

# The three rules of crossing over from gay media to mainstream media advertising: lesbians, lesbians, lesbians

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## Abstract

Faced with low readership of gay media among gay and lesbian consumers, advertisers are faced with the task of targeting the vast majority of the “Dream Market” in mainstream media while counterbalancing the risk of backlash from heterosexual consumers. Thus, advertising to gays and lesbians in mainstream media may require different strategies from those employed in gay media. This research provides marketers with an understanding of how heterosexual consumers’ attitudes toward gays and lesbians affects their attitude towards advertising with gay and lesbian content. Additionally, the important, yet currently underestimated, role that gender, in terms of both the heterosexual audience and the homosexual imagery in the advertisement, plays in affecting heterosexuals’ attitudes towards gay and lesbian advertising content is studied. Finally, the effect of different levels of intimacy between same-sex couples in advertising content on heterosexuals’ attitudes toward the advertisement, and its interaction with both the gender of the audience and the gender of the target, is examined.

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## 1. Introduction

During the 1990s, advertisers began to recognize the potential of the gay and lesbian market, flooding the more than 152 gay magazines and newspapers in the US with annual ad expenditures totaling over US\$120.4 million (Nicholson, 1999). Prompted by reports of above average disposable income and a willingness to spend (Lukenbill, 1995), the gay and lesbian consumer market became known as the “Dream Market.”

However, it has been estimated that more than half of the gay and lesbian population that resides in the US does not read gay media of any kind (Poux, 1998). In fact, a placement of an ad in *OUT* and *The Advocate*, the two most widely circulated gay magazines, will only reach 3% of the gay and lesbian population, at most. While the number of advertisers who place ads in gay media continues to grow (*Wall Street Journal*, 1999), 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 consider placing advertising in mainstream media to reach the vast majority of the homosexual population.

However, while the vast majority of gay and lesbian consumers may view mainstream media for its content, effective targeting as a segment would suggest that readily identifiable gay and/or lesbian imagery should be used in advertising to this audience (Jaffe, 1991). While many gays and lesbians want to be “full-fledged members of the American mosaic” (Tharp, 2001), they still wish to express unique tastes and behaviors associated with their homosexuality as part of their individuality (Bowes, 1996; Freitas et al., 1996; Penaloza, 1996). Gay and lesbian consumers tend to develop a strong loyalty to firms who, through their recognition of the market, are perceived as supporting the gay community. 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” due to Miller’s advertising in gay magazines for the past 10 years (Chase, 1997). The “coming-out” episode of *Ellen* provides a powerful illustration of the efficacy of marketing efforts that are perceived as sup-

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portive of the gay community. Volkswagen showed its ambiguously gay “Drivers Wanted” campaign on the episode, while other major automobile firms, such as Ford, GM, and Chrysler, elected to succumb to a fear of mainstream backlash and withdrew their advertisements from the broadcast. The results were noteworthy: 18% of a sample of viewers said they would be more likely to buy from advertisers who stayed with the show, while 17% said they would be less likely to buy from advertisers who left it (Beatty, 1997).

However, 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 share the major car manufacturers’ reluctance to target gays and lesbians through mainstream media. While 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. In a recent Time/CNN poll, 48% of those surveyed believed that homosexual relationships were morally wrong (Lacayo, 1998.) Thus, given the significant negative attitude towards homosexuality in mainstream America, marketers may risk the nightmare of alienating a far greater percentage of the market in pursuit of the “Dream Market.” Many firms that have identified themselves with the gay community have suffered reprisals from anti-gay consumers. IKEA and its advertising agency Deutsch received hate mail after their ads showing a gay male couple shopping for a dining table aired on television (Elliott, 1994). The “Religious Right” targeted Visa for its US\$10,000 contribution to the Gay Games and Disney for its “Gay Day” and domestic partner benefits program (Gill, 1998).

Interestingly, those firms that have used homosexual imagery in mainstream advertising have almost exclusively used depictions of gay males in their advertising. However, while such a strategy provides the potential to roll-over the almost exclusively gay male-oriented advertising from gay media outlets and effectively target gay males (and, supposedly, lesbians) in mainstream media, it may expose advertisers to the greatest risk of negative backlash from heterosexual consumers. Research from the social sciences suggests that heterosexuals have differential attitudes toward gay males and lesbians that may transfer to their attitudes toward gay and lesbian imagery in advertising. Notably, these attitudes tend to differ between male and female heterosexuals. Thus, those advertisers who are currently attempting to target gays and lesbians in mainstream media appear to have failed to consider how heterosexual consumers will differentially respond to the gender of homosexuals depicted in advertising. Additionally, the intimacy of the depiction of homosexuality in the advertisements may play a large role in affecting heterosexual consumers attitudes toward gay- and lesbian-oriented imagery in advertising.

