Queer Eye for a Gay Guy: Using Market-Specific Symbols in Advertising to Attract Gay Consumers Without Alienating the Mainstream

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ABSTRACT

Although advertisers have flooded gay and lesbian print media in recent years, it is estimated that more than half of the gay and lesbian population does not read gay media. Hence, this study addresses the question: How may marketers target gays and lesbians in mainstream media without alienating heterosexual consumers? As such, this study assesses responses of both heterosexual and homosexual consumers to advertising content that includes mainstream imagery, implicit gay and lesbian imagery, and explicit gay or lesbian imagery to provide advertisers with a better understanding of how to effectively crossover into mainstream media with gay-targeted advertisements. © 2005 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

With a buying power of $450 billion spread over 16 million consumers (www.gay.com), the gay and lesbian market represents the highest buy-

ing power per capita of any minority group in the United States. Marketers have responded to this potential by flooding the more than 152 gay magazines and newspapers in the United States with annual ad expenditures totaling over $120.4 million (Nicholson, 1999).

However, although the number of advertisers that target the "Dream Market" in gay media continues to grow (Cracking the Gay Market, 1999), a placement of an ad in *Out* and *The Advocate,* the two most widely circulated gay magazines, will reach only 3% of the gay and lesbian population, at most. In fact, it has been estimated that more than half of the gay and lesbian population that resides in the United States does not read any form of gay media (Poux, 1998). Conversely, more than 90% of gay men and 82% of lesbians reportedly read mainstream magazines such as *Newsweek, Time, People, National Geographic, Gentleman's Quarterly, New Yorker, Smithsonian, Vanity Fair, Men's Health,* and *Consumer Reports* (Tharp, 2001). Thus, marketers may have to consider placing advertising in mainstream media to reach the vast majority of the homosexual population. A short survey of advertising history charts a similar path in targeting racial and ethnic groups that led to a crossover to mainstream media (Peñaloza, 1996).

Yet despite the fact that firms such as IKEA, Calvin Klein, Banana Republic, and Benetton have used gay imagery in ads that have appeared in mainstream media, most advertisers have remained reluctant to target gay readers through mainstream media. To fully penetrate the gay and lesbian market, marketers must face a paradox that has been avoided with gay and lesbian media placements—exposing mainstream audiences to gay- and lesbian-oriented advertising content. However, although the gay and lesbian market may seem appealing to marketers, its size is far less significant than the heterosexual audience, many of whom are far from ready to welcome gays and lesbians into mainstream society. A recent Gallup Poll, commissioned by CNN and *USA Today*, showed that support for key items on the gay-rights agenda has declined for the first time in nearly a decade (Goldstein, 2003). In fact, for the first time since 1997, a majority thinks that being gay is not an "acceptable alternative lifestyle" (Goldstein, 2003). Thus, given the significant negative attitude toward homosexuality in mainstream America, marketers may risk the nightmare of alienating a far greater percentage of the market in pursuit of the "dream market."

Therefore, although the increase in gay and lesbian media outlets provides marketers with numerous placements for their advertisements targeted at a gay and lesbian audience, a move to mainstream media will require a rethinking of marketers' current advertising strategies in targeting gays and lesbians. Although gay male imagery and targeted copy is the norm in advertising in *The Advocate* and *Out,* the leading gay and lesbian magazines (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2000), a reliance on a similar strategy in mainstream media may cause advertisers to expose themselves to great risk of a negative response from mainstream audiences.

When targeting gays and lesbians in mainstream media, gender may play a far more significant role than simply as a targeting tool. Research drawing on findings from the social sciences has shown that the sex of the target has a significant effect on heterosexuals' attitudes toward depictions of gays and lesbians in advertising in that heterosexuals tend to have a more negative response to gay males than they do lesbians (Oakenfull & Greenlee, in press). Thus, a move to mainstream media requires that marketers re-evaluate the importance of the gender depicted in gay and lesbian advertising content.

However, a depiction of a same-sex couple of any gender may lead to a negative response by any mainstream consumers with a negative attitude toward homosexuality. The key to targeting gays and lesbians in mainstream media without alienating the nontarget market may be to find targeted imagery that is not detected as such by mainstream consumers. Use of implicit gay and lesbian imagery such as gay and lesbian iconography and symbolism may allow marketers to effectively target the gay and lesbian consumers who will recognize the symbolism in the ad, while posing far less risk of offending heterosexual consumers, who may be unaware of the meaning of the advertising content.

Thus, it is apparent that marketers cannot simply transfer the imagery most commonly used in gay media advertising to mainstream media. It is important that marketers fully understand how heterosexual consumers will react to different types of gay- and lesbian-oriented imagery in advertising prior to running such an advertising campaign in mainstream media and provoking a potentially fatal backlash from heterosexual consumers. However, care must be taken not to appease one audience while forsaking another. Gay and lesbian consumers must respond as well to advertising using implicit gay and lesbian imagery as they do to explicit depictions of gay and lesbian imagery to be effectively targeted in mainstream media.

