

Unraveling the Movement from the Marketplace: Lesbian Responses to Gay-Oriented Advertising

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This research examines the effect of lesbians' in-group/out-group considerations of gay males on their responses to both gendered and non-gendered gay-oriented imagery. The findings indicate that lesbians' consideration of the extent to which they feel they share group membership with gay males plays a vital role in determining their attitudes towards advertisements that depict lesbian, gay male, or non-gendered ad content. These findings suggest that advertisers' current practice of predominantly using advertisements with gay male imagery is unnecessarily disenfranchising lesbians who do not consider themselves as sharing an in-group with gay males.

INTRODUCTION

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) consumer market is currently estimated to have an overall buying power of over \$835 billion (Witeck and Combs, 2011). Over the past decade, corporate recognition of the attractiveness of LGBT consumer spending patterns has led to quite a dramatic increase in LGBT-oriented promotional activities. In 2004, 36% of Fortune 100 companies advertised directly to LGBT consumers, and US corporations now spend about \$212 million annually in LGBT print media, according to the Gay Press Report from Rivendell Marketing and Prime Access, which tracks 284 U.S. LGBT press publications. Another \$12 million was spent in online LGBT media, and over \$7 million more spent annually on sponsorships in the LGBT community, totaling over \$231 million in annual corporate spending in the LGBT community (Wilke, 2007).

Ragusa (2005) suggests that, between 1980 and 2000, Corporate America changed from stigmatizing and avoiding homosexuals to establishing a gay market niche. In doing so, it moved through three distinct phases in its treatment of the LGBT population: (i) corporate shunning in the 1980s, (ii) corporate curiosity and fear in the 1990s, and (iii) corporate pursuit in the 2000s. During this same time period, the gay social movement shifted from the calls for sexual freedom and fluidity that flourished in the 1970s and 1980s (Altman, 1987) to present day demands for equal treatment under the law. In discussing the role of the marketplace within social movements, Peñaloza (1996) states that, the marketplace may be viewed as an important domain of social contestation whereby disenfranchised groups engage in ongoing struggles for social and political incorporation. She suggests that, marketplace incorporation is important in the path to social legitimization of gay males and lesbians. Many corporations appear to have moved beyond mere inclusion of gay consumers in their marketing activities to a role of Corporate Advocacy in the current decade. Last year, companies such as Microsoft, Starbucks and Google were among 48 corporations signing a brief arguing to the federal appeals court in Boston that the Defense of Marriage

Act was bad for business. In New York, corporations were influential in persuading legislators to pass a bill legalizing same-sex marriage.

However, while corporate advocacy and inclusion in the marketplace and workplace is playing an important role in the gay social movement, observers have suggested that advertisers appear to consider the gay market as synonymous with the gay male market. Despite calls for an appreciation of the diversity between the gay male and lesbian markets (Bowes 1996; Freitas et al. 1996), marketers have, almost exclusively, used gay male imagery in advertising placed in gay print media (Baxter 2010). Critics have attributed his bias towards gay male consumers to one of two realities: (1) marketers have simply chosen to ignore the lesbian market, preferring to devote their advertising research to the supposedly more lucrative gay male market, or (2) they endorse the belief that a gay-male-oriented ad will also be effective in targeting lesbians who will translate subtext and code in gay marketing in order to see themselves represented in the advertising (Shulman 1998.)

Given corporations' increasing activism on behalf of equal rights for the LGBT population, it may be that their tendency to treat LGBT consumers as members of a single market stems from corporations' increasing participation in the public debate on equal rights for LGBT individuals. Discrimination based on sexual orientation at all levels of public policy unites the LGBT population in its fight to achieve equal rights in a way. Hence, based on their experience with the LGBT population united in their fight for equal rights in the public policy environment, companies who participate in the gay social movement may assume that the LGBT population can also be treated as a homogeneous market segment. However, the gay social movement's fight for equal rights for LGBT individuals may unite gay males and lesbians for a common cause while the marketplace may not. Given the need for gay males and lesbians to unite as a homogeneous group based on sexual orientation in the public policy arena as they fight for the same basic civil rights, an alternate, or perhaps additional, explanation of the predominance of gay-male-oriented ads is that advertisers may assume, while pursuing the gay male market, that a one-size-fits-all approach to the gay market will also capture lesbians (Oakenfull 2007).

