lesbian as a political identity grew to describe a social philosophy among women, often overshadowing sexual desire as a defining trait.

According to Sender (2004), lesbian feminism separated lesbians from gay men whom lesbians "saw as invested only in the hedonistic here and now of an increasingly open public sexual culture" (p14). Independence from men as oppressors was a central tenet of lesbian-feminism, and many believers strove to separate themselves physically and economically from androcentric culture, including gay men's culture. Feminist theorists suggest that the lesbian identity is distinct from that of gay men, as lesbians face simultaneous oppression based on their

sex/gender as well as their sexual orientation (Rich, 1980; Rust, 1992, 1993; Bristor and Fischer, 1995). Rich, a lesbian feminist, described a lesbian continuum that puts woman-identifiedness at its core, a result of the socio-historical oppression of women. She writes:

> *To equate lesbian existence with male homosexuality because each is stigmatized is to deny and erase female reality once again. To separate those women stigmatized as homosexual or gay from the complex continuum of female resistance to enslavement, and attach them to a male pattern, is to falsify our history. (Rich 1980, p.637).*

As equality was a priority for lesbian-feminists, the disparity of roles between men and women, or butch and femme, was viewed as patriarchal. Lesbian-feminists eschewed the gender role-play that had been pervasive in bars, as well as the perceived chauvinism of gay men; many lesbian-feminists refused to "fraternize" with gay men, or take up their causes.

The sexual revolution in the 1970s introduced the differentiation between identity and sexual behavior for women. Many women took advantage of their new social freedom to try sexual experiences with other women. While reinforcing the lesbian feminist's understanding of the lesbian potential in all women, this perspective was at odds with the minority-rights framework of the Gay Rights movement and caused tension between politically active gay men and lesbians. Additionally, lesbians fought for representation within the feminist movement. The first time lesbian concerns were introduced into the National Organization for Women (NOW) came in 1969, when Ivy Bottini, an open lesbian who was then president of the New York chapter of the National Organization for Women, held a public forum titled "Is Lesbianism a Feminist Issue?" However, National Organization for Women president Betty Friedan was against lesbian participation in the movement stating that the "women's movement was not about sex, but about equal opportunity in jobs and all the rest of it" (Friedan, 2001 p.223). In fact, Friedan was so concerned about the threat that she believed associations with lesbianism posed to NOW and the emerging women's movement, she coined the term "Lavender Menace" to refer to the informal group of lesbian radical feminists formed to protest the exclusion of lesbians and lesbian issues from the feminist movement at the Second Congress to Unite Women in New York City in 1970.

This desexualization of lesbianism emblematic of second-wave separatist feminists was rejected by the 1990s by typically younger third-wave feminists. The third-wave feminism movement was born out of tension with the second wave as third-wave feminists criticized the second wave for its separatist ideology, not to mention a lack of diversity. Third-wave feminism was founded on diversity, including the diversity of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual perspectives. Embracing Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) intersectional analytic, third-wave feminism recognizes the "interlocking nature of identity—that gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and class never function in isolation but always work as interconnected categories of oppression and privileged" (Henry, 2004, 32). Among lesbians, butch and femme roles returned, although not as strictly followed as they were in the 1950s and became a mode of chosen sexual self-expression for some women in the 1990s. As they had during the sexual revolution of the 1960s, in the 1990s women once again felt safer claiming to be more sexually adventurous, and sexual flexibility became more accepted (Iannello, 2010).

In reality, throughout 150 years of LGBTQ+ social movements (roughly from the 1870s to today), leaders and organizers struggled to address the very different concerns and identity issues of gay men and women identifying as lesbians, and others identifying as gender variant or

nonbinary. White, male, and Western activists whose groups and theories gained leverage against homophobia did not necessarily represent the range of racial, class, and national identities complicating a broader LGBT agenda. Women were often left out altogether (Morris, 2009). Black lesbians found themselves struggling to find representation at the intersection of the civil rights movement, the women's rights movement, and the gay rights movement (Kiesling, 2017).

1980s: Going Beyond the Binary

The term "LGB" first came about in the 1980s when bisexual people were added to the description to provide greater political power through numbers. Post-civil rights era cultural goals of the gay and lesbian social movement began to take shape to include, (but were not limited to) (i) building gay communities, (ii) working to liberate the broader society from biphobia and homophobia, and (iii) challenging dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity and the primacy of the gendered heterosexual nuclear family (heteronormativity). Political goals included changing laws and policies in order to gain new rights, benefits, and protections from harm." (Bernstein, 2002).