Despite the potential rewards of successfully penetrating the gay and lesbian market and the potential pitfalls involved in doing so within mainstream media, little is known about how gay and lesbian consumers react to different types of advertising content, with the topic receiving very little attention in academic literature (see Bhat, Leigh, & Wardlow, 1999, for an exception). This study addresses the question: How may marketers target gays and lesbians in mainstream media without alienating heterosexual consumers? As such, this study examines the consequences of marketers using different types of gay and lesbian advertising content, including both implicit and explicit gay and lesbian imagery, in mainstream media advertising.

Specifically, this study assesses responses of both heterosexual and homosexual consumers to advertising content that includes mainstream imagery, implicit gay and lesbian imagery, and explicit gay or lesbian imagery to provide advertisers with a better understanding of how to effectively cross over into mainstream media with gay- and lesbian-targeted advertisements.

GAYS AND LESBIANS IN ADVERTISING: A LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite the growing number of firms that have begun to tap into the gay and lesbian dream market, the topic has received very little attention in academic literature. In fact, to date there have been only three published studies that empirically examined the effect of gay advertising content on consumers' attitudes toward the advertisement. Looking at heterosexuals and homosexuals from an in-group/out-group perspective, Bhat et al. (1999) examine how heterosexuals, an in-group, react to the portrayal of homosexuals, an out-group, in advertisements. They find that heterosexuals' emotional and attitudinal responses to a homosexual advertisement depend on their general attitude toward homosexuality. Additionally, they find that heterosexuals have a less favorable attitude toward gay imagery than do gay and lesbian consumers. Looking at two products, jeans and shampoo, the authors examine the difference between consumers' attitudes toward advertisements that depicted a heterosexual couple and a homosexual couple. However, for both products, images of gay male couples are used exclusively to measure consumers' attitude toward a homosexual advertisement. Thus, no inference can be drawn about the effect of the gender of the gay and lesbian imagery used in the advertisement—an issue vital to firms that contemplate using gay and lesbian imagery in mainstream media, given the potentially more negative reaction to gay males than to lesbians. Additionally, no consideration is given to the type of gay imagery that was used in the advertising.

Grier and Brumbaugh (1999) use a meaning-based approach to examine how target and nontarget markets create ad meanings. Applying the same in-group/out-group consideration as Bhat et al. (1999), Grier and Brumbaugh (1999) explore the meanings created by target and nontarget viewers of advertising targeting black/white and gay/lesbian cultures. As with Bhat et al. (1999), advertisements with gay males are exclusively used as stimuli in the study. The results show that members of in-groups, or target viewers, can apply reading strategies that allow them to interpret meaning in advertising content that is not available to out-group, or nontarget, members. The meanings created by target and nontarget viewers of ads are influenced by asymmetries in cultural expertise, power, distinctiveness, and stigmatization among those cultural groups. Thus, although it does not focus specifically on gay and lesbian consumers, this research provides a rich theoretical base for further exploration of the use of advertising content that conveys different meaning to target and nontarget consumers.

Oakenfull and Greenlee (in press) 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 het-

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erosexuals' attitudes toward gay 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 imagery. These results are compounded when the level of intimacy depicted in the advertisement is increased.

Thus, this study builds on those of Bhat et al. (1999) and Oakenfull and Greenlee (in press) to examine heterosexual, gay, and lesbian consumers' responses to advertising with mainstream, gay, and lesbian imagery. Specifically, it will examine the effect that the sexual orientation and the gender of the same-sex imagery depicted in the advertisement has on heterosexual, gay, and lesbian consumers' attitudes toward the advertisement. Additionally, drawing from the Grier and Brumbaugh (1999) study of in-group meaning in advertising, this study addresses heterosexual, gay, and lesbian consumers' responses to the explicitness of the depictions of same-sex imagery used in advertising.

TARGETING GAYS AND LESBIANS IN MAINSTREAM MEDIA

IKEA, the Swedish furniture company, created much controversy when it included a gay male couple in its lifestyles ad campaign, which was broadcast on network television in the United States. It is reasonable to assume that IKEA considered its target audience to consist of both gay and lesbian consumers and heterosexual consumers who hold a positive attitude toward homosexuality. Images suggesting homosexuality have also been used in mainstream advertising for fashion labels such as Calvin Klein, Banana Republic, and Benetton. Similarly, the fashion industry has consistently been a gay-friendly industry where such imagery is accepted without resistance.

Why should marketers risk alienating heterosexual consumers by placing ads with gay content in mainstream media? First, an enormous proportion of gays and lesbians cannot be reached through gay media. Second, by bringing gay issues into the mainstream, marketers may stand to gain from the goodwill of gay and lesbian consumers who strive for the acceptance of gays and lesbians into mainstream society. Peñaloza (1996) contends that many gay and lesbian consumers consider their inclusion in marketplace activities as recognition of the progress of the gay social movement. Thus, it is possible that some gay and lesbian consumers may feel that a firm's decision to place a gay ad in a mainstream media vehicle offers a greater endorsement of support for the gay social movement than a similar placement in a gay medium.

