

Effects of Gay Identity, Gender and Explicitness of Advertising Imagery on Gay Responses to Advertising

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ABSTRACT. The present research draws from literature relating to gay identity in psychology and sociology and feminist theory to consider the effect of gay identity and gender on gays' and lesbians' attitudes toward various types of advertising content that are most commonly used to target gay consumers. As such, this study empirically tests whether gay males' and lesbians' responses to gay-oriented advertising content are moderated by individual characteristics: (1) the degree to which they identify as gay, and (2) their gender, and by the explicitness and gender of the gay-oriented advertising imagery.

KEYWORDS. Gay identity, gender, advertising effects, gay male, lesbian, marketing, advertising imagery, consumers

The gay consumer market has been enthusiastically labeled the "Dream Market," due to its overall buying power of over \$641 billion

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(Witeck and Combs, 2006) among an estimated 4 to 10% of the overall U.S. population (Kinsey et al., 1948; Laumann et al., 1994). Research indicates that, on average, gay consumers do not earn more than other Americans, but that they have more disposable income because fewer are raising children.

In 1994, Swedish furniture retailer Ikea became the first company to target this largely untapped market on television by running an ad that featured a middle-aged gay male couple shopping for furniture. However, despite the financial attractiveness of the "Dream Market," the ad created a wave of controversy among the mainstream television audience who found the idea of homosexuality far less palatable than did profit-minded marketers. Quickly marketers realized that advertising in the growing number of gay print media available would provide an entrée to the gay market with a relatively low risk of backlash from the much bigger group of mainstream consumers. Hence, advertising spending in gay print media, such as *The Advocate* and *Out Magazine*, far outpaced industry averages, with annual ad expenditures at the end of the decade estimated at over \$200 million (www.commercialcloset.org). Many companies in the entertainment, travel, financial, and pharmaceutical industries joined alcohol and apparel brands in reaching gay consumers in the more than 152 gay magazines and newspapers in the United States (Wilke and Applebaum, 2001). More recently, gay-oriented shows such as *The L Word*, *Will and Grace*, *Ellen*, *Queer as Folk*, and *Queer Eye for a Straight Guy* have increasingly pushed the boundaries of cultural acceptance of homosexuality and have diminished the risk of backlash for firms who are perceived to be "gay-friendly." In fact, to date, about 175 Fortune 500 brands have advertised specifically to gay audiences, according to the 2005 Gay Press Report from Prime Access and Rivendell Media Co.

Gay consumers appear to interpret firms' recognition of the gay market as support for the gay community and the gay social movement (Penaloza, 1996). In a 2005 study by Harris Interactive and Witeck-Combs, roughly two-thirds of gay respondents said they were more likely to consider buying products and services from companies that market directly to gay males and lesbians over competing brands that do not. Similarly, a large percentage of readers of gay publications report that they are "very likely" to buy the mainstream products advertised there. Miller Lite has been the "beer of choice for lesbians," largely due to the brand's advertising in gay magazines for the past ten years (Chase, 1997) and sponsorship of gay events such as The Tournament of the Stars, one of the longest-running gay softball tournaments in the world.

However, despite the vast amount of attention that has been paid to the gay market in the popular press, there appear to be few attempts to apply what is theoretically known about gay individuals to the development of effective advertising strategies to target this group. Advertising research based on Identity Theory has suggested that consumers respond best to advertising that provides content that reflects the consumer's identity (Jaffe, 1991). Despite this, to date, marketers appear to see gay consumers as a group that shares one identity, applying a "one size fits all" approach in developing advertising to target gay consumers (Oakenfull and Greenlee, 2005). In a content analysis of advertising in gay and lesbian media, Oakenfull and Greenlee (2005) found that most advertising targeting gay consumers tends to use a depiction of intimacy between two members of the same sex, usually male, to communicate its fit with gay consumers (Oakenfull and Greenlee, working paper).

However, past research on subcultures and social movements would suggest that gays should be treated as a distinct subculture rather than a consumer segment in traditional marketing terms (Fugate, 1993; Peñaloza, 1996; Bhat, 1996). Accordingly, as members of a subculture, gay consumers may differ in the degree to which members of a group identify with group norms and values (Hebdige, 1979; Leigh et al., 1987; Williams and Qualls, 1989; Shouten and McAlexander, 1995; Kates, 2002). Additionally, the gay identity is one of several identities incorporated into a person's self-concept. Feminist theorists have shown significant gender differences in the way gay individuals identify as gay, such that a gay male may identify with different aspects of their own gay experience depicted in gay-oriented advertising imagery than will a lesbian.