This assumption is based on a lesbian's readiness to identify with gay males as members of a homogenous group based on sexual orientation. Bhat (1996) makes a strong argument for the lack of homogeneity that would exist in a gay and lesbian consumer segment. The author suggests that, in the vast majority of situations, sexual orientation cannot be considered a meaningful segmentation variable that results in homogeneous responses to a firm's marketing mix. A closer examination of both their lifestyles and resulting behavior patterns suggests meaningful difference between those of lesbians and gay men. Lesbians are more likely than gay men to be in a relationship (Hughes, 2007), live with a partner (Experian Simmons, 2012,) and have children (O'Connell & Feliz, 2011.) Conversely, they are less likely than gay men to socialize at gay bars or events, being more oriented toward private social and entertainment behavior, and less likely to live in urban neighborhoods.

Additionally, previous research has provided evidence that gay males and lesbians respond differently to various types of advertising content (Oakenfull and Greenlee, 2005; Oakenfull, 2007.) Oakenfull (2007) suggests that differences in advertising response can be attributed to fundamental differences in gay identity between the sexes. Feminist theorists (Etorre 1980, Rich 1980, Kitlinger 1987; Rust 1992, 1993) claim that the lesbian identity is distinct from that of gay males, as lesbians face simultaneous oppression based on their sex as well as their sexual orientation (Rich 1980; Rust 1992, 1993; Bristol and Fischer 1995). Rich believes that a definition of the lesbian existence necessitates a disassociation of lesbian from male homosexual values and allegiances. Hence, marketers may, in fact, be disenfranchising lesbians when a more informed treatment of lesbian consumers that considers that lesbians may vary in the degree to which they identify with gay males as part of the same group, would allow marketers to attract lesbians as a distinct consumer segment or as part of a shared gay market with gay males.

Given their typical differences in terms of lifestyle, economic welfare, and identity as gay, lesbians may vary in the degree to which they feel part of a homogeneous group with gay males. In this research, drawing on social identity theory and previous research on gay consumers' responses to gay-oriented advertising, the effect of lesbians' in-group/out-group considerations of gay males on their responses to both gendered and non-gendered gay-oriented imagery is examined.

GAYS AND LESBIANS IN ADVERTISING: A REVIEW OF ACADEMIC LITERATURE

Despite the growing number of firms that have begun to tap into the gay male and lesbian market, the topic has received very little attention from academic researchers. To date, relatively few published studies have empirically examined the effect of gay advertising content on consumers' attitudes toward the advertisement and none of these studies treat lesbians as a separate consumer segment.

Burnett (2000) provides the first evidence of the effect of sex differences in gay males' and lesbians' attitude toward gay-oriented advertising in general. Specifically, the study found that gay males hold a more negative attitude toward advertising than lesbians, and that lesbians are less interested in appropriate homosexual portrayals in advertising than are gay males. Thus, given the differences that appear to exist between gay males and lesbians in their attitudes toward advertising, one may question whether these differences influence the efficacy of various types of advertising content that are currently designed to target gay consumers.

Oakenfull (2007) examines how a gay individual's sex and level of gay identity play an important role in determining his or her response to various types of gay-oriented advertising messages. The research examined the effect of sex and level on gay identity on gay consumers' responses to advertising the varied on two dimensions: (i) the manner in which gayness was depicted, either with a same-sex couple (explicit) or with gay symbolism (implicit). and (ii) the sex of the same-sex couple used in the advertising. A three-way interaction of sex, gay identity, and ad content was found which was driven by both sex and gay identity effects for the ads that featured gay male imagery and implicit gay imagery.

This research builds off the extant literature to examine the assumption that lesbians can readily identify with gay male imagery based on their shared sexual orientation with gay males. Following Oakenfull's (2007) use of both gendered and non-gendered ad stimuli, we will explore the nuances of the lesbian identity and examine their impact on lesbians' responses to various types of gay-oriented advertising.