How, then, may marketers balance the costs and risks involved in targeting a gay and lesbian audience with advertising in mainstream media?

Given the potential for crossover from gay and lesbian to mainstream media, marketers may contemplate simply transferring the same gay and lesbian targeted advertisements used in gay media to mainstream media. However, any depiction of a same-sex couple usually requires advertisers to portray either a gay or lesbian couple in the ad. To date, firms such as IKEA, Calvin Klein, Banana Republic, and Benetton that have used gay imagery in mainstream media have predominantly used depictions of gay males in their advertising, mirroring the enormous bias toward male-oriented advertising in gay and lesbian media. In a content analysis of advertising in *The Advocate*—one of the leading gay and lesbian magazines, with a circulation of 88,000—lesbian-targeted imagery accounted for only 3% of advertising content in 1999 (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2000).

Given the predominance of male readers of gay media, marketers' use of gay male imagery in their advertisements in gay and lesbian media appears to be an example of effective targeting. However, Bhat et al. (1999) found that mainstream consumers reacted less favorably to advertising depicting homosexual imagery than advertising depicting heterosexual imagery. Given that this study represented homosexual imagery solely with depictions of gay males, it can be concluded that heterosexual consumers prefer advertising with depictions of mainstream imagery than advertising with depictions of gay males. However, advertisers may reduce the potential for negative backlash from mainstream audiences by including depictions of lesbians rather than gay males in their advertising in mainstream media (Oakenfull & Greenlee, in press). Drawing on research from the social sciences that suggests that heterosexuals have more positive attitudes toward lesbians than toward gay males, Oakenfull and Greenlee (in press) showed that these attitudes tend to be transferred to responses to gay and lesbian imagery in advertising. Additionally, overall, gay and lesbian consumers respond equally well to gay or lesbian advertising content (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 1999). Thus, the use of lesbian rather than gay male imagery will not decrease the targeting ability of the advertisement among gays and lesbians in mainstream media.

However, although mainstream consumers may prefer lesbian imagery to gay imagery in advertising, marketers must consider whether the use of any type of explicit same-sex imagery would be received far more negatively than a mainstream advertisement by mainstream consumers, thus alienating the majority for the sake of targeting the few. Despite the fact that heterosexual consumers may be more favorably disposed to advertising depicting lesbians than those with gay males (Oakenfull & Greenlee, in press), drawing from identity theory, consumers respond less favorably to advertisements that do not reflect their self-identity (Jaffe, 1991). Thus, mainstream consumers may fail to identify with advertising that contains explicitly gay or lesbian imagery, which will result in a relatively less favorable attitude toward the advertisement.

Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Heterosexual consumers will have a more positive attitude toward advertisements with mainstream imagery than those with explicit gay male or explicit lesbian imagery.

Use of Implicit Gay and Lesbian Imagery in Advertising

Given that advertisers have decided to pursue the vast proportion of the gay and lesbian market that prefers mainstream media over gay media, it would appear that they may produce a more favorable reaction among heterosexuals by utilizing depictions of lesbians rather than gay males in their advertising, contrary to what is generally the practice in gay media (Oakenfull & Greenlee, in press). However, as hypothesized, this practice may still result in a notable backlash by heterosexual consumers who are averse to any depiction of homosexuality. Thus, the key to advertising to gays and lesbians within mainstream media without alienating heterosexual consumers may lie in the tenet that gayness is in the eye of the beholder.

As with many subcultures (Hebdige, 1979), the gay subculture has developed "markers of gay identity" (Tharp, 2001) such as clothes, symbols, language, and appearance (Altman, 1987; Kates, 2000; Meyer, 1994) that hold meaning to members of the subculture, while creating no meaning to those who have no knowledge of the subculture. Hence, advertisers may effectively reach both gays and lesbians in mainstream media with minimal risk of alienating heterosexuals by implicit gay and lesbian imagery such as gay iconography or symbolism (Peñaloza, 1996; Grier & Brumbaugh, 1999). Examples of such gay iconography include the rainbow, freedom rings, pink triangle, and references to "family" and "pride." Use of implicit gay and lesbian imagery allows gays and lesbians to derive meaning from advertising messages that include gay-specific symbolism that is different from meanings derived by nongay consumers who fail to identify or understand the gay iconography. One may also assume that those heterosexual consumers with a negative attitude toward homosexuality, who are thus most likely to be offended by gay and lesbian content in advertising (Bhat et al., 1999), would be least likely to identify or understand gay iconography. Thus, the use of implicit gay and lesbian imagery allows advertisers to run less risk of backlash from heterosexual consumers than if they were to target gay and lesbian consumers with explicit gay male or lesbian content in their advertising.