The present research draws from literature in psychology and sociology, relating to gay identity, and feminist theory to consider the effect of gay identity and gender on gay males' and lesbians' attitudes toward various types of advertising content that are most commonly used to target gay consumers. As such, this study empirically tests whether gay males' and lesbians' responses to gay-oriented advertising content is moderated by individual characteristics: (1) the degree to which he/she identify as gay, and (2) his/her gender, and by the explicitness and gender of the gay-oriented advertising imagery.

GAYS AND LESBIANS IN ADVERTISING: A BRIEF REVIEW OF ACADEMIC LITERATURE

Despite the growing number of firms that have begun to tap into the gay and lesbian market, the topic has received very little attention from

academic researchers. To date, there have been only four published studies that empirically examine the effect of gay advertising content on consumers' attitudes toward the advertisement. Looking at both heterosexuals and homosexuals from an in-group/out-group perspective, Bhat et al. (1996) found that gay consumers have a more favorable emotional and attitudinal responses to advertisements depicting a gay male couple than those depicting a heterosexual couple.

Applying the same in-group/out-group consideration as Bhat et al. (1996), Grier and Brumbaugh (1999) used a meaning-based approach to explore the meanings created by target and non-target viewers of advertising targeting black/white, and gay male/lesbian cultures. Their results showed that asymmetries in cultural expertise, power, distinctiveness, and stigmatization among those cultural groups influence the meanings created by target and non-target viewers of ads targeting those groups. While not focusing specifically on gay males and lesbian consumers, this research provides a rich theoretical base for further exploration of heterosexual consumers' attitudes toward advertising with gay content. However, as with Bhat et al. (1996), given that both studies measured gay consumers' attitudes only toward an advertisement with gay male imagery, no inference can be drawn about the effect of the gender of the participant or the gender of individuals shown in the advertising imagery on attitudes toward advertising content.

Oakenfull and Greenlee (2004) provide marketers with an understanding of how heterosexual consumers' attitudes toward gays and lesbians affect their attitude toward advertising with different types of gay or lesbian content. The authors examine the role that the gender depicted in the homosexual imagery in the advertisement plays in affecting heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay male and lesbian advertising content. Additionally, the study examines the effect of different levels of intimacy between same-sex couples in advertising content on heterosexuals' attitudes toward the advertisement, and its interaction with the gender of the target. The findings indicate that, overall, heterosexual consumers appear to have a more positive attitude toward advertisements with lesbian imagery than advertisements with gay male imagery. These results are compounded when the level of intimacy depicted in the advertisement is increased.

In a more recent study, Oakenfull and Greenlee (2005) examine the differences between gay males and lesbians' attitudes toward various types of advertising content that have been traditionally used to target gay consumers. Findings indicate that lesbians prefer ads with lesbian imagery to ads using either gay male or heterosexual imagery, while

gay males prefer ads with either gay or lesbian imagery to ads using heterosexual imagery.

However, consumer researchers have tended to assume that gay is a dichotomous construct—either you are or you aren't. In fact, much of the research from the social sciences, the most infamous being conducted by The Kinsey Institute from the late 1930s to the early 1950s (Pomeroy, 1972), acknowledges that there are degrees of gayness, both in terms of the acquisition of the identity and experience of being gay (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989). To date, academic researchers have failed to consider the effect of gay identity, and its potential interaction with previously found gender effects, on gay consumers' attitudes toward various types of advertising content. Additionally, while Oakenfull and Greenlee (2001) found that the gender of the participant and the gender of individuals shown on gay-oriented ads have an effect on gay consumers' attitudes toward ads, the level of explicitness of gay imagery used in the ad may interact with gender differences in affecting attitudes toward gay-oriented ad imagery.

In this research, we discuss the constructs of homosexual and gay identity, so as to understand the relationship between the gender of the individual and the formation of a gay identity. We then empirically examine how gay identity and gender may interact to affect gay males' and lesbians' attitudes toward three types of gay-oriented advertising imagery. First, we test their response to ads with "explicit" gay imagery that varies by the gender of the gay couple shown in the ad. Then, we examine gay individuals' responses to "implicit" gay imagery that avoids reference to either gender by showing gay and lesbian symbolism.