THE DUAL IDENTITY OF LESBIANS

Researchers have appraised the positive impact of the congruity between consumers' self-concept and advertising appeals on attitude and purchase intention (Hong & Zinkhan 1995) and between self-concept and brand image on the liking of the brand (Dolich 1969) and on purchase intention (Landon 1974). Social identity theory asserts that group membership creates in-group/self-categorization and enhancement that favor in-group at the expense of the out-group (Haslam 2001.) Thus, in order to be effectively targeted by gay male-oriented advertising, lesbians would have to consider themselves to be part of the same in-group as gay males, based on their shared identity as homosexual individuals. In line with this thinking, gay males and lesbians would be expected to respond equally well to gay-oriented advertising with depictions of either sex. Troiden (1988) classifies homosexual identity as a cognitive construct and a component of self-concept. Drawing on Cass's (1984) conceptualization of identity, Troiden (1988) incorporates the importance of reference to social categories relevant to a specific social setting or situation.

Homosexual identity refers to a perception of self as homosexual in relation to social settings, imagined or real, defined as romantic or sexual. A perception of self as homosexual assumes the form of an attitude – a potential line of action regarding self or others – that is mobilized in romantic or sexual settings (Troiden, 1988).

Thus, Troiden (1988) argues that self-placement in the social category homosexual is a necessary part of homosexual identity formation, occurring commonly through interactions with other self-defined homosexuals during the coming out process (Dank, 1971; Plummer, 1975; Ponse, 1978). Hence, from an interactionist perspective, the term *homosexual* invokes more than a certain kind of sexual orientation or sexual behavior. It also encompasses an identity and way of life.

However, feminists take issue with the treatment of gay identity as the dominant identity among lesbians and suggest that lesbians are commonly treated as female versions of male homosexuality (Rich 1980; Rust 1992, 1993). They argue that the lesbian identity is distinct from that of gays, as lesbians face simultaneous oppression based on their sex as well as their sexual orientation (Bristor and Fischer 1995). Adrienne Rich, a lesbian feminist, describes a lesbian continuum that puts woman-identifiedness at its core, a result of the socio-historical oppression of females. She writes:

To equate lesbian existence with male homosexuality because each is stigmatized is to deny and erase female reality once again. To separate those women stigmatized as homosexual or gay from the complex continuum of female resistance to enslavement, and attach them to a male pattern, is to falsify our history. Parts of the history of lesbian existence is, obviously, to be found where lesbians, lacking a coherent female community, have shared a kind of social life and common cause with homosexual men. But this has to be seen against the differences: women's lack of economic and cultural privilege relative to men, qualitative differences in female and male relationships. (Rich 1980, p. 635)

Rich believes that a definition of the lesbian existence necessitates a disassociation of lesbian from male homosexual values and allegiances. She perceives the lesbian experience as being a profoundly *female* experience, with particular oppressions, meanings, and potentialities we cannot comprehend as long as we simply bracket it with other sexually stigmatized existences (Rich 1980). As such, lesbianism is more than sexuality; it is the emotional and psychological identification of women with other women.

For lesbians, the gay rights movement of the 1960s and 70s was experienced in tandem with the ideologies of Second Wave feminism that underpinned the women's movement (Sender, 2004.) Rich's lesbian continuum and the influence of the women's movement have contributed to the idea of a socio-political lesbian who rejected the commodified sexual world of gay men (Badgett 2001.) According to Sender (2004). lesbian feminism separated lesbians from gay males whom they saw as invested only in the hedonistic here and now of an increasingly open public sexual culture. The concept of a socio-political lesbian has been confirmed in empirical studies based on lesbian samples (see Etorre 1980, Kitzinger 1987, Ponse 1978,) but largely ignored by theories of homosexual identity development. Eliason (1996) suggests that this may be due to the fact that such theories are based on individual, intrapsychic variables that cannot account for such a concept; a perspective based largely in the socio-political context of feminism is required to capture the essence of the political dimension of lesbian identity. While the term political lesbian is widely used in studies of lesbian identity, the term political gay man does not appear to exist (Eliason 1996). In fact, research findings indicate that for gay men, sexual identity has been primarily associated with gay activity, whereas for lesbians there is a much stronger political and emotional component (Eliason 1996). Hence, despite the fact that lesbians have a shared identity as homosexual with gay males, due to the patriarchal nature of society as a whole and the distinctiveness of lesbian identity, lesbians may be less willing to readily identify with advertising containing gay male imagery than marketers assume.