Interestingly, gay iconography has been employed by advertisers such as Anheuser-Busch, Subaru, and Absolut Vodka in gay media so as to communicate a sense of partnership between the firm and gay and lesbian consumers. Subaru has placed an ad in gay media that cleverly incorporates gay symbolism on the license plate and bumper sticker of each car so as to appeal to different types of gay and lesbian consumers

and communicate how well Subaru understands the nuances of gay or lesbian identity. Given the exclusive nature of the message, the use of implicit gay and lesbian imagery in mainstream media has the characteristics of an inside joke, allowing gay and lesbian consumers to feel bonded with the advertiser against less-informed mainstream adversaries (Peñaloza, 1996). Thus, such a strategy would allow gay and lesbian consumers to identify with the advertising, and would be received equally as well as advertising with explicit depictions of gay male or lesbian imagery.

Based on the idea that gayness is in the eye of the beholder, by including implicit gay and lesbian imagery, such as gay iconography and symbolism that is linked with the gay subculture, in advertising in mainstream media, marketers may target gay and lesbian consumers while minimizing the risk of a negative response by mainstream consumers who are simply unaware of the gay content in the advertisement. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H2: Heterosexual consumers will have a more positive attitude toward advertisements with implicit gay and lesbian imagery than those with explicit gay or lesbian imagery.

H3: Gay and lesbian consumers will have a more positive attitude toward advertisements with implicit gay and lesbian imagery than those with mainstream imagery.

METHOD

Stimuli

Four advertisements representing varying types of advertising content are utilized in the study. The advertising stimuli include advertisements that depict (a) mainstream content, (b) explicit gay male imagery, (c) explicit lesbian imagery, and (d) implicit gay and lesbian imagery. A depiction of a heterosexual couple was used in the advertisement representing mainstream content. Similarly, depictions of a gay male or lesbian couple were used to represent the explicit gay and lesbian imagery for this study so as to ensure mainstream consumers' recognition of the intended target of the advertisement and a reliable manipulation of varying degrees of advertising gayness. Additionally, various types of gay and lesbian symbolism were included in advertisements representing implicit gay and lesbian imagery (Altman, 1987; Kates, 1998; Meyer, 1994.)

As a means of selecting advertisements representative of the four types of advertising content, a pilot test of 20 advertisements was conducted with a sample of 24 undergraduate students who self-identified as gay and lesbian undergraduate students and 30 undergraduate students who self-identified as heterosexual. Gay and lesbian students were

recruited through a university-sponsored gay and lesbian student organization to ensure a balanced sample for the pretest. A split sample was necessary to identify an appropriate advertisement to represent the implicit gay and lesbian imagery stimuli. All of the advertisements used in the pretest and in the main study were actual print advertisements that had appeared in leading nationally published magazines. The gay- and lesbian-oriented advertisements were taken from either *Out* or *The Advocate*, the two most widely circulated gay and lesbian magazines. Each advertisement was selected based on the type of gay or lesbian content used in the advertisement. Specific attention ensured that each type of gay or lesbian advertising content was represented by at least three advertisements. The remaining three gay and lesbian advertisements were selected randomly from the magazines. Additionally, five mainstream advertisements that depicted imagery similar to the same-sex imagery in the explicit gay and explicit lesbian imagery advertisements were selected from *Cosmopolitan, GQ,* and *Rolling Stone* magazines.

Respondents were presented a packet of 20 advertisements and asked to identify the intended audience and message for the specific advertisements. In addition, respondents indicated their level of agreement with whether or not they were the intended target market for the specific advertisements. Respondents were also asked to list any thoughts that they had while examining the advertisement. This task was especially important given the interpretive nature of the advertisements containing implicit gay and lesbian imagery.

Additionally, given that actual advertisements were to be used for the experiment, it was important to measure the impact of potentially confounding variables such as differences in brand familiarity, attitude toward the respective brands, and the attractiveness of people shown in the ads. These data yielded four advertisements, each representative of one of the four types of stimuli, for inclusion in the actual study. The advertisement selected to represent implicit gay and lesbian imagery showed a bottle being removed from a six-pack of beer with the copy "Another one coming out." Additionally, a pink triangle and a rainbow flag were included as gay icons in the advertisement.

 The advertisements selected for the study showed no significant differences across these three potentially confounding factors and varied only in their perceived audience. Additionally, the advertisement with implicit gay and lesbian imagery that was chosen for the study had the greatest variance in terms of perceived intended audience. That is, all of the gay and lesbian participants identified the intended audience for the advertisement as being gay or lesbian. However, many mainstream participants failed to identify the gay and lesbian symbolism in the advertisement and designated the advertisement as intended for mainstream audiences.

Given the use of actual advertisements, the study did not completely control for product category or brand type. However, three of the advertisements represented alcoholic beverages, and the remaining advertisement represented a clothing company.