DEFINING HOMOSEXUALITY AND HOMOSEXUAL IDENTITY

Fuss (1989) highlights the difficulty involved in conceptualizing homosexual identity by asking, "Is identity a personal, natural, political, or linguistic category?" The relationship between homosexual activity and homosexual identity is neither fixed nor absolute; a certain amount of interdependence exists between sexual behavior and sexual identity. Women or men may define themselves as homosexual without the benefit of homosexual experience (Coleman, 1985). Conversely, overt homosexual behavior is not necessarily an expression of a homosexual identity (Troiden, 1988). Hence, sexual acts may be compartmental-

ized subjectively to leave unaffected an individual's sexual identity (Coleman, 1985; Ponse, 1978; Troiden, 1974, 1988).

Troiden (1988) classifies homosexual identity as a cognitive construct and a component of self-concept. Drawing on Cass's (1984) conceptualization of identity, Troiden (1988) incorporates the importance of reference to social categories relevant to a specific social setting or situation and argues that self-placement in the social category "homosexual" is a necessary part of homosexual identity formation, occurring commonly through interactions with other self-defined homosexuals during the "coming out" process (Plummer, 1975; Ponse, 1978). Hence, from an interactionist perspective, the term *homosexual* involves more than a certain kind of sexual orientation or sexual behavior. It also encompasses an identity and way of life. As with other identities, the homosexual identity is one of several identities incorporated into a person's self-concept. However, for many homosexuals, their homosexual identity becomes a *master status* at some points in their lives, where their homosexual identities are viewed as defining characteristics of self, and as attributes relevant to most social interactions and situations (Troiden, 1988).

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN GAY IDENTITY

Carol Warren (1974) suggests that the way gay males view homosexuality and gayness is more complex than the way heterosexuals view it; different criteria are used, and subtler distinctions are made, to determine who is or is not homosexual and to differentiate components of gay identity. According to Warren (1974), a *homosexual identity* describes a kind of sexual behavior, sexual preference, and sexual identity, whereas a *gay identity* encompasses not only the dimensions of homosexual identity, but also social involvement in the homosexual community and same-sex romantic (emotional) attachments (Troiden, 1988). Warren's definition of homosexuality usefully conveys the *experience* of homosexual identity at specific points in its formation. Vanable et al. (1994) found that, although homosexually active men are often considered to be part of the same homogeneous group, there are substantial individual differences in the extent to which these men perceive themselves to be part of the larger gay community and in the degree to which they self-identify as gay. Hence, individuals who are heavily involved in the gay subculture are likely to be totally identified with all aspects of the gay

world or subculture and feel a strong sense of belonging to and with other members of the subculture (Vanable et al., 1994).

Conversely, while gays whose experience is less focused within the gay community may be fully committed (Cass, 1979, 1984; Troiden, 1988) to their gay identity, they do not experience it as central (Troiden, 1988) to their sense of self. They will tend to be less involved in the gay community in terms of attending gay or lesbian organizational activities, frequenting gay bars, and reading gay media (Vanable et al., 1994). From this one can conclude that, while both of these types of homosexual individuals fully identify as gay, the manifestation of this identity and the experience of being gay will differ greatly between the two types.

Additionally, research in the social sciences suggests that there may be gender differences in the way gay individuals identify as gay (Etorre, 1980; Rich, 1980; Kitzinger, 1987; Rust, 1992, 1993). Hence, the meaning of a lesbian identity may differ greatly to that of a gay male identity.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GENDER TO GAY IDENTITY

Despite calls for an appreciation of the diversity between the gay and lesbian markets (Bowes, 1996; Freitas, Kaiser and Hammidi, 1996; Lukenbill, 1995), marketers have, almost exclusively, used gay male imagery in advertising placed in gay and lesbian print media (Oakenfull and Greenlee, working paper). Given that it is unlikely that these marketers would consider ignoring the many differences between heterosexual men and women, one can reasonably suggest that they are responding to the overall income-differential between gays and lesbians and are in pursuit of the gay dollar (Badgett, 1998). In doing so, marketers have focused their advertising dollars on the gay males, with the expectation that lesbians will translate subtext and code in gay marketing in order to see themselves represented in the advertising (Shulman, 1998).

However, based on feminist literary criticism theory, Stern (1993) suggests that men and women exhibit distinct reading styles when processing gender-related advertising content. Men tend to be detached readers who "see (judge, evaluate, or think about) a story from the outside," women tend to be communal readers who "see (experience, feel or empathize) a story from the inside" (pp. 559-560). Hence, gays and lesbians may be expected to differ systematically in how they process and interpret a specific ad. Thus, when presented with homosexual imagery,

we may expect lesbians to process the ad in terms of how it makes them *feel*, while gays will focus less on the affective aspects of the imagery and respond in a more cognitive manner.