Thus, practitioners appear to have failed to consider how advertising to gays and lesbians in mainstream media may

require different strategies from those employed in gay media so as to avoid the negative consequence of alienating heterosexual consumers. This study addresses the question: *What are the consequences of mainstream marketers using different types of gay and lesbian imagery in mainstream media?* Specifically, this research provides marketers with an understanding of how heterosexual consumers’ attitudes toward gays and lesbians affects their attitude towards advertising with gay and lesbian content. Additionally, we examine the important, yet currently underestimated, role that gender, in terms of both the heterosexual audience and the homosexual imagery in the advertisement, plays in affecting heterosexuals’ attitudes towards gay and lesbian advertising content. Finally, we examine the effect of different levels of intimacy between same-sex couples in advertising content on heterosexuals’ attitudes toward the advertisement, and its interaction with both the gender of the audience and the gender of the target.

## 2. 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 two 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. (1996) examined how heterosexuals, an in-group, react to the portrayal of homosexuals, an out-group, in advertisements. They found that heterosexuals’ emotional and attitudinal responses to a homosexual advertisement depend on their general attitude toward homosexuality. Looking at two products, jeans and shampoo, the authors examined the difference between consumers’ attitudes toward advertisements that depicted a heterosexual couple and a homosexual couple. However, for both products, gay male couples were used exclusively to measure consumer attitudes toward a homosexual advertisement. Thus, no inference can be drawn about the effect of the gender of the homosexual imagery used in the advertisement—an issue vital to firms who contemplate using homosexual imagery in mainstream media, given the potentially more differential reaction to gay males than lesbians. Additionally, no consideration of the gender of the participant was used to examine its influence on heterosexuals’ attitudes toward homosexuality.

Grier and Brumbaugh (1999) used 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. (1996), Grier and Brumbaugh explored the meanings created by target and nontarget viewers of advertising targeting black, white, and gay/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 nontarget viewers of ads targeting those groups. While not focusing specifically on gay and lesbian consumers, this research provides a rich theoretical base for further exploration of heterosexual consumers' attitudes towards advertising with gay and lesbian content. However, as with Bhat et al., advertisements with gay males were exclusively used as stimuli in the study. Thus, academic research to date has failed to examine the effect of gender, both of the audience member and that depicted in the advertisement, on heterosexuals' attitudes towards advertising with homosexual content.

### 3. Heterosexual attitudes toward homosexuals

According to a recent Gallup Poll, the percentage of Americans that believes that homosexual relations should be legal has risen only 7%—from 43% to 50%—in the 22 years between 1977 and 1999 (Newport, 1999). Additionally, in 1999, 46% of the US public believed that homosexuality should not be considered an acceptable alternative lifestyle, reflecting only a 5% decrease from a similar poll in 1982 (Newport, 1999). However, the percentage of Americans that considers homosexuality to be an acceptable alternative lifestyle has grown from 34% in 1982 to 50% in 1999. This reflects a decrease in the percentage of participants with no opinion on the subject. Thus, it would appear that, at the present time, Americans fall decidedly on either side of the issue in relatively equal numbers.

#### 3.1. *The role of gender*

While at a societal level, it would appear that mainstream attitudes towards homosexuality are slowly becoming more positive, it may be most useful to examine heterosexuals' attitudes towards homosexuality in terms of the correlates of these attitudes. Attitudes toward lesbians and gay men appear to be influenced by a variety of factors (Herek, 1994a,b). These include demographics, such as gender and education (Herek and Glunt, 1991, 1993), and several social psychological variables including attitudes about gender and family roles, religiosity, political ideology, and the extent and quality of interpersonal contact with lesbians and gay men (Herek, 1987, 1988a; Herek and Glunt, 1993).

From a segmentation and targeting perspective, the influence of gender in heterosexuals' attitudes toward homosexuals is of great interest. Many media vehicles provide advertisers with specific targeting in terms of gender of the audience, and many products are designed to appeal to specific genders. Thus, it is important for advertisers to understand how the gender of the heterosexual audience affects their attitude towards homosexuality, and, thus, gay and lesbian advertising content.

Given the potential for crossover from gay and lesbian to mainstream media, marketers may contemplate simply trans-

ferring the same gay and lesbian targeted advertisements used in gay media to mainstream media. To date, firms 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. Although national advertisers claim to be focusing on the gay and lesbian market, the lesbian market continues to be ignored. In a content analysis of advertising in *The Advocate* (1996), 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 and Greenlee, 2000).

Given the gender-specific content of most gay and lesbian targeted advertisements, marketers may be consciously neglecting lesbians and targeting gay men as a marketing segment due to the enormous income differential that exists between the two (Schulman, 1998). Lesbian households have the most disadvantageous income mix possible in the US. Women in the US earn less than two-thirds of men's income. Thus, despite the fact that gay men earn less than heterosexual men do (Badgett, 1998), gay men earn so much more than heterosexual women that a gay male household still has a combined earnings advantage over heterosexual couples. Thus, marketers are primarily focused on attracting consumer dollars from gay men (Schulman, 1998) and rely on gay male imagery in their advertising to do so.

However, research in the social sciences has shown that the sex of the target has a significant effect on heterosexuals' attitudes toward homosexuality. Thus, while marketers' use of gay male imagery in their advertisements in gay and lesbian media appears to be an example of effective targeting, a move to mainstream media gives marketers cause to reevaluate the importance of the gender depicted in gay and lesbian advertising content. It is vital, therefore, that firms crossing over to mainstream media understand how the sex of the target influences heterosexual consumers' attitudes towards advertising with gay and lesbian content.