The concept of a "gay market" was first publicly pitched, and immediately anointed the "Dream Market," in a 1988 article in *The Wall Street Journal* (Rigden, 1988). The article citing the higher-than-average incomes and career success, far greater spending on alcohol, and travel, and higher-than-average credit card purchases (Rigden, 1988). Over the next three decades, LGBTQ+ marketing agencies continued to tout the higher-than-average household incomes, attractive buying habits, and strong brand loyalty of the LGBT(Q+) consumer market with an estimated buying power of over $871 billion (National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce, 2016).

In reality, the rising visibility of the Dream Market in the media was part of a strategic effort by leaders of, what was then, the LGB social movement to achieve social progress through the marketplace. LGB activists felt that being recognized in the marketplace was important for the social legitimization of LGB individuals and the growth of the LGB social movement. This followed the path of earlier social movements that recognized the marketplace as an important domain of social contestation where disenfranchised groups engage in ongoing struggles for social and political inclusion (Peñaloza, 1996).

LGB activists and organizers set about proving to corporate America that it needed to focus on the LGB community as a consumer market. Activist-led marketing firms conducted surveys to show that not just affluence but high levels of brand loyalty were a hallmark of gays and lesbians (Wilke, 2017). The image of gays and lesbians in society began to change once Wall Street and Madison Avenue realized that there was a vast, untapped market of potential consumers who were affluent DINKs (Dual Income with No Kids) and urban dwellers who loved to spend on travel and entertainment. In the media, while little attention was paid to lesbians, gay men were perceived as well-to-do, cosmopolitan, and voraciously consumerist. In Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia's 1996 dissent in *Romer v. Evans* (Romer, Governor of Colorado, et al. v. Evans et al., 1996), the landmark case that overturned a Colorado state constitutional amendment prohibiting legal protections for gays and lesbians, Scalia wrote, "Those who engage in homosexual conduct tend to reside in disproportionate numbers in certain communities" (p27). Even more ominously, to Scalia, gays and lesbians have "high disposable income," which gives them "disproportionate political power… to [achieve] not merely a grudging social toleration, but full social acceptance, of homosexuality" (p28).

In the 1990s, a central theme emerged in trade press articles about the LGB market as companies struggled with the economic recession - "This sector (financial advising, hospitality, automobiles, whatever sector) needs to look to the gay market, especially in tough financial times, because gays have a higher-than-average income, have fewer financial responsibilities, will spend on luxury goods, are loyal, and set trends" (Sender, 2017).

However, despite the fact that lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals united for political gain, it's questionable whether sexual orientation, defined as non-heteronormative, can be considered a meaningful segmentation variable that results in homogeneous responses to a firm's marketing mix. Based on Cravens' (1982) characteristics of a meaningful consumer segment, a consumer group must also be actionable so that all consumers are homogeneous in their response to targeted marketing activities.

The 2013 Pew Research LGBTQ+ survey examined key demographic characteristics of bisexuals, gay men, and lesbians. Results show, among other things, that bisexuals are younger, have lower family incomes, and are less likely to be college graduates than gay men and lesbians. The relative youth of bisexuals likely explains some of their lower levels of income and education. The survey also finds that bisexuals differ from gay men and lesbians on a range of attitudes and experiences related to their sexual orientation. For example, while 77% of gay men and 71% of lesbians say most or all of the important people in their lives know of the respondents' sexual orientation, just 28% of bisexual respondents say the same. Likewise, about half of gay men and lesbians say their sexual orientation is extremely or very important to their overall identity, compared with just two-in-ten bisexual men and women. Two-thirds of bisexuals say they either already have or want children, compared with about half of lesbians and three-in-ten gay men. When it comes to community engagement, gay men and lesbians are more involved than bisexuals in a variety of LGBTQ-specific activities, such as attending a gay pride event or being a member of an LGBTQ+ organization. Given these differences between the centrality of sexual orientation in these respondents' self-identities, behaviors, and attitudes, marketers would be challenged to create marketing activities that could evoke the same response across gay, lesbian, and bisexual consumers.

1990s: Trans – Folding in Gender identity

The transgender "T" was added to the LGBTQ+ acronym in the late 1990s. As a broader array of companies woke up to the possibilities of the Dream Market, gay magazines and local papers were thriving, online portals were at an exciting experimental stage, the market was consolidating, and network and cable television were capitalizing on the new gay (if less lesbian, bisexual, and transgender) visibility. New web portals such as PlanetOut.com and Gay.com housed ads targeting their gay and lesbian readers, but notable less bisexual or transgender readers, that functioned much like their print media counterparts, with static ads attached to editorial content. In the early stages of the era of big data, these portals became increasingly sophisticated at collecting more detailed data on their members. During the same period, TV programming began to represent the diversity of the LGB population. *Ellen, Will & Grace*, and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* were followed by shows that presented mainstream audiences with a myriad of diverse representations of the LGBT community, with new focus on the transgender population, such as *Modern Family*, *Glee* and *RuPaul's Drag Race* in 2009 and *Orange Is the New Black* in 2013, *Looking* and *Transparent* in 2014, and the list goes on.