Additionally, feminist theorists argue that the lesbian identity is distinct from that of gays, as lesbians face simultaneous oppression based on their gender as well as their sexual orientation (Bristor and Fischer, 1995), which gay males do not. As a result, gay males and lesbians appear to *experience* their gay identities differently. Lesbian feminists have been critical of the inclusion of lesbians as "female versions of male homosexuality" (Rich, 1980; Rust, 1992, 1993) and argue that there appears to be a fundamental difference in the *way* males and females identify as homosexual. Rich (1980) describes a lesbian continuum that puts woman-identifiedness at its core, a result of the socio-historical oppression of females. She suggests that lesbianism is more than sexuality; it is the emotional and psychological identification of women with other women. Rich's lesbian continuum coupled with the influence of the women's movement have contributed to the idea of a "socio-political lesbian," a concept confirmed in empirical studies based on lesbian samples (see Etorre, 1980; Kitzinger, 1987; Ponse, 1978). Interestingly, while the term "political lesbian" is widely used in studies of lesbian identity, the term "political gay man" does not appear to exist (Eliason, 1996). In fact, research findings indicate that for gay men, sexual identity has been primarily associated with gay activity, whereas for lesbians there is a much stronger political and emotional component (Eliason, 1996).

Thus, Warren's (1974) idea of the *experience* of being homosexual appears to differ between sexes. Hence, while both gay males and lesbians may wish to be targeted with gay imagery, the *type* of imagery with which each will identify may differ. Given that most advertising targeting gay consumers tends to use a depiction of intimacy between two members of the same sex to communicate its fit with gay consumers (Oakenfull and Greenlee, working paper), we may expect both sexes to identify most strongly with advertising that reflect their own sex, referred to as "explicit" imagery in this paper. Hence, lesbian consumers may prefer advertising with lesbian imagery over gay male imagery, while the reverse holds for gay male consumers.

However, the effect of gender on gay consumers' attitude toward explicit gay ad content may be moderated by their level of gay identity. As discussed above, as consumers become more identified as gay, the male gay identity tends to become more sexually-oriented while

the female identity skews toward the socio-political. Hence, the effect of gender on attitude toward the ad tends to be most pronounced on individuals who are highly identified as gay. As such, low gay identity lesbians will refer to sex-identification when preferring explicit lesbian imagery to explicit gay male imagery. While advertising with explicit gay male imagery effectively targets gay males by capturing their essence of "gayness" (Warren, 1974), similarly explicit depictions of a female couple may be interpreted negatively by lesbians as an advertiser's attempt to treat lesbians as Rich's (1980) "female versions of male homosexuality."

Hence, high identity lesbians are more likely than low identity lesbians to believe that explicit gay imagery with depictions of either gender tends to capture the sexual dimension of the gay male identity rather than the socio-political core of lesbian identity (Eliason, 1996). Similarly, for males, depictions of gay males may be interpreted as more sexual than depictions of lesbians, thus more effectively capturing the essence of "gayness" (Warren, 1974) for gay males. Hence, high gay-identified males will have a more positive attitude toward explicit gay male imagery than explicit lesbian imagery, while low gay identity males will not differentiate based on the gender of the ad. As such, we may hypothesize the following based on the effect of gender and gay identity on gay consumers' attitudes toward ads with explicit gay content:

H1: Among high gay identity consumers, males have a more positive attitude toward ads with explicit gay male imagery than do females.

H2: Among males, high gay identity consumers have a more positive attitude toward ads with explicit gay male imagery than do low gay identity consumers.

H3a: High gay identity males have a more positive attitude toward ads with explicit gay male imagery than ads with explicit lesbian male imagery.

H3b: Low gay identity females have a more positive attitude toward ads with explicit lesbian imagery than ads with explicit gay male imagery.