Participants

Estimates of homosexuality within the U.S. population run from 3% to 10% (Lukenbill, 1995). Thus, a randomized sampling procedure would be unlikely to yield a balanced sample of heterosexual and homosexual participants. Additionally, Bhat et al. (1999) found a strong correlation between heterosexuals' attitudes toward homosexuality and their attitude towards advertising with homosexual imagery. Herek (1988) showed that heterosexuals' attitudes toward homosexuality are strongly tied to geographic location, among other factors. Thus, in order to develop a balanced sample that reduced the probability of obtaining a sample skewed regarding heterosexuals' attitudes toward homosexuality, a snowball sampling procedure was utilized for both groups of participants and was drawn from a mixture of both rural and metropolitan areas around the United States.

The authors distributed surveys to self-identified gays and lesbians in five geographic regions of the United States. Additionally, surveys were distributed through contacts in mainstream places of employment in these geographic areas so as to develop a sample of heterosexual participants with a broad range of attitudes toward homosexuality. Participants in the study included 118 self-identified homosexual adults, including 46 females and 68 males, and 134 heterosexual adults, 74 females and 60 males, from five geographic regions of the United States. Four participants did not indicate their gender. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 68 years old with a mean age of 34 years old.

Procedure

Participants were presented with the four advertisements: a mainstream advertisement, depicting a heterosexual couple; an advertisement with implicit gay and lesbian imagery containing gay and lesbian symbolism; an advertisement with explicit gay male imagery, depicting a gay male couple; and an advertisement with explicit lesbian imagery, depicting a lesbian couple. The four advertisements were presented one at a time with the order of presentation randomized 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 measure accompanying each advertisement. Specific questions on a 1–7 semantic-differential scale included: "did you think the advertisement was . . . ?" (*very bad* to *very good*), "was your reaction to the advertisement . . . ?" (*very unfavorable* to *very favorable*), and "did you like the advertisement?" (*dislike very much* to *like very much*). A manipulation check designed to measure the perceived gayness of the advertising content utilized in each advertisement was presented after the participants had viewed all four advertisements. The survey concluded with general demographic measures including sexual orientation, age, and gender.

RESULTS

Measure Reliability and Manipulation Check

Cronbach alpha coefficient measures of reliability for the three-item attitude-toward-the-advertisement measure yielded a satisfactory result of $\alpha = .97$, with $n = 248$. Results from the manipulation check indicated an overall significant difference among the perceived gayness of the four advertisements ($F_{1, 241} = 1081.69, p < .001$). As expected, the advertisement featuring the mainstream advertising content was perceived to be the least gay and statistically different from the other three advertisements representing various degrees of gay advertising content ($p < .001$). The advertisement featuring the implicit gay and lesbian imagery was perceived to be the second least gay advertisement and statistically different from the other three advertisements ($p < .001$). Although not statistically different, the advertisements featuring explicit gay male imagery and explicit lesbian imagery were perceived to be the most gay.

Table 1 shows means and standard deviations of heterosexual and homosexual consumers' attitudes toward the advertisement by the four types of advertising content.

Table 1. Heterosexual and Gay and Lesbian Consumers' Attitudes Toward Advertising Content.

DESCRIPTIVES

Measure: MEASURE 1

SEXUAL ORIENTATION	ADTYPE	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Heterosexual	Mainstream	4.299	.088	4.125	4.472
	Implicit G&L	4.184	.137	3.914	4.454
	Explicit Gay Male	2.716	.127	2.465	2.967
	Explicit Lesbian	3.410	.121	3.173	3.648
Gay Male or Lesbian	Mainstream	4.389	.095	4.201	4.577
	Implicit G&L	5.079	.148	4.786	5.371
	Explicit Gay Male	4.813	.138	4.541	5.085
	Explicit Lesbian	4.792	.131	4.535	5.050

Tests of Within-Subjects Contrasts

Measure: MEASURE 1

Source	ADTYPE	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
ADTYPE	Linear	31.290	1	31.290	23.608	.000
	Quadratic	.148	1	.148	.146	.703
	Cubic	68.517	1	68.517	38.685	.000
ADTYPE * SEXOR	Linear	79.363	1	79.363	59.880	.000
	Quadratic	35.531	1	35.531	35.127	.000
	Cubic	16.479	1	16.479	9.304	.003
Error(ADTYPE)	Linear	326.044	246	1.325		
	Quadratic	248.827	246	1.011		
	Cubic	435.703	246	1.771		

H1 (Impact of Sexual Orientation Depicted in Advertising Imagery on Consumers' Attitude toward the Advertisement)

Consistent with Hypothesis 1 and presented in Table 2, a general linear model repeated-measures procedure shows that heterosexuals liked the advertisement with mainstream imagery ($M = 4.29$) significantly more than the advertisement with explicit gay male imagery ($M = 2.71$; $F_{1, 133} = 174.45, p < .001$) and significantly more than the advertisement with explicit lesbian imagery ($M = 3.41$; $F_{1, 133} = 36.69, p < .001$).