In the mid-2000s, trade coverage of an LGBT market had begun to wane but LGBT marketing agencies continued to promote the tantalizing spending power of the LGBT market and ensured advertisers that gay men were willing to pay a premium for services that recognize

and respect their sexuality and relationships (Sender, 2017). Companies responded by developing gay-specific copy advertising to use in, what was referred to as, gay and lesbian media.

Some argue that transgender and transsexual identities and causes are distinct from those of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) people. This argument centers on the idea that transgender and transsexuality are defined based on gender identity, or a person's understanding of being a man, a woman, or both, or neither, irrespective of their sexual orientation, while LGB issues refer to the matter of sexual orientation or attraction. These distinctions have been made in the context of political action in which LGB goals, such as same-sex marriage legislation and adoption rights, may be perceived to differ from transgender and transsexual goals. Others believe that grouping together people with non-heterosexual orientations perpetuates the myth that being gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender makes a person deficiently different from other people. Finally, the term transgender has many definitions depending on whom you ask and in what social, institutional, and political context. Similar to queer, transgender is frequently used as an umbrella term to refer to all people who do not identify with their assigned sex/gender at birth or with the binary gender system in the first place. This umbrella definition includes transsexuals, cross-dressers, genderqueer people, drag kings, drag queens, two-spirit people, and others. Some transgender people feel they exist not within one of the two standard gender categories, but rather somewhere between, beyond, or outside of those two genders.

According to the 2013 Pew Research Center's Study on LGBTQ+ Americans, gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals perceive that they have less in common with transgender people than with each other; conversely, transgender adults do not perceive a great deal of commonality with lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals. In particular, issues such as same-sex marriage might be viewed as less important by transgender people, and transgender adults appear to be less involved in the LGBTQ+ community than other LGBTQ+ sub-groups. That said, the recent National Transgender Discrimination Survey found that 77% of transgendered respondents identified their sexual orientation as something other than straight, leaving room for some transgender individuals to be included in gay male or lesbian consumer segments defined by a gender and non-heterosexual orientation (Grant et al., 2011).

2010s: Queer – A Complicated History

"Q" may mean "questioning" or "queer." The term "queer" may be used to refer to anyone who does not identify as heterosexual or gender-normative (non-cisgender), instead of exclusively to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (Shankle, 2006). In announcing its transition from LGBT to LGBTQ+ in 2016, the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the leading advocate for LGBTQ+ rights, stated that "Queer" is a word with a complicated modern history – both used in a defiant chant originated by LGBTQ+ rights activists more than a quarter-century ago to confront bigotry, and hijacked by hate-mongers doubling down on discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The organization's decision to adopt the term was driven by predominant use by youth to refer to their sexual orientation as "queer" and their gender identity as "genderqueer." Most recently, a '+' sign has begun to be used to optimize inclusion and describe the growing list of gender and sexual orientations that don't fit into the acronym LGBTQ, such as intersex, asexual, aromantic, and pansexual.

Over the past decade, many prominent companies have sought visibility as "Corporate Advocates" of LGBTQ+ concerns, going beyond developing inclusive internal policies and gay-oriented marketing practices to influencing the treatment of the LGBTQ+ population in public policy. In 2013, 379 corporations and employer organizations urged the Supreme Court to strike

down state bans on gay marriage (Barrett, 2015). The list of companies that filed an amicus brief included corporate behemoths such as Coca-Cola Company, Goldman Sachs, Google, and Morgan Stanley. It also included brands like Ben & Jerry's, a division of Unilever, and sports teams such as the New England Patriots, the San Francisco Giants, and the Tampa Bay Rays. In 2018, the HRC found that 72% of CEI-rated businesses met the standard of demonstrating at least three efforts of public commitment to the LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning) community – marketing, advertising and recruitment efforts, philanthropic contributions to LGBTQ+ organizations, LGBTQ+ diverse supplier initiatives and public policy weigh-in - and have inclusive philanthropic giving guidelines. (Human Rights Campaign, 2018). Every June, the month of most LGBTQ+-pride celebrations, companies like Netflix, McDonald's, Apple, Salesforce, and Walmart spend tremendous amounts of money to include their branded floats in parades around the country.

However, by its very definition, the term "LGBTQ, especially with the added "+," is designed to capture everybody who is *not* a member of two distinct categories – not heterosexual or not gender-normative. While its inclusivity is laudable as a social category, as a marketing concept, it falls far short of actionability required to be a segmentation variable for a homogeneous consumer segment.