For many homosexuals, however, their homosexual identity becomes a *master status* (Becker, 1963) at some points in their lives, where their homosexual identities are viewed as defining characteristics of self, and as attributes relevant to most social interactions and situations (Troiden 1988). According to Troiden (1988). this elevation in the importance of homosexual identity can be linked to the degree to which an individual perceives several factors to exist in society at any point in time: these include the social stigma surrounding homosexuality and homosexuals (Cass 1979, Plummer 1975, Ponse 1978 Troiden, 1979); the lack of legitimacy of the bisexual options (Blumstein and Schwarz 1977, Paul 1985); the culturally-defined link between homosexuality and gender-inappropriate behaviors (Cass, 1979; Plummer 1975); the heterosexual assumption – the presumption that everyone is heterosexual and that the logical progression of adult life includes marriage and family (Plummer 1971, Ponse 1978); and the tendency of dominant groups to inferiorize minorities to protect the hierarchy of access (Adams 1978).

Hence, the role that homosexual identity plays as a *master status* (Becker 1963) relative to lesbian identity may vary among lesbians, based on their perception of influences in their own environment.

Puntoni et al. (2011) states that viewers who believe that they belong to the target market display more favorable attitudes toward the ad than do viewers who feel excluded. As such, we may expect the depiction of either gay males or lesbians in gay-oriented imagery in advertising to have a differential effect on the responses of lesbians who feel that they are members of an in-group based on their homosexual identity that is shared with gay males than those who do not. Hence, some lesbians may view other lesbians as the in-group while considering gay males as an out-group, while others will consider themselves as part of an in-group based on sexual orientation with gay males. Drawing from identity theory, one would expect consumers to respond less favorably to advertisements that do not reflect their self-identity (Jaffe 1991). Relating this thinking to previous research on gay male consumers' responses to gay advertising (Bhat, Leigh and Wardlow 1996, Grier and Brumbaugh 1999), it is hypothesized that:

H1: Lesbians who consider themselves in an in-group with gay males will have a more positive attitude towards ads with gay male imagery than will lesbians who consider gay males an out-group.

H2: Lesbians who consider gay males an out-group will have a more positive attitude towards ads with lesbian imagery than those with gay male imagery.

As with many subcultures, the gay and lesbian subculture has developed markers of gay identity (Tharp 2001) such as clothes, symbols, language and appearance (Altman 1987, Kates 1998, Meyer 1994) that hold specific meaning to members of the subculture. Examples of such gay iconography and symbolism which are linked to the gay subculture include the rainbow, freedom rings, pink triangle, and references to family, pride and coming out. Subaru has placed an advertisement in gay and lesbian media that cleverly incorporates gay symbolism and code on the license plate and bumper sticker of three cars so as to appeal to different types of gay and lesbian consumers (Pertman 2001.) Oakenfull (2007) found that lesbians varied in their responses to ads with non-gendered gay imagery based on their level of gay identity.

In the context of this study, given the polarizing effect of gay male imagery on lesbians who consider gay males an out-group, the use of non-gendered gay imagery in advertising may allow all lesbians to identify with the advertisement based on their sexual orientation without the risk of alienating their lesbian identity. Hence, we suggest that all lesbians may respond similarly to advertising with non-gendered imagery, regardless of in-group/out-group perceptions based on sexual identity. Additionally, consistent with Oakenfull (2007), we would not expect lesbians to have any preference between the lesbian ad imagery and the non-gendered imagery, given that each taps into their lesbian in-group identity. However, lesbians who consider themselves distinct from gay males will consider the non-gendered ad as a reflection of their identity as lesbian and prefer it over the disenfranchising effect of ads with gay male imagery, while lesbians who see themselves in an in-group with gay males will respond equally well with either ad. Hence, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Lesbians who consider gay males an out-group will have a more positive attitude toward ads with non-gendered gay-oriented imagery than ads with gay male imagery.

METHOD

Stimuli

Three advertisements representing varying types of advertising content are utilized in the study. The advertising stimuli created for the study include advertisements that depict 1) gay male imagery, 2) lesbian imagery, and 3) non-gendered gay imagery. The ad with lesbian imagery shows two women in an embrace, while the gay male ad shows two men in the same embrace. In each ad, one of the couple is

taking a beverage out of a six-pack and features the headline Another One Coming Out, which taps into gay speak or gay-subcultural language as a reference to gays and lesbians identifying themselves to others as gay (Altman 1987, Kates 1998, Meyer 1994.) The non-gendered gay-oriented ad shows a close-up of a hand removing the bottle from the six-pack with the same headline, but does not include any people explicitly. Ad stimuli were developed for two different brands – Starbucks and Blue Moon - to ensure that brand familiarity and brand affect had no effect on the results.