H2 (Impact of Implicit Gay and Lesbian Imagery in Advertising Content on Heterosexual Consumers' Attitude toward the Advertisement)

Consistent with H2 and presented in Table 3, a general linear model repeated-measures procedure shows that heterosexual consumers liked the advertisement with implicit gay and lesbian imagery ($M = 4.18$) significantly more than advertisements with explicit gay male ($M = 2.72$; $F_{1,133} = 100.08, p < .001$) or lesbian imagery ($M = 3.41$; $F_{1,133} = 27.56, p < .001$). Furthermore, there was no statistical difference between the mean score for the advertisement with implicit gay and lesbian imagery ($M = 4.18$) and the mean score for the mainstream imagery advertisement ($M = 4.30$; $F_{1,133} = .82, p = .366$).

H3 (Impact of Advertising with Implicit Gay and Lesbian Imagery on Homosexual Consumers' Attitude toward the Advertisement)

Consistent with H3 and presented in Table 4, a general linear model repeated-measures procedure shows that homosexual consumers liked the advertisement with implicit gay and lesbian imagery ($M = 5.08$) significantly more than the advertisement with mainstream imagery ($M = 4.39$; $F_{1,113} = 17.59, p < .001$). Furthermore, there was no statistical difference between the mean score for the advertisement with implicit gay and lesbian imagery ($M = 5.08$) and the mean score for the advertisement with either explicit gay imagery ($M = 4.81$; $F_{1,113} = 1.88, p = .173$) or explicit lesbian imagery ($M = 4.79$) ($F_{1,113} = 3.02, p = .085$).

DISCUSSION

To reach gay and lesbian consumers, advertisers must provide advertising content with which they can identify (Jaffe, 1991). However, this study shows that although depictions of gay males and lesbians in advertising will effectively target gay and lesbian consumers, they will also result in an unfavorable response from mainstream consumers. Thus, marketers should avoid the temptation to simply rollover advertisements with explicit gay male or lesbian imagery customarily used in gay and

Table 2. A Comparison of Heterosexual Consumers' Attitudes Toward Advertisements with Heterosexual Imagery and Those with Explicit Gay or Explicit Lesbian Imagery.

i) Heterosexual Imagery v. Explicit Gay Male Imagery

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
MAINSTREAM	4.2985	.94570	134
EXPLICIT GAY MALE	2.7164	1.34860	134

Tests of Within-Subjects Contrasts

Measure: MEASURE_1

Source	ADTYPE	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
ADTYPE	Linear	167.701	1	167.701	174.451	.000
Error(ADTYPE)	Linear	127.854	133	.961		

ii) Heterosexual Imagery v. Explicit Lesbian Imagery

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
MAINSTREAM	4.2985	.94570	134
EXPLICIT LESBIAN	3.4104	1.45665	134

Tests of Within-Subjects Contrasts[a]

Measure: MEASURE_1

Source	ADTYPE	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
ADTYPE	Linear	52.840	1	52.840	36.689	.000
Error(ADTYPE)	Linear	191.549	133	1.440		

[a]. SEXOR2A = str8

Table 3. A Comparison of Heterosexual Consumers' Attitudes Toward Advertisements with Implicit Gay and Lesbian Imagery and Those with Explicit Gay or Explicit Lesbian Imagery.

i) Implicit Gay and Lesbian Imagery v. Explicit Gay Male Imagery

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
IMPLICIT G&L	4.1841	1.49159	134
EXPLICIT GAY MALE	2.7164	1.34860	134

Tests of Within-Subjects Contrasts[a]

Measure: MEASURE_1

Source	ADTYPE	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
ADTYPE	Linear	144.320	1	144.320	100.081	.000
Error(ADTYPE)	Linear	191.791	133	1.442		

[a]. SEXOR2A = str8

ii) Implicit Gay and Lesbian Imagery v. Explicit Lesbian Imagery

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
IMPLICIT G&L	4.1841	1.49159	134
EXPLICIT LESBIAN	3.4104	1.45665	134

Tests of Within-Subjects Contrasts

Measure: MEASURE_1

Source	ADTYPE	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
ADTYPE	Linear	40.100	1	40.100	27.561	.000
Error(ADTYPE)	Linear	193.511	133	1.455		

Table 4. A Comparison of Gay and Lesbian Consumers' Attitudes Toward Advertisements with Implicit Gay and Lesbian Imagery and Those with Mainstream Imagery.

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
MAINSTREAM	4.3889	1.09519	114
IMPLICIT G&L	5.0789	1.68940	114

Tests of Within-Subjects Contrasts[a]

Measure: MEASURE_1

Source	ADTYPE	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
ADTYPE	Linear	27.142	1	27.142	17.585	.000
Error(ADTYPE)	Linear	174.413	113	1.543		

a. SEXOR2A = G&L

lesbian media outlets into mainstream media outlets. Although a logical strategy given the attractiveness of the gay and lesbian market and the likelihood of developing strong brand loyalty among gay and lesbian consumers, rolling over such a strategy to mainstream media outlets would likely alienate many heterosexual consumers. The results of this study indicate that heterosexual consumers are more averse to advertisements depicting gay males and lesbians than mainstream advertising content. Additionally, although not directly hypothesized, it was found that mainstream consumers respond far less favorably to advertisements with explicit gay or lesbian content than do gay and lesbian consumers ($F = 134.38, p < .001$).