The Biased Realities of the Dream Market

Over the past two decades, increasing numbers of companies have advocated for LGBTQ+ rights in the political sphere and invested in the LGBTQ+ marketplace. In 2014, advertising spending in the US LGBTQ+ press increased by 6.4% while ad spending within mainstream consumer publications declined (Sass 2015). While doing so, corporate America and the popular press have mirrored the evolving terminology of the LGBTQ+ social movement, referring to a single "LGBTQ+ market," rather than each distinct market niche. However, the reality of marketing practice in the LGBTQ+ consumer sphere seems to better reflect the patriarchal systems and gender bias that lesbian feminists rallied against in the 1960s than the ideals of inclusivity embraced by contemporary third/fourth-wave feminists.

In practice, since the declaration of the Dream market in the 1980s, marketers have, almost exclusively, used gay male imagery in advertising placed in gay print media (see, for example, Tsai 2010). Some suggest that the predominance of gay-man-oriented ads indicates a simple misunderstanding by predominantly male creative directors who assume that a one-size-fits-all approach to the gay market will also capture lesbians. Based on this argument, a lesbian, because of her sexual orientation, will look at an advertisement with imagery or text targeting a gay man and see herself represented in the ad. The converse is never expected of gay men, as this argument is based on an implicit acceptance of the patriarchal selection of gay men to represent both gay men and lesbians (Sender, 2004).

Additionally, when consumer research has focused on LGBTQ+ people, the research scope has tended either to exclude lesbians or to group lesbians with gay men without offering specific data on the lesbian market. Hence, advertisers eyeing the lesbian market often are left to make assumptions about lesbian spending and media habits or to advertise to lesbians via gay publications and grassroots marketing efforts, which reach only smaller numbers of the market. Recent research efforts, such as Nielsen's 2015 LGBTQ+ Consumer Research, rarely break out the data for the four demographics that make up the LGBTQ+ social movement. Thus, resulting

data offer a limited view of the LGBTQ+ consumer marketplace that skews toward gay men and is of little help when undertaking meaningful target marketing efforts.

At best, this practice reflects a lack of understanding regarding the importance of social identity and representation in effective advertising. At worst, advertisers are referring to the LGBTQ+ market while focusing exclusively on the gay man's dollar.

The Dual Oppression of Lesbians in Advertising

Unfortunately, this skew towards knowledge about gay males over other groups within the LGBTQ+ community also manifests itself within academic research. Branchik (2002) traces the evolution of the gay male market segment from the late nineteenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first century through three historical phases: (1) the underground phase, pre-1941; (2) the community-building phase, 1941-1970; and (3) the mainstream phase, 1970 to the present. No such historical analysis exists for lesbian consumers, in large part because there is a dearth of lesbian-targeted marketing activities to analyze. In reality, gay males are the only subset of the LGBTQ+ population that has received noteworthy attention from marketers and marketing academics. While lesbians as a population have received attention in the social sciences and other disciplines, academic research, both empirical and qualitative have treated lesbian consumers similarly to marketers. Ginder and Byun (2015) conducted a critical review of the extant interdisciplinary literature on the gay and lesbian consumer market, spanning from the earliest publication in 1993 to 2013. The study found that, while every research study on the LGBTQ+ consumer market included gay males as either participants in the study or objects of the study, lesbians were often excluded, and bisexuals and transgender individuals were always excluded. Additionally, given the reliance on white male subjects, the impact of the intersectionality of race with LGBTQ+ identity has received little academic or marketplace consideration.

Within the marketplace, lesbians remain one of the least well-represented consumers in advertising. Despite the fact that a greater number of lesbian couples have children than do gay men, gay men actually tend to be more frequently portrayed with families compared to lesbian couples (Nölke, 2018). Recent research in the United Kingdom found that just 19% of people featured in advertising are from minority groups, and of those only 0.06% are from the LGBTQ+ community despite this group making up 1.7% of the British population. Some 79% of respondents in a national survey of British consumers said they believe lesbians are under-represented in advertising. This comes ahead of the number that believes bisexual people are under-represented (56%), gay men (49%) and disabled people (44%). Lesbians taking part in the research felt the least accurately portrayed out of any group, with just 21% believing advertising reflects their lives (Rogers, 2016).