#### 3.2. *The influence of gender on heterosexuals' attitudes toward homosexuality*

Past research indicates that heterosexual men hold more negative attitudes toward homosexuality than do heterosexual women (Kite, 1984), and that these men have a particularly negative attitude when the target is a gay male rather than a lesbian (Gentry, 1987; Herek, 1988b; Kite, 1984; Whitley, 1988). Whether heterosexual women's attitudes differ by sex of target is less empirically clear. Some research shows that heterosexual women evaluate gay males and lesbians similarly (Herek, 1988b; Kite, 1984), whereas other studies suggest that heterosexual women rate lesbians more negatively than they do gay men (Gentry, 1987; Kite, 1994; Whitley, 1988).

Herek (1988a,b) suggests that sex differences in attitudes toward homosexuals and attitudinal differences based on the

sex of the target can be attributed to cultural constructions of gender and their relationship with principal correlates of homophobia. Herek found that religiosity, personal contact with gay people, perceived attitudinal norms, and ideologies of family and gender were strongly correlated with attitudes toward homosexuals. Relating these findings to an examination of sex differences in attitudes toward homosexuals, Herek suggests that men and women are likely to have different experiences associated with the principal correlates of homophobia which would, in turn, lead to differences in attitudes toward homosexuals between the sexes.

For example, the male role in contemporary America explicitly emphasizes the importance of heterosexuality to masculinity, and many males also feel the need to affirm their masculinity by rejecting men who violate the heterosexual norm (Herek, 1987). This ideology is likely to be strongly supported by male peers... Adherence to such an ideology inevitably limits a male's opportunities for contact with gay men and lesbians, since the latter are unlikely to disclose their sexual orientation to heterosexual persons they anticipate to be hostile (Weinberg, 1972). Thus, males' experiences predispose them toward more negative attitudes toward homosexuals than those held by females (Herek, 1988a,b).

Heterosexual females, however, are less likely to perceive rejection of lesbians and gay men to be integral to their own gender identity. Consequently, they will experience fewer social pressures to express hostile attitudes toward homosexuals and may have more opportunities for personal interaction with lesbians and gay men (Herek, 1988a,b). These gender-specific patterns would help to explain why heterosexual males' attitudes are especially hostile toward gay men while heterosexual females' attitudes do not vary consistently according to the target's gender.

While the previous discussion focused on how heterosexual males' attitudes towards gay men tend to be significantly more negative than their attitude toward lesbians, it may be the case that attitudes towards lesbian may not be merely *less negative*, they may actually be positive. Whitley (1988) suggests that lesbians provide an erotic value to heterosexual males as exemplified by the depiction of lesbianism in "men's magazines." In a study of sexually explicit magazines, Winick (1985) found that while female homosexuality is commonly depicted in "men's magazines," male homosexuality is rarely depicted in "women's magazines." Thus, it would appear that heterosexual males draw an erotic value from depictions of lesbians, while the converse does not hold for heterosexual females. As such, we may expect heterosexual males to hold a somewhat *positive* attitude toward lesbians, rather than simply a less negative attitude than they hold toward gay men.

Relating these findings from the social sciences to marketing, we can begin to predict how heterosexual consumers will respond to certain types of gay and lesbian imagery in advertising. However, simply examining the gender of the target leaves advertisers with little guidance as to the type of gay and lesbian imagery that should be used in advertising placed mainstream media. Given the potential for backlash from heterosexual consumers, it is vital that advertisers understand how different types of gay and lesbian imagery affect heterosexual consumers' attitudes toward the advertisement.

### 3.3. Importance of type of gay and lesbian imagery to heterosexuals' attitudes toward the advertisement

Given the gender differences that may occur in heterosexual males' and females' responses to advertisements with gay and lesbian content, it is important to identify how various types of advertising content will be evaluated within each gender. As discussed earlier, previous work in the social sciences finds that male heterosexuals have a more negative attitude towards gay males than lesbians, whereas female heterosexuals appear to hold no difference in attitudes toward either sex. Applying these findings to an advertising context, we would expect male heterosexuals to evaluate advertisements that depict lesbians more favorably than those that depict gay males, while female heterosexuals will not hold different attitudes toward either gay male or lesbian imagery in advertising.

**Hypothesis 1:** Male heterosexuals will have a more positive attitude toward ads with overtly lesbian imagery than ads with overtly gay male imagery. There will be no difference in heterosexual females' attitudes toward ads with overtly lesbian imagery than overtly gay male imagery.

Additionally, given the erotic value of lesbian imagery to male heterosexuals, we could expect a positive relationship to exist between the degree of lesbianism depicted in the advertisement and male heterosexuals' attitudes toward the advertisement. Conversely, while overall female heterosexuals have similar attitudes towards gay males and lesbians, the level of intimacy depicted in the advertisement may yield results consistent with Kite and Deaux's (1987) application of Freud's (1953) inversion model, which predicts that each gender would identify more strongly with ads that reflect their opposite gender than those that do not.