Past research has found that mainstream audiences tend to have a more negative response to depictions of gay males than of lesbians in advertising (Oakenfull & Greenlee, in press). Additionally, homosexual consumers respond equally well to both gay male and lesbian imagery in advertising. Thus, marketers may decrease the likelihood of a negative reaction from mainstream audiences by using lesbian imagery over gay male imagery in advertising placed in mainstream outlets. However, given mainstream audiences' unfavorable reaction to any kind of explicit gay or lesbian imagery, it is unlikely that marketers will risk alienating mainstream audiences with identifiable gay- and lesbian-oriented advertising in mainstream media.

The term *identifiable* provides the key to this paradox. Mainstream consumers will react to gay and lesbian imagery only when they identify it as such. Thus, the real panacea appears to be the use of *implicit* gay and lesbian imagery, such as gay and lesbian symbolism and iconography, when advertising to gays and lesbians in mainstream media. First, marketers may reduce much of the potential backlash against gay-targeted advertising placed in mainstream media by avoiding same-sex imagery in advertisements. Results of this study show that, although heterosexual consumers preferred advertisements with mainstream imagery to

those with explicit gay or explicit lesbian imagery, advertisements containing implicit gay and lesbian imagery were received as well as those with mainstream imagery. Thus, it can be assumed that mainstream audiences were either unaware that the advertisement contained gay and lesbian imagery or responded more favorably to the more subtle content.

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of heterosexual and homosexual consumer's attitudes toward the four types of advertising used in the study. Worth noting is the fact that both mainstream and gay and lesbian consumers have a similar attitude toward mainstream imagery in advertising. The results of the study show that there is no significant difference between mainstream consumers' ($M_{\text{Mainstream}} = 4.30$) and gay and lesbian consumers' ($M_{\text{Gay \& Lesbian}} = 4.39$) attitudes toward the advertisement with mainstream content ($F_{1,246} = 0.486, p < .486$). Thus, given the alternative of using gay and lesbian imagery or mainstream imagery, it would appear that advertisers who are concerned about the risk of alienating mainstream consumers may be best served by continuing to use mainstream imagery in their advertising.

As can be seen in Figure 1, gays and lesbians may not react negatively to advertising with mainstream imagery in the same way that mainstream consumers react to advertising with gay and lesbian imagery. Given the idea of heterosexuality as the dominant culture in society (Butler, 1990), gay and lesbian consumers are surrounded by heterosexual imagery every day of their lives and to a large extent accept it as the "norm." Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that gay and lesbian consumers do not react negatively to heterosexual imagery. However, although the results show that gays and lesbians have the same attitude toward the advertisement with mainstream imagery as heterosexuals, this falls short of suggesting that advertisements depicting heterosexual imagery could be used to effectively target homosexuals. Targeted gay and lesbian
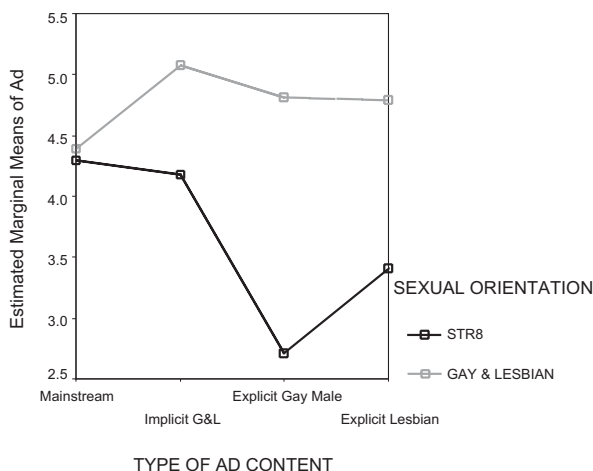
Figure 1. Heterosexual and homosexual consumers' attitudes toward advertising content.

consumers may not identify with heterosexual or "mainstream" content, and thus will not be targeted by this type of advertising.

Additionally, advertisers may consider how gay and lesbian consumers who read mainstream media may differ from those who read gay media. Despite the cost benefits of transferring an advertisement placed in gay media to mainstream media, advertisers may have to use different messages from many of those used in gay media due to both demographic and attitudinal differences between the two gay and lesbian audiences (Lukenbill, 1995). Thus, although many of the advertisements that appear in gay and lesbian media tend to rely on sexual innuendo or overtly physical imagery (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2000), ads placed in mainstream media may require more subtle content (Lukenbill, 1995). This study shows that gay and lesbian consumers have an equally favorable response to all types of gay- and lesbian-targeted advertising, including those with implicit gay and lesbian imagery. Thus, by using implicit gay and lesbian imagery in advertising placed in mainstream media, marketers can appeal to gay and lesbian consumers in mainstream media with little risk of creating negative sentiments among heterosexual consumers.