Additionally, while there has been a shift in recent years in terms of how lesbians are portrayed in advertising, the shift has more to do with "mainstreaming" lesbians than recognizing the full spectrum of identities that exist within and among lesbian individuals. Nölke (2018) conducted an intersectional analysis of explicit LGBTQ+ portrayals in mainstream advertising between 2009 and 2015. The analysis highlights the erasure of lesbians as a marginalized group, simultaneously oppressed as female and non-heterosexual, as mainstream advertising continues to perpetuate a heteronormative, domesticized version of "gayness." It is proposed that non-LGBTQ+ consumers are the underlying target group of lesbian-explicit advertising, causing non-target market effects that alienate lesbian consumers despite their overt inclusion. Nölke (2018) suggests that lesbian representations in advertising are restricted to four typical depictions of

lesbians: (1) Lipstick lesbians - the women portrayed tended to be overly sexualized and feminine – and they often came in pairs. The fact that they're lesbian tends to be portrayed as a huge tragedy for any men involved. (2) Femmes - These women are imagined as very feminine but are not sexualized. They tend to be shown as being happily married or in long-term relationships. (3) Domestic femme – These are very feminine women who have a family. They are only shown in a domestic setting and are portrayed doing household chores or raising children. (4) Soft butch – The women are still quite feminine, and still adhere to "common standards of what a woman is accepted to look like."

Hence, while there has been a shift in recent years in terms of how lesbians are portrayed in advertising. the shift has more to do with "mainstreaming" lesbians than recognizing the full spectrum of identities that exist within and among lesbian individual (Nölke, 2018). Lipstick lesbian was the main portrayal of lesbians in advertising up until recent years. While the Soft Butch depiction evolved over the past couple of years, today's main depiction of lesbians in advertising is that of the Femme. Instead of hyper-sexualized portrayals of lesbians, advertisers have now gone "to the other end of the spectrum" and prefer to play it safe to show straight people that lesbian couples are just like them.

The Viability of a Distinct Lesbian Consumer Segment

This research argues that lesbians cannot be grouped with gay men as consumers and form a viable consumer segment in their own right that warrants the focused attention that gay male consumers have received for decades. Much of the historical neglect of their consumer group can be attributed to uninformed perceptions of a lack of consumer buying power, outdated stereotypes of anti-consumerism, or a lack of understanding of lesbian consumption behavior and social identities.

The Income Fallacy

Lesbian couples are wrongly assumed to suffer twice as much as a heterosexual couple from the sex differential in incomes in the US, creating an inaccurate perception that lesbian households hold less potential for marketers than a household of either heterosexuals or gay men (Badgett, 1998). While the gender pay gap means lesbians are likely to earn less than men, lesbians tend to earn more than heterosexual women and lesbian households are more likely to consist of two incomes than are heterosexual or gay men households. Lesbians also tend to be better educated than their heterosexual counterparts.

On average, lesbians earn 20 to 34 percent more than heterosexual women, according to a report on LGBTQ+ consumers by Experian Marketing Services (Marketing Out Loud, 2016). Readers of *Curve*, the best-selling lesbian-oriented print magazine in the US with a circulation of 52,237, have annual salaries averaging $85,372; 61 percent are college graduates (Warn 2006); 62% have managerial/professional occupations, and the same percentage own a home (Curve Facts, 2017). According to the 2014 American Community Survey, 57 percent of same-sex couples have both partners of a household working, compared to 48 percent of opposite-sex couples. Additionally, in a recent survey, 59 percent of lesbians lived with a partner compared with 37 percent of gay men (Pew Research Center, 2013).

The Enduring Ebb of the Second-Wave

Beyond the inaccurately negative perceptions of lesbian buying power, outdated but anti-consumerist lesbian stereotypes may also contribute to the neglect of lesbian consumers as a distinct segment. While stereotypes about gay men have drawn the attention of marketers (they earn more money than the general population; have expensive tastes; enjoy fashion, theater, home decorating, dance, music, art, design, and gourmet goods, etc.), common stereotypes of lesbians, held over from second-wave feminism, incorrectly labeled them as politically- minded feminists who don't subscribe to consumerism and, as a result, don't like fashion, makeup, or shopping in general (Wilke, 2006).

Learning Beyond the L-Word

The L Word, a television series which originally ran on the Showtime network from 2004 to 2009, challenged some of these typical anti-consumer stereotypes and put a sexy (some say hetero-sexy) contemporary gloss on mostly fictional versions of lesbian life, which nonetheless helped to bring lesbians into the cultural mainstream. A data-driven examination of lesbian consumer behavior and spending patterns reveals the need to treat lesbians as an attractive consumer segment separate from both heterosexual women and gay men.