TARGETING GAY CONSUMERS WITHOUT REFERENCE TO SEX

Despite marketers' practice to date of indicating "gayness" in their advertising with either depictions of gay males or gay and lesbian couples, an alternative ad strategy may exist that allows advertisers to avoid a reference to the gender of the target audience. As with many subcultures, the gay and lesbian subculture has developed "markers of gay identity" (Tharp, 2001) such as clothes, symbols, language and appearance (Altman, 1987; Kates, 1998; Meyer, 1994) that hold specific meaning to members of the subculture. Examples of such gay iconography and symbolism which are linked to the gay subculture include the rainbow, freedom rings, pink triangle, and references to "family," "pride" and "coming out." Subaru has placed an advertisement in gay and lesbian media that cleverly incorporates gay symbolism and code on the license plate and bumper sticker of three cars so as to appeal to different types of gay and lesbian consumers (Pertman, 2001). The use of implicit gay imagery allows both gays and lesbians to identify with the advertisement without the risk of alienating their gender identity. However, as with explicit gay imagery that tends to represent male "gayness" more accurately than that of females, we would expect gender differences in gay and lesbian consumers' attitudes toward ads containing implicit gay imagery to be moderated by their level of gay identity. Hence, both gay males and lesbians who do not strongly identify as gay will respond as favorably to advertising containing implicit gay imagery as they will to advertising depicting gay couples of their respective sex, as the advertising imagery draws on each consumers' gay identity without alienating his or her gender identity (Bristor and Fischer, 1995). Similarly, low gay identity males and females will prefer the implicit gay imagery to explicit gay imagery of the opposite sex. Hence, we can hypothesize:

H4a: Low gay identity males have a more positive attitude toward ads with implicit gay imagery than those with explicit lesbian imagery.

H4b: Low gay identity females have a more positive attitude toward ads with implicit gay imagery than those with explicit gay male imagery.

Finally, conceptualizing the lesbian identity as an artifact of the societal stigmatism experienced as both a homosexual and female (Rich,

1980; Schulman, 1998), one may expect lesbians to prefer the advertisement with implicit gay imagery to that with explicit gay imagery. The gender-neutral content of the implicit gay imagery will avoid the gender alienation of the advertisement with explicit gay male imagery. Additionally, the use of implicit gay imagery will not be interpreted by lesbians as marketers attempt to treat lesbians as Rich's (1980) "female versions of male homosexuality" as may be the case with explicit lesbian imagery. We would expect this response to be moderated by the level of gay identity such that high gay identity females will have a more favorable attitude toward ads with implicit gay imagery than will low gay identity females. Given that implicit gay imagery does not tap into the sexual nature of gay male identity, it is unlikely that high or low gay identity males would react differently to implicit gay imagery in ads. Similarly, given that implicit gay imagery avoids stimulating elements of gender identity, we would not expect to find any differences between low gay identity males and females in their response to implicit gay imagery.

However, both gay identity and gender will play a significant role in determining gay consumers' attitudes toward implicit gay imagery as they become more strongly identified as gay. The moderating effect of gay identity is most evident when comparing highly gay-identified males and females. As such, given the use of implicit gay imagery may more closely fit with lesbian identity and the lesbian experience of being homosexual than would be the case for gays, we may expect highly identified lesbians to have a more favorable attitude toward the implicit gay imagery than will highly identified males. In effect, among highly identified gay consumers, implicit gay imagery is to lesbians what explicit gay male imagery is to gay males. Additionally, we may expect high identity females to have a more favorable attitude toward implicit gay imagery than either explicit gay male, as a result of gender identity, or explicit lesbian imagery, as a result of gay identity. Similarly, high identity males will have a more favorable attitude toward explicit gay male imagery than implicit gay imagery. Finally, we may expect high identity females to have a more favorable attitude than do low identity females toward implicit gay imagery, as implicit gay imagery most closely captures the essence of lesbian identity that is more meaningful to highly identified lesbians than those less identified. Hence, we can hypothesize:

H5a: High gay identity females have a more positive attitude toward ads with implicit gay imagery than do high gay identity males.

H5b: High gay identity females have a more positive attitude toward ads with implicit gay imagery than do low gay identity females.

H6: High gay identity females have a more positive attitude toward ads with implicit gay imagery than those with explicit lesbian imagery or explicit gay male imagery.

H7: High gay identity males have a more positive attitude toward ads with explicit gay male imagery than those with implicit gay imagery.

PROCEDURE

Three advertisements, depicting implicit gay imagery, explicit gay male imagery or explicit lesbian imagery were selected from a pretest of twenty gay-oriented advertisements. In the pretest, twenty gay-identified participants were asked to indicate the perceived audience for each advertisement. While the use of actual advertisements improves the ecological validity of the study, the author recognizes the potential confounding variables that may be introduced by use real world ads. In an effort to control for these effects, the selected stimuli all represented alcoholic beverages to control for product effects. Additionally, the ads selected showed no significant difference across the three potentially confounding variables of differences in brand familiarity, attitude toward the respective brands, and the attractiveness of people shown in the advertisements in pretests.