The findings of the study can be summarized, as shown in Figure 2, to give advertisers guidance in determining which type of advertising content should be used to target gay and lesbian consumers. Currently, most companies feel that the potential rewards of tapping into the gay and lesbian market fail to outweigh the potential backlash by mainstream audiences in response to the company's actions. Given the prevalence of gay and lesbian consumers reading mainstream media, those consumers will be exposed frequently to mainstream advertising content. However, although gay and lesbian consumers will not identify with the content of the advertising, marketers can target mainstream audiences without fear of alienating gay and lesbian consumers. As part of a minority group, gays and lesbians exist within a dominant heterosexual culture (Bristor & Fischer, 1995). As such, gays and lesbians are exposed to heterosexual imagery as the norm and will not react negatively to mainstream imagery.

However, if advertisers want to target gays and lesbians, they have to communicate with them via readily identifiable advertising content. This can be achieved in one of two ways. Advertising with explicit gay or lesbian imagery will provide gays and lesbians with depictions of same-sex

Figure 2. The Effect of Type of Advertising Content on Mainstream and Gay and Lesbian Audiences Responses to Advertising in Mainstream Media.

		Type of Advertising Content		
		Mainstream	Explicit G&L	Implicit G&L
Type of consumer	Mainstream Gay and lesbian	Targeting No alienation	Alienation Targeting	No alienation Targeting

couples to which they can relate. However, marketers can be seen to be clearly targeting gays and lesbians by everyone who views the advertisement—a relatively low-risk strategy in gay and lesbian media, but a potentially more costly proposition in mainstream media. Thus, although the use of explicit gay or lesbian imagery in advertising will target gay and lesbian consumers, it will alienate mainstream audiences and potentially create a negative response from antigay consumers.

Gay and lesbian consumers will respond equally well to either explicit or implicit depictions of gay and lesbian imagery and prefer both types of imagery to mainstream imagery. However, given marketers' fear of alienating mainstream audiences in pursuit of gay and lesbian consumers, the key to targeting gay and lesbians in mainstream media may be to communicate with gay and lesbian consumers in a manner that goes undetected by mainstream consumers who are most likely to disapprove of the strategy. Use of implicit gay or lesbian imagery allows advertisers to communicate with their target audience in mainstream media without fear of repercussion from mainstream consumers. Gay and lesbian symbolism and iconography can be interpreted by two types of consumers: gays and lesbians and gay-friendly mainstream consumers. The former will be targeted by the advertisement and may appreciate the opportunity to "pull the wool over the opposition's eyes." The latter are unlikely to hold negative attitudes to gays and lesbians, as their knowledge of gay and lesbian symbolism would result from frequent contact with gays and lesbians. Meanwhile, mainstream consumers who are most likely to be offended by the use of gay and lesbian imagery are unlikely to have enough knowledge of gay and lesbian symbolism to identify the advertisement as containing gay and lesbian content, and thus no alienation will take place.

Does Coded Advertising Present an Ethical Dilemma?

An interesting aside to the use of gay and lesbian symbolism and iconography in advertising is the consideration of the moral issues of developing advertising content that is designed to be unavailable for interpretation by a specific group of consumers. Such deliberate bias could be considered to be unethical or, at least, deceptive advertising. The ethics debate would center on whether the use of gay symbolism represents prejudice or discrimination and whether bias against the advantaged mainstream culture can be considered unethical.

When applying various ethical theories, universalists, who focus on moral egalitarianism, may argue that coded advertising reflects a preference for one group, gays and lesbians, over another, heterosexual, that is *discriminatory* and, therefore, unethical. However, even within universalist thought, others may argue that preferential treatment of gays and lesbians as a stigmatized minority can be justified under universal principles, if coded advertising to a disadvantaged subculture is consid-

ered a necessary intermediate step to achieving a more moral and universal world. Similarly, deontological thinking, an ethical theory based on an acute concern for the least advantaged, would support the idea that the stigmatized treatment of gays and lesbians by the dominant culture would validate advertising that met their needs, regardless of its impact on unsuspecting heterosexual audience members.

Clearly, the use of gay symbolism in advertising that can be interpreted by its gay and lesbian target audience while avoiding the risk of backlash from antigay consumers provides marketers with a useful method of targeting an attractive market without reverting to niched gay and lesbian publications. Additionally, it allows marketers to use a standardized advertisement in both mainstream and gay media resulting in obvious cost savings. However, advertisers may have to consider whether employing advertising content whose meaning is available to specific readers of a medium while being deliberately unavailable to others represents either deceptive advertising or unethical treatment of some heterosexual consumers or whether these members' status as privileged members of the dominant culture substantiates the strategy.

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