The annual Gay and Lesbian Consumer Index Study provides some insights in the lifestyles, preferences, and behaviors of lesbians as consumers. The 2015 Gay and Lesbian Consumer Index Study found major differences between gay men and lesbians in terms of the make-up of the average household and consumption behaviors, factors that are critical to marketers when considering targeted marketing activities. Compared to gay men, lesbians are more likely to report living with a partner, often with children, and with pets. Additionally, gay men and lesbians appear to gravitate towards different lifestyles, a fact that challenges for segmentation based on psychographics or behaviors. In the 2015 Gay and Lesbian Consumer Index Study, gay men were more likely than lesbians to dine out with friends; go to bars or clubs, movies, and live performances; and go to the gym, perhaps because of their greater tendency to live alone and in urban areas. In contrast, consistent with their greater tendency to live outside of cities, lesbians are more likely than are gay men to spend time enjoying the outdoors and to purchase sports-related equipment such as running shoes, camping equipment, and hiking boots (2015 Gay and Lesbian Consumer Index Study).

However, even if marketers recognize the attractiveness of the lesbian consumer market, given the historical gay male skew of the Dream Market, marketers may lack the contextual intelligence to develop campaigns that resonate with lesbian consumers. Marketers may need to rely on a deeper dive into LGBTQ+ marketing history to provide them with the cultural literacy needed to create the lens of empathy required for effective marketing practice.

Historical Lessons from the Lezbura

In the 1990s, gay causes seemed to be on the losing side of the culture war. The Clinton Administration instituted its "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy regarding homosexuality in the military, Congress passed the Defense of Marriage Act and few companies would embrace or even acknowledge their gay customers. Yet during this era fraught with stigmatization and discrimination, Japanese car-maker Subaru's recognition and effective wooing of lesbian consumers helped push gay and lesbian advertising from the fringes to the mainstream and gave LGBTQ+ consumer visibility the market visibility needed to anchor the social movement through legislative adversity.

As is still the case today, in the 1990s, Subaru's unique selling point was that the company increasingly made all-wheel drive standard on all its cars. When the company's marketers went searching for people willing to pay a premium for all-wheel drive, they identified four core groups who were responsible for half of the company's American sales: teachers and educators, health-care professionals, IT professionals, and outdoorsy types. Then they discovered a fifth: lesbians. When they did the research, they found pockets of the country like Northampton, Massachusetts, and Portland, Oregon, where the head of the household would be a single person—and often a woman. When marketers talked to these customers, they realized these women buying Subarus were lesbians, stumbling upon the lesbian propensity for rural living and a love for the outdoors that was codified 20 years later with the 2015 Gay and Lesbian Consumer Index Study. Subaru was struggling, its niche marketing campaign was its plan for redemption, and it realized that it had to take some risks to survive. Encouraged by a gay male advertising director, Subaru's senior management reluctantly agreed to pour advertising dollars into the lesbian market at a time when pop culture had also yet to embrace the LGBTQ+ cause. Subaru famously used "coded" advertising, which fell under the category of the new marketing term "gay vague," and became a way for companies to reach lesbian audiences with minimal risk of a conservative backlash. In print ads, Subaru used inside jokes that were obvious to lesbians but not to anyone else. One ad campaign showed Subaru cars that had license plates that said: "Xena LVR" (a reference to *Xena: Warrior Princess*, a TV show whose female protagonists seemed to be lesbian lovers) or "P-TOWN" (a moniker for Provincetown, Massachusetts, a popular LGBTQ+ vacation spot). Many ads had taglines with double meanings. "Get Out. And Stay Out" could refer to exploring the outdoors in a Subaru—or coming out as gay. "It's Not a Choice. It's the Way We're Built" could refer to all Subarus coming with all-wheel-drive—or LGBTQ+ identity. The Subaru Outback became known in LGBTQ+ circles as the "Lezbaru," capturing its popularity among lesbian consumers and establishing itself as a symbol of lesbianism in US culture.

Subaru was not the first company to create advertisements for gay and lesbian consumers, but it was the first major company in the United States to do it so transparently and consistently. Beyond simple representation in advertising, it was the company's full support of the gay community that underlies its unique success with lesbian consumers. Beyond demographics on household composition and statistics on consumption, recent empirical research has shown that lesbians respond differently than do gay men to a variety of marketing activities typically employed on LGBTQ+ consumers (Oakenfull, 2013b). When evaluating a company's gay-friendliness, lesbians appear to place more importance than do gay men on LGBTQ-oriented corporate policies, such as the provision of domestic partner benefits and LGBTQ+ non-discrimination policies (Oakenfull, 2013b). Lesbians also place more weight than do gay men on a company's effort to identify itself as gay-friendly in its marketing communications and to provide financial support for gay causes (Oakenfull, 2013b).