Thus, a threshold effect may exist to where the more overt or explicit the depiction of lesbianism in the advertisement, the more negative female heterosexuals' attitudes toward imagery in advertising.

**Hypothesis 2:** Heterosexual males will have a more positive attitude toward ads with overtly lesbian imagery

than lesbian imagery. Heterosexual females will have a more positive attitude toward ads with lesbian imagery than overtly lesbian imagery.

### 3.4. The negative effect of gay male imagery

Given the predominance of gay male imagery over lesbian imagery in advertising in gay and lesbian media, it is important that advertisers fully understand the effect that simply crossing over to mainstream media with the same content would have on heterosexual consumers' attitudes toward the advertisement. Unlike lesbian imagery, no erotic value is contrived from gay male imagery for either sex. Thus, while it is perhaps evident that heterosexual males will respond more negatively to more overt depictions of gay male homosexuality, it is less clear how heterosexual females will react.

**Hypothesis 3a:** Heterosexual males will have a more positive attitude toward ads with gay male imagery than overtly gay male imagery.

**Hypothesis 3b:** Heterosexual females will have a more positive attitude toward ads with gay male imagery than overtly gay male imagery.

To this point, we have considered the effect of advertising content within genders. An interesting issue is how male and female heterosexuals compare in their response to gay and lesbian imagery. Given that marketers may place advertising with gay- and lesbian-oriented content in mainstream media that have an overall rather than a gender-specific appeal, it is important that advertisers understand the effect of their advertising content on attitudes toward the advertisement. While we would not expect heterosexual females to respond negatively to lesbian imagery in advertising, given the erotic value of lesbian imagery for heterosexual males, we would expect heterosexual males to respond more favorably to lesbian content in advertising than would heterosexual females. Additionally, due to the threat that male homosexuality appears to place on male gender construction, we would expect heterosexual males to hold a more negative attitude toward advertising with gay male imagery than heterosexual females.

**Hypothesis 4a:** Heterosexual males will have a more positive attitude than heterosexual females toward ads with overtly lesbian imagery.

**Hypothesis 4b:** Heterosexual females will have a more positive attitude than heterosexual males toward ads with overtly gay imagery.

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Participants

Participants in the study included 134 self-identifying heterosexuals from several metropolitan areas within the Midwest.

### 4.2. Stimuli

Four advertisements representing varying degrees of gay advertising content were utilized in the study. The degrees of gayness were representative of gay male imagery, lesbian imagery, overtly gay male imagery, and overtly lesbian imagery. Gay male and lesbian imagery is differentiated from overtly gay male and overtly lesbian imagery by means of the level of intimacy depicted in the advertisement. An appeal to gay and lesbian audiences can be made using a variety of imagery that could suggest homosexuality based on "markers of gay identity" (Tharp, 2001) such as clothes, symbols, language, and appearance (Altman, 1987; Kates, 1998; Meyer, 1994). However, the stimuli used for this study focused on depictions of same-sex couples as a representation of homosexuality so as to ensure heterosexual consumers' recognition of the intended target of the advertisement and a reliable manipulation of varying degrees of gayness.

As a means of selecting advertisements representative of the four degrees of gay advertising content, a pilot test of 15 advertisements was conducted with a sample of 54 undergraduate students. The 15 advertisements were actual print advertisements that had appeared in either *Out* or *The Advocate*, the two most widely circulated gay and lesbian magazines. Each advertisement was selected based on its degree of gay or lesbian content. Specific attention ensured that each of the four degrees of gay or lesbian advertising content was represented by at least three advertisements. The remaining three advertisements were selected randomly from the magazines.

Respondents were presented a packet of 15 advertisements and were 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. These data yielded four advertisements, each representative of one of the four degrees of gayness categories, for inclusion in the actual study. The gay and lesbian advertisements depicted the appropriately targeted, same-sex couple in close proximity such that the imagery would be interpreted as depictive of a couple rather than simply two individuals of the same sex. Specifically, the advertisement with gay male imagery featured two males seated closely to one another at a table for two. The advertisement with lesbian imagery featured two females standing closely to one another beside a pool table. As a means of increasing the levels of intimacy, the same-sex

couples portrayed in the overt advertisements were depicted in intimate, affectionate embraces. Specifically, the overtly gay male advertisement featured two males, seated side-by-side, embracing, with one male kissing the cheek of the other. The overtly lesbian advertisement featured two females, embracing, with one female kissing the forehead of the other.

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 while the remaining advertisement represented a clothing company.