Participants and Procedure

Estimates of homosexuality within the US population run from 3 percent to 10 percent. Thus, a randomized sampling procedure would be unlikely to yield a sizable sample of homosexual participants. A snowball sampling procedure was utilized where the author distributed surveys to self-identified lesbians at a gay and lesbian choral festival in Montreal, Canada, a gay pride festival in Columbus, Ohio, and to employees at a mid-size mid-western university. Participants in the study included 172 self-identified lesbians. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 74 years old, with a mean age of 34 years old. Household incomes ranged from under \$25,000 to over \$200, 000, with a mean of \$82,000.

Prior to being shown the ads, each participant was asked to indicate whether they had recently purchased or consumed the brand being studied to measure brand usage. Additionally, using a nine-point semantic differential scale in each case, they were asked to indicate the extent to which they were familiar with the brand, their image of the brand (very negative to very positive), their opinion of the brand (very unfavorable to very favorable), and their feelings for the brand (dislike very much to like very much.)

The author felt that a within-subject research design that allowed participants to see all three ads would lead to hypothesis guessing when both the gay male and lesbian ads were presented. Additionally, given the challenges of ascertaining a sizeable sample of lesbian participants, there were concerns that a full between-subjects research design may require an unattainable sample size of lesbians. Hence, each participant was then presented with two ads – one gendered and one non-gendered. The order that the advertisements were presented was counterbalanced to control for order effects. For the gendered ad, each participant was given either the ad with gay male imagery or the ad with lesbian imagery.

Participants were asked to review each ad in turn and to answer a three-item attitude toward the advertisement measure accompanying each advertisement. Specific questions on a 9-point semantic differential scale included: How good or bad would you say this ad is? (very bad to very good); What is your overall reaction to this ad? (very unfavorable to very favorable); and How much would you say you like or dislike this ad? (dislike very much to like very much). They were then asked to repeat the procedure for the non-gendered gay-oriented ad, with instructions not to refer back to the previous ad. The survey concluded with general demographic measures including sexual orientation, age, gender, and household income.

Lesbians' in-group/out-group attitude towards gay males was measured with a 9-point semantic differential scale where participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statement *I feel that gay males and lesbians are part of the same group* (strongly disagree to strongly agree.)

RESULTS

Manipulation Check and Attitude Measure Reliability

As expected, Starbucks had significantly higher brand usage ($F_{1, 167} = 38.366, p = .000$), brand familiarity ($F_{1, 167} = 95.292, p = .000$), and brand affect ($F_{1, 150} = 7.402, p = .007$) than had Blue Moon. Cronbach alpha coefficient measures of reliability for the three-item brand affect measure yielded a satisfactory result of $\alpha = 0.96$ with $n = 152$. As predicted, brand usage, brand familiarity and brand affect had no effect on participants' response to advertising depicting the brands. Cronbach alpha coefficient measures of reliability for the three-item attitude toward the advertisement (Aad) measure yielded a satisfactory result of $\alpha = .97$ with $n = 166$. Table 1 shows the means for Aad as a result of the counterbalanced order in which ads were presented to participants. A series of ANOVAS showed the

order that the ads were presented (gendered vs non-gendered) for both the gay male ad and the lesbian ad had no effect on attitude towards the ad. The mean for the measure of being in an in-group with gay males was 6.27 with a median of 6.0. A median split was performed to establish a variable to represent in-group and out-group feelings towards gay males among lesbians.