An understanding of the multidimensionality of Subaru efforts to capture the lesbian consumer market will provide today's marketers with the cultural capital needed to develop a lens through which to understand modern-day lesbian consumers. Subaru understood far better than companies who followed them decades later that lesbians needed more than visibility in advertising to earn their loyalty. In 2013, Oakenfull (2013a) found that lesbian consumers placed far greater importance on company policies that support the community than did gay men. Three decades earlier, while Volkswagen played coy about whether an ad perceived as gay-friendly really portrayed a gay couple, Subaru supported causes that mattered to lesbians. Subaru hired

Martina Navratilova, a former tennis pro and a lesbian who was shunned by sponsors when she came out in the early 1980s, to appear in Subaru ads. It also sponsored events like gay-pride parades, partnered with the Rainbow Card, a credit card that instead of cashback offered donations to gay and lesbian causes, and contributed millions of dollars to HIV/AIDS research and LGBTQ+ causes that helped both their customers and people who couldn't afford a Subaru. Subaru of America also knew it had to support its gay and lesbian employees if it wanted to appeal to lesbian customers, so it began to offer domestic partnership benefits. Moreover, Subaru, vetted firms interested in sponsoring the Rainbow Card by looking into the policies they had for their employees, like benefits for same-sex partners. This led to a trend of companies making their internal policies more gay-friendly when they wanted to advertise to gay customers. When Ford created gay-friendly ads, it revised its policies for its more than 100,000 employees.

Beyond an increased emphasis on company policies that support the community, research has shown that sex/gender differences also appear to exist in gay men's and lesbians' attitudes toward gay-oriented advertising in general (Oakenfull, 2013a). Additionally, gay men and lesbians appear to respond differently to various types of gendered advertising content (Oakenfull, 2007; 2012). Oakenfull (2007) suggests that a gay individual's gender and level of gay identity play an important role in determining his or her response to various types of gay-oriented advertising messages. Finally, the extent to which lesbians feel they share group membership with gay males plays a vital role in determining their attitudes towards advertisements that depict lesbian, gay male, or non-gendered ad content (Oakenfull, 2012). Research over the past decade has consistently indicated that there are significant gender differences in media habits between lesbians and gay men, as lesbians consume different types of gay media than do gay men (Oakenfull, 2013). The gay media landscape has finally begun to recognize the potential of the lesbian market and is becoming more representative of the full spectrum of the gay rainbow in the past few years. When the US-based *Vice Versa* was published in 1947, founder Lisa Ben wanted a place for lesbians "through which we may express our thoughts, our emotions, our opinions." Sent in secret through the mail, the monthly newsletter is credited as the first-ever LGBTQ+ publication in the United States. Although *Vice Versa* only lasted for nine issues, it inspired *The Ladder*, the most famous US lesbian magazine, as well as several other influential lesbian guides, including *The Lesbian Tide*, *Heresies*, and, more recently, *Curve*. With a circulation of 60,000, *Curve* is now joined by a number of regional lesbian magazines, though most lesbian-focused media today have moved exclusively to the web.

Over the last decade, more cities have been finding their own local lesbian/bi publications and websites to be necessary. California's *Lesbian News*, founded in 1975, is the longest-running still in circulation, while Florida's *SHE Magazine* has served Miami-Dade and Broward Counties, West Palm Beach, Tampa, and Orlando since 1999. *GO Magazine*, based out of New York City, distributes the free magazine in 10 other cities (Bendix, 2014). However, the subscriber base of leading LGBTQ+ print magazines remains predominantly gay men with similarly skewed content. Historically, only 25 percent of readers of *The Advocate*, touted as the leading gay and lesbian magazine in the world were lesbian. In a recent effort to attract more women subscribers, *The Advocate*'s online presence launched a section dedicated to women.

Additionally, as social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram provide opportunities for LGBTQ+ individuals to access a variety of networks, information, and products that may or may not be LGBTQ+-specific, gay print media readerships have plummeted and many titles have folded. Lesbian bars no longer serve a central purpose for social activity, as

lesbian-specific sites, such as HER, and mainstream social media platforms, such as Facebook and Instagram, and online dating sites such OKCupid, Tinder, and Match, all driven by powerful search algorithms, provide advertisers with unprecedented targeted access to lesbian consumers. Following the overall technology-driven cultural shift from physical LGBTQ+ spaces to those online, 56% of LGBTQ+ singles have dated someone they met online, with transgender singles dating the most online (65%) (Match, 2017).

Conclusion

In practice, despite a consistent and fallacious reference to the "LGBTQ+ market", Corporate America has never tousled with the challenge of defining a meaningful segment of consumers from an LGBTQ+ population that by its very purpose is diverse. It directly went after the gay male dollar, with a small amount of attention to lesbians (Oakenfull, 2012). Over the past three decades, white, affluent, gay males could expect to see themselves in gay print magazines and online portals, in national ad campaigns in these media, and, increasingly, in mainstream media, particularly television and news media, while advertisers left lesbians, and the rest of the LGBT population, including gay men of color, out in the cold (Tsai, 2010; Oakenfull et al., 2008).