4.3. Procedure

Participants were presented with the four advertisements representative of the four degrees of gay advertising content one at a time, with order of presentation randomized to control for order effects. Participants were asked to review each advertisement in the order presented and to answer the three-item attitude toward the advertisement measure accompanying each advertisement. Specific questions on a 1 to 7 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*). Having evaluated an advertisement, participants were instructed not to return to that specific advertisement. Following these measures, a manipulation check designed to measure the perceived gayness of the advertising content utilized in each advertisement was presented. The manipulation check asked respondents for their level of agreement, 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*) scale, with the following statement: “this advertisement’s content is explicitly homosexual.” The survey concluded with general

Table 1  
Mean attitude toward the advertisement across type of advertising content by gender of heterosexual audience

| Descriptive statistics |                    |    |         |         |        |                    |
|------------------------|--------------------|----|---------|---------|--------|--------------------|
| Gender                 |                    | N  | Minimum | Maximum | Mean   | Standard deviation |
| Female                 | Gay                | 98 | 1.00    | 7.00    | 3.5000 | 1.6672             |
|                        | Lesbian            | 98 | 1.00    | 7.00    | 3.5136 | 1.3188             |
|                        | Overtly Gay        | 98 | 1.00    | 7.00    | 2.9626 | 1.3133             |
|                        | Overtly Lesbian    | 98 | 1.00    | 6.00    | 3.1633 | 1.3075             |
|                        | Valid N (listwise) | 98 |         |         |        |                    |
| Male                   | Gay                | 36 | 1.00    | 5.33    | 2.9259 | 1.3758             |
|                        | Lesbian            | 36 | 1.00    | 6.33    | 3.3704 | 1.3088             |
|                        | Overtly Gay        | 36 | 1.00    | 5.00    | 2.0463 | 1.2245             |
|                        | Overtly Lesbian    | 36 | 1.00    | 6.67    | 4.0833 | 1.6395             |
|                        | Valid N (listwise) | 36 |         |         |        |                    |

Table 2  
Effect of gender of gay and lesbian imagery on heterosexual males’ attitudes toward the advertisement

| Descriptive statistics                          |          |                         |    |             |        |              |
|---|----------|-------------------------|----|-------------|--------|--------------|
|   | Mean     | Standard deviation      | N  |             |        |              |
| Overtly gay                                     | 2.0463   | 1.2245                  | 36 |             |        |              |
| Overtly lesbian                                 | 4.0833   | 1.6395                  | 36 |             |        |              |
| Tests of within-subjects contrasts <sup>a</sup> |          |                         |    |             |        |              |
| Measure: MEASURE_1                              |          |                         |    |             |        |              |
| Source  | OGAYOLES | Type III sum of squares | df | Mean square | F      | Significance |
| OGAYOLES  | Linear   | 74.691                  | 1  | 74.691      | 48.734 | .000         |
| Error   | Linear   | 53.642                  | 35 | 1.533       |        |              |

<sup>a</sup> GENDER1 = male.

demographic measures including sexual orientation, age, and gender.

5. Results

5.1. Measure reliability and manipulation check

The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the three-item attitude toward the advertisement measure indicated good reliability of participant responses with a value of .96.

Using a General Linear Model Repeated Measures procedure, results from the manipulation check indicated an overall significant difference among the perceived gayness of the four advertisements [ $F(3,133) = 24.187, P < .001$ ]. As expected, the lesbian imagery advertisement was perceived to be less explicitly homosexual than the overtly lesbian imagery advertisement ( $P < .001$ ). In addition, the gay male imagery advertisement was perceived to be less explicitly

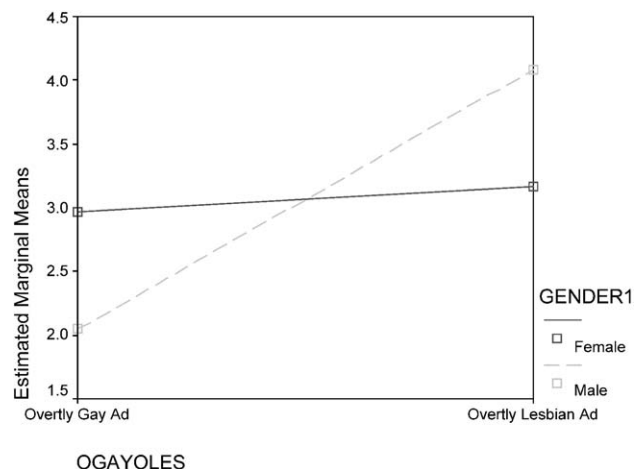


Fig. 1. Interaction effect of gender of heterosexual audience and gender of homosexual imagery on attitude toward the ad for overt advertising content.

Table 3A  
Effect of explicitness of lesbian ad content on heterosexual males' attitudes toward the advertisement

| Descriptive statistics                          |         |                         |    |             |       |              |
|---|---------|-------------------------|----|-------------|-------|--------------|
|   | Mean    | Standard deviation      | N  |             |       |              |
| Lesbian   | 3.5136  | 1.3188                  | 98 |             |       |              |
| Overtly lesbian                                 | 3.1633  | 1.3075                  | 98 |             |       |              |
| Tests of within-subjects contrasts <sup>a</sup> |         |                         |    |             |       |              |
| Measure: MEASURE_1                              |         |                         |    |             |       |              |
| Source  | LESOLES | Type III sum of squares | df | Mean square | F     | Significance |
| LESOLES   | Linear  | 9.150                   | 1  | 9.150       | 8.448 | .006         |
| Error   | Linear  | 37.906                  | 35 | 1.083       |       |              |
| (LESOLES)                                       |         |                         |    |             |       |              |

<sup>a</sup> GENDER1 = Male.

homosexual than the overly gay male imagery advertisement ( $P < .001$ ).