TABLE 1
EFFECT OF ORDER OF AD PRESENTATION (GENDERED VS. NON-GENDERED)

Dependent Variable	Order	N	Mean	Std Error
Attitude towards <u>lesbian ad</u>	Lesbian first	51	5.94	0.312
	Non-gendered first	47	6.34	0.321
Attitude towards non-gendered ad	Lesbian first	52	6.54	0.251
	Non-gendered first	47	6.26	0.266
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Dependent Variable	Order	N	Mean	Std Error
Attitude towards <u>gay male ad</u>	Gay male first	52	4.92	0.322
	Non-gendered first	48	4.79	0.326
Attitude towards non-gendered ad	Gay male first	53	5.77	0.29
	Non-gendered first	50	5.86	0.333

H1 (Effect of In-Group Perceptions on Lesbians' Responses to Ads with Gay Male Imagery)

Consistent with Hypothesis 1 and presented in Table 2, an analysis of variance procedure shows that lesbians who consider themselves in an in-group with gay males will have a significantly more positive attitude towards ads with gay male imagery ($M = 5.53$) than will lesbians who consider gay males an out-group ($M = 4.40$; $F_{1,101} = 6.332, p = .013$.)

TABLE 2
EFFECT OF GENDER OF AD IMAGERY ON OUT-GROUP LESBIANS' RESPONSES TO ADS DESCRIPTIVES

Attitude Towards Gendered Ad

Gender of Ad	Factor	N	Mean	Std. Error	95 percent Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Gay Male Ad	g&l out-group	57	4.4	0.255	3.89	4.91
	g&l in-group	45	5.53	0.389	4.75	6.32
	Total	102	4.9	0.229	4.45	5.36
Lesbian Ad	g&l out-group	35	5.77	0.355	5.05	6.49
	g&l in-group	67	6.33	0.273	5.78	6.87
	Total	102	6.14	0.217	5.71	6.57

ANOVA

Attitude Towards Gendered Ad

Gender of Ad		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Gay Male Ad	Between Groups	32.1	1	32.1	6.332	0.013
	Within Groups	506.919	100	5.069		
	Total	539.02	101			
Lesbian Ad	Between Groups	7.131	1	7.131	1.489	0.225
	Within Groups	478.948	100	4.789		
	Total	486.078	101			

H2 (Effect of Gender of Ad Imagery on Out-Group Lesbians' Responses to Ads)

Consistent with Hypothesis 2 and presented in Table 3, an analysis of variance procedure shows that lesbians who consider themselves in an out-group relative to gay males will have a significantly more positive attitude towards ads with lesbian imagery ($M= 5.77$) than they will towards ads with gay male imagery ($M = 4.40$; $F_{1,91} = 10.204$, $p = .002$.)

TABLE 3
EFFECT OF GENDER OF AD IMAGERY ON OUT-GROUP LESBIANS' RESPONSES TO ADS DESCRIPTIVES

Attitude Towards Gendered Ad

Feel Gay Males and Lesbians Same Group	Factor	N	Mean	Std. Error	95 percent Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
g&l out-group	Gay Male Ad	57	4.4	1.926	3.89	4.91
	Lesbian Ad	35	5.77	2.102	5.05	6.49
	Total	92	4.92	2.093	4.49	5.36
g&l in-group	Gay Male Ad	45	5.53	2.608	4.75	6.32
	Lesbian Ad	67	6.33	2.232	5.78	6.87
	Total	112	6.01	2.411	5.56	6.46

ANOVA

Attitude Towards Gendered Ad

Feel Gay Males and Lesbians Same Group		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
g&l out-group	Between Groups	40.577	1	40.577	10.204	0.002
	Within Groups	357.891	90	3.977		
	Total	398.467	91			
g&l in-group	Between Groups	17.015	1	17.015	2.98	0.087
	Within Groups	627.976	110	5.709		
	Total	644.991	111			

H3 (Out-Group Lesbians' Attitudes Toward Gay Male vs. Non-Gendered Gay-Oriented Advertising)

Consistent with Hypothesis 3 and presented in Table 4, a paired samples t-test procedure shows that lesbians who consider gay males an out-group will have a significantly more positive attitude toward ads with non-gendered gay-oriented imagery (M = 5.61) than towards ads with gay male imagery (M = 4.4; $t_{55} = 3.921, p = .000$.)