The advertisements with explicit gay male imagery or lesbian imagery depicted two same-sex individuals in close proximity such that the imagery would be interpreted as depictive of a couple rather than simply two individuals of the same sex. The advertisement selected to represent implicit gay imagery showed "markers of gay identity" (Altman, 1987; Kates, 1998; Meyer, 1994) that would capture the socio-political aspect of gay identity. As such, the implicit gay ad showed a bottle being removed from a six-pack of beer with a headline stating "Another one coming out," a pink triangle and a rainbow flag.

As discussed earlier, various studies have estimated that between 4 and 10% of the any population is homosexual, resulting in 12 to 28 million gays and lesbians in the United States alone (Kinsey et al., 1948; Laumann et al., 1994). Thus, a randomized sampling procedure would

be unlikely to yield a sizable sample of homosexual participants. Additionally, it is also difficult to determine sexual minorities through surveys due to complexities of self-identification, definitions, and stigmas (Laumann et al., 1994; Bhat et al., 1996). A snowball sampling procedure was utilized where the authors distributed surveys to self-identified gays and lesbians in five geographic regions of the United States. Participants in the study included 68 self-identified gay males and 44 self-identified lesbians from five geographic regions of the United States. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 68 years old with a mean age of 34 years old.

Each participant was presented with all of the three advertising stimuli with the order that the advertisements were presented balanced to control for order effects. Participants were asked to review each advertisement in the order presented and to answer a three-item attitude toward the advertisement (good/bad, like/dislike, favorable/unfavorable) measure accompanying each advertisement.

Level of gay identity was measured using a modification of Venable et al.'s (1994) *Identification and Involvement with the Gay Community* scale. The original scale was designed to measure involvement with and perceived closeness to the gay community among individuals who self-identified as gay. The original scale consisted of eight self-report items. Participants indicated their degree of agreement with attitude statements regarding the importance of self-identifying as gay and associating with a gay community. However, in order to modify the scale so as to be applicable to both males and females, three scale items were added to capture lesbian attraction to women.

High and low gay identity was measured using a median split of participants' responses to Venable et al.'s (1994) scale. Medians for male and female participants were compared to control for any gender differences in levels of gay identity. However, the median for males and females was not significantly different and the data were split against the same median.

RESULTS

The data were analyzed using a General Linear Model multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with Gender (male, female) and Gay Identity (Low, High) as between-subjects factors and Ad Content (implicit gay imagery, explicit gay imagery) as a within-subjects factor.

The dependent measure was attitude toward the advertisement (A_{ad}) which was a composite measure of the good, favorable and liking measures discussed in the Procedure section. These three measures demonstrated high inter-item reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.96$.

Effect of Gay Identity, Gender and Ad Content on Ad Attitudes

The results indicated a significant three-way interaction of gay identity, gender and ad content ($F_{(1,109)} = 3.10, p = 0.049$). This interaction appears to be driven by the following between-subject effects:

First, as can be seen in Figure 1 and Table 1, consistent with *H1*, among high gay identity consumers, males have a more positive attitude toward ads with explicit gay male imagery ($M = 5.67$) than do females ($M = 4.48, F_{(1,59)} = 10.71, p = 0.002$), while, consistent with *H5a*, females have a more positive attitude toward ads with implicit gay imagery ($M = 5.15$) than do males ($M = 4.94, F_{(1,59)} = 5.34, p = 0.024$). As mentioned earlier, this effect was expected due to the tendency for high identity gay

FIGURE 1. The Effect of Gender and Explicitness of Ad Imagery on High Gay Identity Consumers' Attitude Toward Gay-Oriented Advertising

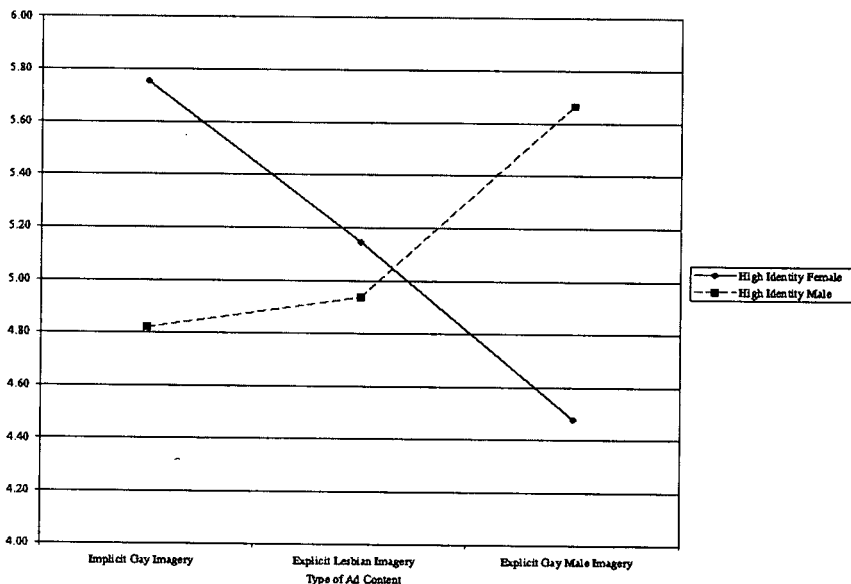


TABLE 1. Mean Attitude Toward the Ad and Between-Subjects Effects of Level of Gay Identity and Gender on Ad