5.2. Hypothesis 1

Table 1 provides the descriptives for the mean of the three-item attitude toward the advertisement measure for both heterosexual males and heterosexual females across different types of gay and lesbian advertising content. Each of these results will be explored in greater detail in individual hypotheses and in the Discussion section that follows.

Given the previous discussion on gender differences between heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay males and lesbians, Hypothesis 1 predicted heterosexual males would have a more positive attitude toward advertisements with overtly lesbian imagery than advertisements with overtly gay male imagery. Furthermore, no differences in heterosexual females' attitudes toward advertisements with overtly lesbian imagery versus advertisements with overtly gay male imagery were expected.

Table 3B  
Effect of explicitness of lesbian ad content on heterosexual females' attitudes toward the advertisement

| Descriptive statistics                          |         |                         |    |             |       |              |
|---|---------|-------------------------|----|-------------|-------|--------------|
|   | Mean    | Standard deviation      | N  |             |       |              |
| Lesbian   | 3.5136  | 1.3188                  | 98 |             |       |              |
| Overtly lesbian                                 | 3.1633  | 1.3075                  | 98 |             |       |              |
| Tests of within-subjects contrasts <sup>a</sup> |         |                         |    |             |       |              |
| Measure: MEASURE_1                              |         |                         |    |             |       |              |
| Source  | LESOLES | Type III sum of squares | df | Mean square | F     | Significance |
| LESOLES   | Linear  | 6.014                   | 1  | 6.014       | 6.601 | .012         |
| Error   | Linear  | 88.375                  | 97 | 0.911       |       |              |
| (LESOLES)                                       |         |                         |    |             |       |              |

<sup>a</sup> GENDER1 = Female.

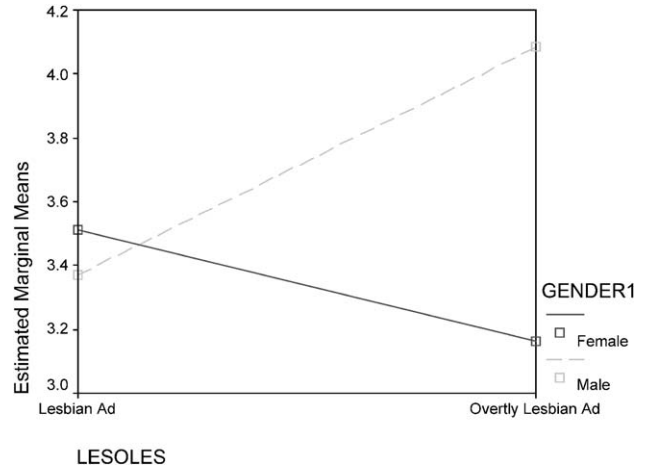


Fig. 2. Interaction effect of gender of heterosexual audience and type of lesbian imagery on attitude toward the ad.

As predicted, results in Table 2 indicate heterosexual males liked the advertisement with overtly lesbian imagery ( $M = 4.083$ ) significantly more than the advertisement with overtly gay male imagery [ $M = 2.046$ ;  $F(1,35) = 48.734$ ,  $P < .001$ ].

No difference was found between heterosexual females' attitudes toward advertisements with overtly lesbian imagery ( $M = 3.163$ ) and advertisements with overtly gay male imagery [ $M = 2.963$ ;  $F(1,97) = 3.490$ ;  $P = .118$ ]. Fig. 1 illustrates the results of Hypothesis 1 to show the significant interaction of gender of heterosexual audience and gender of homosexual ad content on attitude toward the ad [ $F(1,132) = 44.902$ ,  $P < .001$ ].

5.3. Hypothesis 2

Given the previous discussion on the erotic value of lesbian imagery to heterosexual males, Hypothesis 2 predicted heterosexual males would have a more positive attitude toward advertisements with overtly lesbian imagery

Table 4A  
Effect of explicitness of gay male ad content on heterosexual males' attitudes toward the advertisement

| Descriptive statistics                          |         |                         |    |             |        |              |
|---|---------|-------------------------|----|-------------|--------|--------------|
|   | Mean    | Standard deviation      | N  |             |        |              |
| Gay   | 2.9259  | 1.3758                  | 36 |             |        |              |
| Overtly gay                                     | 2.0463  | 1.2245                  | 36 |             |        |              |
| Tests of within-subjects contrasts <sup>a</sup> |         |                         |    |             |        |              |
| Measure: MEASURE_1                              |         |                         |    |             |        |              |
| Source  | GAYOGAY | Type III sum of squares | df | Mean square | F      | Significance |
| GAYOGAY   | Linear  | 13.927                  | 1  | 13.927      | 13.012 | .001         |
| Error   | Linear  | 37.461                  | 35 | 1.070       |        |              |
| (GAYOGAY)                                       |         |                         |    |             |        |              |

<sup>a</sup> GENDER1 = Male.