Sender (2004) quotes the head of an "LGBTQ" advertising agency who, in practice, exclusively targets gay men. In defending his agency's complete neglect of lesbian consumers, he says, "there are just hundreds of thousands, millions of lesbians who are paired off, living together, who are living quiet lives on the edge of woods or in the heart of the city or whatever, that …… are very hard to reach (p.18)" The recent respatialization of the LGBTQ+ marketplace has put to rest the "lesbians are so hard to reach" defense. The shift from physical brick-and-mortar to an online ecosystem, powered by Big Data and complex targeting algorithms, provides marketers with direct access to lesbian consumers.

Today's marketers must look back to move forward. There are meaningful marketing lessons to be learned from the historical and societal context of the "Lezbaru" campaign. The 1990s were the decade that the "Silent Majority" established the idea of "Red and Blue America." Red America was built quite solidly on visible disapproval for the "LGBTQ+ lifestyle" and vitriolic debate about a lifestyle "choice." Many LGBTQ+ consumers stayed concealed in the closet and lived a life of secrecy and fear of discrimination. Those consumers did not want to be out in the mainstream any more than Subaru did, so the inside joke nature of the coded ads was a perfect solution. Subaru said "we see you" and then made sure that nobody else did because that is how lesbian consumers wanted it.

To be clear, today's lesbian consumers would interpret the "wink-wink" use of polysemy in Subaru's ads as a lack of conviction to LGBTQ+ people, their civil rights, and their right to be treated with legitimacy in the marketplace. Thirty years on from the Lezbaru, non-conforming millennials and Gen Z consumers are growing up without the stigma and lack of social legitimacy that defined previous generations of LGBTQ+ individuals. They are not looking to hide, and they expect to be recognized. Marketers must understand the complex social identities that provide the underpinning for effective advertising content,

In the contemporary socio-political context, lesbians enjoy far greater visibility and acceptance as a sexual minority than those of their 1990s counterparts. However, discrimination is still baked-in to lesbian existence. Despite the recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling prohibiting workplace discrimination, lesbians, along with all LGBTQ+ individuals, still face discrimination and marginalization on countless fronts beyond the workplace. In many states, it is still legal to

refuse service to someone who is LGBT, to deny them a home to rent, or to decline the provision of health care. The Equality Act, which was recently reintroduced to Congress, seeks to explicitly include sexual orientation and gender identity in civil rights laws. The Equality Act is designed to provide unequivocal non-discrimination protections for people on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity in a number of areas, including public spaces and services, housing, education, credit, jury service, and federally funded programs, as well as explicitly codifying the Supreme Court's recent holding regarding employment.

Additionally, lesbians are still experiencing gender discrimination and oppression unknown to gay men that carve them out as a distinct group with a shared identity. While gay men can revel in rising societal support for LGBTQ+ rights, including the legal recognition of same-sex marriage and other anti-discrimination laws, as well as other advantages such as social legitimization in the marketplace and the media, gender inequality remains a considerable challenge for lesbians. Lesbians, as do all women, experience systemic institutionalized discrimination in health, education, political representation, employment, finance, etc., with negative repercussions for the development of their capabilities and their freedom of choice. As intersectional analysis reminds us, social identities are interlocking, not additive. Hence, lesbians experience specific forms of gender oppression because of their sexual orientation, just as they experience specific forms of sexual oppression because of their gender. Modern-day marketers must do the work to carve out empathetic campaigns that meet today's lesbians where they live – emotionally, geographically, and socially – to tap into a segment that has existed mostly dormant or ignored throughout history. Marketers will need to do the work of understanding the complexity of the intersectional lesbian identities, and meet these consumers with resonant messaging where they live – on Facebook, on Instagram, on Twitter, on OkCupid, and on Tinder. In turn, academic researchers must address the gender bias highlighted by Ginder and Byun (2015)'s review of extant literature to provide practitioners with the data-driven insights that are needed to capture the intersectionality of lesbian existence and nuances of lives now lived out in the open, in the real world, and in the digital world.

A Note on Race

While this article attempts to put a call out for marketers to embrace the gender-based diversity that exists within LGBTQ+ community, without bias and while applying sound marketing principles and practices, it stops short of a much-needed examination of the intersectionality of race with sexual identity and gender. The almost exclusive lens of white male gays in academic research has limited our knowledge of the interlocking effect of race, racial identity, and racism for all LGBTQ+ individuals of color. In light of the BLACK LIVES MATTER social justice movement, this author puts out an earnest call for academic researchers to work harder to include LGBTQ+ people of color as participants in their research and as objects of study.

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