Ad Content	Level of Gay Identity	Female	Male	<i>p</i> -Value
Implicit gay imagery	Low	4.79	5.10	0.52
	High	5.75	4.82	0.02*
	<i>p</i> -value	0.05*	0.47	
Explicit gay male imagery	Low	4.11	4.82	0.11
	High	4.48	5.67	0.00*
	<i>p</i> -value	0.38	0.02*	
Explicit lesbian imagery	Low	4.80	4.40	0.29
	High	5.14	4.94	0.53
	<i>p</i> -value	0.42	0.07	

* Indicates statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

consumers of each gender to identify more strongly with advertising that reflects the essence of their respective gay identities (Warren, 1974).

Second, consistent with *H2*, as can be seen in Table 1, high gay identity males have a more positive attitude toward ads with explicit gay male imagery ($M = 5.67$) than do low identity males ($M = 4.82$, $F_{(1,68)} = 5.33$, $p = 0.02$). Similarly, as can be seen in Table 1, consistent with *H5b*, high gay identity females have a more positive attitude toward ads with implicit gay imagery ($M = 5.75$) than do low gay identity females ($M = 4.79$, $F_{(1,44)} = 3.77$, $p = 0.05$). Therefore, as expected, the effect of level of gay identity on attitude toward the ad is significant for males for the explicit gay male imagery and for females for the implicit gay imagery.

Effect of Explicitness and Gender of Ad Imagery on Ad Attitudes

The results of other hypotheses, which examine the within-subject effects of the explicitness and gender of ad content on attitude toward the ad, are discussed below.

High Gay Identity Females: As can be seen in Figure 1 and Table 2, consistent with *H6*, high gay identity females have a more positive attitude toward ads with implicit gay imagery ($M = 5.75$) than those with explicit lesbian imagery ($M = 5.15$, $t_{(22)} = 2.31$, $p = 0.030$) or explicit gay male imagery ($M = 4.48$, $t_{(22)} = 3.025$, $p = 0.006$).

TABLE 2. Within-Subject Effects of Explicitness and Gender of Ad Imagery on Ad

Sex of Participant	Level of Gay Identity	Ad Content	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Female	Low	Implicit gay imagery-Explicit gay male imagery	1.48	21	0.16		
		Implicit gay imagery-Explicit lesbian imagery	-0.03	21	0.98		
		Explicit gay male imagery-Explicit lesbian imagery	-3.12	21	0.01*		
	High	Implicit gay imagery-Explicit gay male imagery	3.03	22	0.01*		
		Implicit gay imagery-Explicit lesbian imagery	2.31	22	0.03*		
		Explicit gay male imagery-Explicit lesbian imagery	-1.75	22	0.09		
		Male	Low	Implicit gay imagery-Explicit gay male imagery	0.91	31	0.37
				Implicit gay imagery-Explicit lesbian imagery	2.66	31	0.01*
				Explicit gay male imagery-Explicit lesbian imagery	1.36	31	0.19
High	Implicit gay imagery-Explicit gay male imagery		-2.85	36	0.01*		
	Implicit gay imagery-Explicit lesbian imagery		-0.41	36	0.69		
	Explicit gay male imagery-Explicit lesbian imagery		3.45	36	0.00*		

* Indicates statistical significance at the 0.05 level.

High Gay Identity Males: As can be seen in Figure 1 and Table 2, consistent with *H3a*, high gay identity males have a more positive attitude toward ads with explicit gay male imagery ($M = 5.67$) than ads with explicit lesbian male imagery ($M = 4.94$, $t_{(36)} = 3.45$, $p = 0.001$). As can be seen in Table 2, consistent with *H7*, high gay identity males have a more positive attitude toward ads with explicit gay male imagery ($M = 5.67$) than those with implicit gay imagery ($M = 4.82$, $t_{(36)} = 3.45$, $p = 0.001$).