Table 4B  
Effect of explicitness of gay male ad content on heterosexual females' attitudes toward the advertisement

| Descriptive statistics                          |         |                         |           |             |          |              |
|---|---------|-------------------------|-----------|-------------|----------|--------------|
|   | Mean    | Standard deviation      | <i>N</i>  |             |          |              |
| Gay   | 3.5000  | 1.6672                  | 98        |             |          |              |
| Overtly gay                                     | 2.9626  | 1.3133                  | 98        |             |          |              |
| Tests of within-subjects contrasts <sup>a</sup> |         |                         |           |             |          |              |
| Measure: MEASURE_1                              |         |                         |           |             |          |              |
| Source  | GAYOGAY | Type III sum of squares | <i>df</i> | Mean square | <i>F</i> | Significance |
| GAYOGAY   | Linear  | 14.152                  | 1         | 14.152      | 11.005   | .001         |
| Error   | Linear  | 124.737                 | 97        | 1.286       |          |              |

<sup>a</sup> GENDER1 = Female.

than advertisements with lesbian imagery. Conversely, heterosexual females were predicted to hold a more positive attitude toward advertisements with lesbian imagery than advertisements with overtly lesbian imagery.

Results in Table 3A show support for Hypothesis 2 and indicate heterosexual males liked the advertisement with overtly lesbian imagery ( $M=4.083$ ) significantly more than

the advertisement with lesbian imagery [ $M=3.370$ ;  $F(1,35)=8.448$ ,  $P=.006$ ].

Table 3B shows that heterosexual females liked the advertisement with lesbian imagery ( $M=3.514$ ) significantly more than the advertisement with overtly lesbian imagery [ $M=3.163$ ;  $F(1,97)=6.601$ ,  $P=.012$ ].

Fig. 2 illustrates the results of Hypothesis 2 to show the significant interaction of gender of heterosexual audience and the explicitness of lesbian ad content on attitude toward the ad [ $F(1,132)=15.558$ ,  $P<.001$ ].

#### 5.4. Hypotheses 3a and 3b

Given the previous discussion on the negative effect of gay male imagery, Hypothesis 3a predicted heterosexual males would have a more positive attitude toward advertisements with gay male imagery than advertisements with overtly gay male imagery. Likewise, Hypothesis 3b predicted heterosexual females would exhibit the same attitudinal pattern.

##### 5.4.1. Hypothesis 3a

As predicted, Table 4A shows that heterosexual males liked the advertisement with gay male imagery ( $M=2.926$ ) significantly more than the advertisement with

Table 5  
Effect of gender on heterosexuals' attitudes toward gay and lesbian advertising content

| Descriptives    |                |                |           |                    |                |              |         |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|-----------|--------------------|----------------|--------------|---------|
|                 |                | <i>N</i>       | Mean      | Standard deviation | Standard error | Minimum      | Maximum |
| Gay             | Female         | 98             | 3.5000    | 1.6672             | 0.1684         | 1.00         | 7.00    |
|                 | Male           | 36             | 2.9259    | 1.3758             | 0.2293         | 1.00         | 5.33    |
|                 | Total          | 134            | 3.3458    | 1.6095             | 0.1390         | 1.00         | 7.00    |
| Lesbian         | Female         | 98             | 3.5136    | 1.3188             | 0.1332         | 1.00         | 7.00    |
|                 | Male           | 36             | 3.3704    | 1.3088             | 0.2181         | 1.00         | 6.33    |
|                 | Total          | 134            | 3.4751    | 1.3127             | 0.1134         | 1.00         | 7.00    |
| Overtly gay     | Female         | 98             | 2.9626    | 1.3133             | 0.1327         | 1.00         | 7.00    |
|                 | Male           | 36             | 2.0463    | 1.2245             | 0.2041         | 1.00         | 5.00    |
|                 | Total          | 134            | 2.7164    | 1.3486             | 0.1165         | 1.00         | 7.00    |
| Overtly lesbian | Female         | 98             | 3.1633    | 1.3075             | 0.1321         | 1.00         | 6.00    |
|                 | Male           | 36             | 4.0833    | 1.6395             | 0.2733         | 1.00         | 6.67    |
|                 | Total          | 134            | 3.4104    | 1.4566             | 0.1258         | 1.00         | 6.67    |
| ANOVA           |                |                |           |                    |                |              |         |
|                 |                | Sum of squares | <i>df</i> | Mean square        | <i>F</i>       | Significance |         |
| Gay             | Between groups | 8.677          | 1         | 8.677              | 3.410          | .067         |         |
|                 | Within groups  | 335.858        | 132       | 2.544              |                |              |         |
|                 | Total          | 344.535        | 133       |                    |                |              |         |
| Lesbian         | Between groups | 0.540          | 1         | 0.540              | 0.312          | .578         |         |
|                 | Within groups  | 228.655        | 132       | 1.732              |                |              |         |
|                 | Total          | 229.195        | 133       |                    |                |              |         |
| Overtly gay     | Between groups | 22.105         | 1         | 22.105             | 13.276         | .000         |         |
|                 | Within groups  | 219.786        | 132       | 1.665              |                |              |         |
|                 | Total          | 241.891        | 133       |                    |                |              |         |
| Overtly lesbian | Between groups | 22.288         | 1         | 22.288             | 11.319         | .001         |         |
|                 | Within groups  | 259.916        | 132       | 1.969              |                |              |         |
|                 | Total          | 282.203        | 133       |                    |                |              |         |



overtly gay male imagery [ $M=2.046$ ;  $F(1,35)=13.012$ ,  $P<.001$ ].