Low Gay Identity Females: As can be seen in Table 2, consistent with *H3b*, low gay identity females have a more positive attitude toward ads with explicit lesbian imagery ($M = 4.80$) than ads with explicit gay male imagery ($M = 4.11$, $t_{(36)} = 3.12$, $p = 0.005$). As can be seen in Table 2, inconsistent with *H4b*, low gay identity females do not have a more

positive attitude toward ads with implicit gay imagery ($M = 4.79$) than those with explicit gay male imagery ($M = 4.11$, $t_{(21)} = 1.48$, $p = 0.155$).

Low Gay Identity Males: As can be seen in Table 2, consistent with *H4a*, low gay identity males have a more positive attitude toward ads with implicit gay imagery ($M = 5.10$) than those with explicit lesbian imagery ($M = 4.39$, $t_{(31)} = 2.67$, $p = 0.012$).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates how 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. The results are consistent with the theoretical perspectives offered and advance prior research in an important direction. Simply grouping gay and lesbian consumers of all types into a single market defies traditional segmentation practices by ignoring individual differences among members of the group that may affect responses to marketing actions (Bhat, 1996).

This research examined the effect of gender and level on gay identity on gay consumers' responses to advertising the varied on two dimensions: (1) the manner in which gayness was depicted, either with a same-sex couple (explicit) or with gay symbolism (implicit), and (2) the gender of the same-sex couple used in the advertising. A three-way interaction of sex, gay identity and ad content was found which was driven by both gender and gay identity effects for the ads that featured gay male imagery and implicit gay imagery. These ads appeared to tap into the difference in the way males and females identify as gay (Ponse, 1978; Rich, 1980; Eliason, 1996), which is closely tied to how they *experience* gayness (Warren, 1974). These gender differences are moderated by an individual's level of gay identity, such that the more strongly an individual identifies as gay, the more salient the effect of gender becomes on responses to gay-oriented ad imagery.

From a managerial perspective, clearly the current practice of using a predominance of gay male imagery in advertising to gay consumers provides an effective means of targeting gay males, especially those who are highly identified as gay. However, such a practice is likely to alienate lesbians, who fail to identify with both the gender of the couple in the ad and the sexual nature of the imagery. Despite, this need for lesbian-oriented ad imagery, a content analysis of advertising in *The Advocate*, one of the leading gay and lesbian magazines with a circulation of 88,000, found that lesbian-targeted imagery accounted for only 3% of

advertising content in 1999 (Oakenfull and Greenlee, working paper). However, lesbian readers of gay and lesbian media represent a niche that appears to be demographically attractive. According to a survey by *Girlfriends*, a lesbian magazine with a circulation of 32,000, its readers have a median household income of \$47,700, with 54% having professional or managerial jobs, 77% having college degrees, 57% having partners, and 22% having children (*Wall Street Journal*, 1999).

Hence, marketers that attempt to tap into this market must be aware of the impact of gender on the gay identity. While depictions of lesbian couples that mimic gay male advertising imagery will appeal to lesbians who do not hold a strong gay identity, highly identified lesbians consider this type of advertising to be no more desirable than explicit gay male imagery. The use of implicit gay imagery, in the form of gay symbolism that represents the socio-political nature of lesbian identity should be utilized to target all lesbians. Additionally, it is as effective in targeting low identity gay males as is explicit gay male imagery.

To some extent, this research represents the tip of the iceberg. If consumers respond best to advertising that provides content that reflects the individual's identity (Jaffe, 1991), and if the gay identity is only one of several identities incorporated into a person's self-concept, academics must explore all how other types of individual differences among gay consumers, such as ethnicity, income level, age, affect responses to advertising strategies. The rainbow has been used as a symbol of the gay movement. Marketers should realize that the colors of the rainbow represent the diversity that exists within gay community. While gay males and lesbians have joined together as a social movement (Peñaloza, 1996), the results of this study would indicate that marketers must be consider differences that exist within the group, such as the gender of the target group and their level of gay identity, when designing effective advertising strategies to target gay consumers.

Limitations

The findings of this study should be interpreted within the limitations of the methodology. Given the use of actual advertisements, the study did not completely control for brand type. Additionally, while the potential for hypothesis-guessing could be reduced by presenting each participant with only one advertisement, given the challenges involved in reaching a sizable sample of gay and lesbian consumers, it was decided to maximize the amount of data collected by presenting each participant with all three advertisements. Finally, while inferences were

made as to why gay males and lesbians responded to various types of advertising imagery as they did, the inclusion of ad process measures may help to more accurately understand the rationale behind attitude toward the ad measures.

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