#### 5.4.2. Hypothesis 3b

As predicted, Table 4B shows that heterosexual females liked the advertisement with gay male imagery ( $M=3.50$ ) significantly more than the advertisement with overtly gay male imagery [ $M=2.963$ ;  $F(1,97)=11.005$ ,  $P<.001$ ].

#### 5.5. Hypotheses 4a and 4b

Given the previous discussion on the erotic value of lesbian imagery to heterosexual males, Hypothesis 4a predicted heterosexual males would have a more positive attitude than heterosexual females toward advertisements with overtly lesbian imagery. Likewise, given the discussion on the threat homosexuality appears to place on male gender construction, Hypothesis 4b predicted heterosexual females would have a more positive attitude than heterosexual males toward advertisements with overtly gay male imagery.

##### 5.5.1. Hypothesis 4a

As predicted, Table 5 shows that heterosexual males ( $M=4.0833$ ) liked the advertisement with overtly lesbian imagery significantly more than heterosexual females [ $M=3.1633$ ;  $F(1,132)=11.319$ ,  $P<.001$ ].

##### 5.5.2. Hypothesis 4b

As predicted, Table 5 shows that heterosexual females ( $M=2.9626$ ) liked the advertisement with overtly gay male imagery significantly more than heterosexual males [ $M=2.0463$ ;  $F(1,132)=13.276$ ,  $P<.001$ ].

## 6. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that, overall, heterosexual consumers appear to have a more positive attitude toward advertisements with lesbian imagery than advertisements with gay imagery. However, these results must be interpreted within the context of the gender of the heterosexual audience member and the explicitness of the gay or lesbian imagery in the advertisement. Heterosexual males and females differ in their attitudes toward advertisements with gay and lesbian imagery. Heterosexual males have a more negative attitude than heterosexual females toward advertisements with gay imagery, and a more favorable attitude toward advertisements with lesbian content than do heterosexual females.

However, heterosexual females do not appear to differ in their attitudes toward gay male or lesbian imagery, while heterosexual males have a far more negative attitude towards gay male imagery than lesbian imagery. The introduction of different levels of intimacy between gay or

lesbian couples in the advertising appears to magnify heterosexual males' attitudes towards advertisements with gay and lesbian imagery, such that they hold a very negative attitude towards overtly gay male imagery and a very positive attitude toward overtly lesbian imagery. Heterosexual females appear to evaluate both genders similarly regardless of the level of intimacy depicted in the advertisement. However, their attitudes are significantly less favorable for both gay male and lesbian imagery as the depictions become more intimate. Thus, it would appear that advertisers must consider both the gender of the target gay and lesbian audience and the gender of the heterosexual audience who may be exposed to the advertisement when crossing over to mainstream media with gay or lesbian targeted advertising.

These findings would indicate advertisers' current practice of using gay male imagery in advertisements when crossing over to mainstream media provides the greatest risk of alienation by heterosexual audiences, regardless of their gender. That risk increases directly with the level of intimacy depicted in the advertisement. Thus, while advertisers in gay and lesbian media have used predominantly gay male imagery in advertising, so as to target more affluent gay males and provide economies in the production of advertisements, the key to using gay or lesbian imagery in mainstream media may be to focus on lesbians for advertising imagery.

Past research on gay and lesbian consumers has shown that gay males respond equally well to advertisements that contain either gay or lesbian imagery (Oakenfull and Greenlee, 1999). Thus, marketers would not have to fear that their targeting of gay males in mainstream media would be less effective if lesbian imagery was used in the advertisements. Additionally, lesbians have a far more positive attitude towards advertisements that contain lesbian imagery than to advertisement that contain gay male imagery (Oakenfull and Greenlee, 1999). Thus, marketers could effectively target both gay males and lesbians while reducing the risk of alienating heterosexual consumers.

Thus, it would appear that marketers have little to gain by pursuing current advertising practices. By failing to consider the effect of gender of both the heterosexual audience and the homosexual imagery in the advertisement, marketers may risk alienating a far greater audience than the gay and lesbian group targeted. Use of gay male imagery will provoke a negative backlash from heterosexual males; use of overtly gay male imagery will result in a negative backlash from ALL heterosexuals. The key to targeting gays and lesbians without alienating unintended audiences is to use subtle lesbian imagery in the advertisements. Ironically, while outdated stereotypes of lesbians as less sophisticated and less affluent consumers than gay men have kept advertisers away from lesbian media such as *Curve* and *Girlfriends* (Alsop, 1999), a move to mainstream media may bring lesbians representation in advertising content that has eluded them thus far.

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