TABLE 4
OUT-GROUP LESBIANS' ATTITUDES TOWARD GAY MALE VS. NON-GENDERED GAY-ORIENTED ADVERTISING

Paired Samples Statistics

Feel Gay Males and Lesbians Same Group	Gender of Ad		Mean	N	Std. Error Mean
g&l out-group	Gay Male Ad	Attitude Towards Gendered Ad	4.41	56	0.26
		Attitude Towards Non-gendered	5.61	56	0.312
	Lesbian Ad	Attitude Towards Gendered Ad	5.77	35	0.355
		Attitude Towards Non-gendered	6.49	35	0.311
g&l in-group	Gay Male Ad	Attitude Towards Gendered Ad	5.53	45	0.389
		Attitude Towards Non-gendered	6.09	45	0.308
	Lesbian Ad	Attitude Towards Gendered Ad	6.33	67	0.273
		Attitude Towards Non-gendered	6.4	67	0.224

Paired Samples Test

Feel Gay and Lesbians Same Group	Gender of Ad	Paired Differences					
			Mean	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
g&l out-group	Gay Male Ad	Attitude Towards Gendered Ad - Attitude Towards Non-gendered	-1.196	2.284	-1.808	55	0
	Lesbian Ad	Attitude Towards Gendered Ad - Attitude Towards Non-gendered	-0.714	2.652	-1.625	34	0.12
g&l in-group	Gay Male Ad	Attitude Towards Gendered Ad - Attitude Towards Non-gendered	-0.556	2.889	-1.423	44	0.204
	Lesbian Ad	Attitude Towards Gendered Ad - Attitude Towards Non-gendered	-0.075	2.636	-0.718	66	0.817

CONCLUSIONS

This research examined the effect of lesbians' attitudes toward group membership with gay males on their responses to various types of gay-oriented advertising. The results are consistent with the theoretical perspectives offered and advance prior research in several important directions. The findings of this study indicate that lesbians' consideration of the extent to which they feel they share group membership with gay males plays a vital role in determining lesbians' attitudes towards various types of advertising imagery.

Consistent with perspectives from lesbian feminist theory that focus on the power-hierarchy that exists within homosexual society as a result of societal gender-inequities (Rich, 1980; Rust, 1992, 1993) and social identity theory's ideas on in-group bias, this research found that, while all lesbians utilize an in-group attitude towards ads with lesbian imagery and non-gendered gay-oriented advertising, responses to gay male imagery are dependent on in-group/out-group judgments of gay males. Drawing from Identity Theory which suggests that consumers respond most favorably to advertisements reflecting their self-identity (Jaffe, 1991). the key to effectively reaching lesbian consumers is understanding the nuances of the lesbian identity distinct from that of gay males.

The findings of this study suggest that advertisers' current practice of predominantly using advertisements with gay male imagery (Baxter 2010, *Wall Street Journal* 1999) is unnecessarily disenfranchising lesbians who do not consider themselves to share an in-group with gay males. If advertisers do want to utilize a one-size-fits-all approach to reaching the gay population, this research suggests that they can do so by utilizing non-gendered ads with gay symbolism to create a dynamic where all gay males and lesbians are targeted as an in-group. Puntoni et al. (2011) refers to ads that overtly target gay consumers through the use of ambiguous cues as gay window dressing. However, while Peñaloza (1996) suggests that the use of gay and lesbian symbolism has the quality of providing an inside joke, shared between the gay and lesbian audience and the advertiser, but meaningless to heterosexuals, gay and lesbian consumers may see this attempt to fly under the gaydar as a lack of commitment to the gay social movement (Gudelanas 2010).

As such, it seems increasingly important that marketers begin to consider this group of consumers not as the *gay and lesbian market* but as *the gay market and the lesbian market*. Fugate (1997) takes issue with the treatment of the homosexual market as a homogeneous consumer segment citing the group's inability to meet Craven's (1987) criteria of being identifiable, sufficient, stable, and accessible. While societal shifts in the acceptability of homosexuality and the growth of gay media over the past decade have rendered many of Fugate's (1993) arguments outdated, Bhat (1996) makes a strong argument for the lack of homogeneity that would exist in a gay and lesbian consumer segment. The author suggests that, in the vast majority of situations, sexual orientation cannot be considered a meaningful segmentation variable that results in homogeneous responses to a firm's marketing mix. Bhat (1996) warns against the use of demographic variables, such as sexual orientation, as a base of segmentation, which should be an underlying characteristic that differentiates segments. When marketers do create segments based on sexual orientation, Bhat (1996) would argue, and this author agrees, that marketers are using a descriptor as a base of segmentation. He warns that such a practice leads to stereotyping, assuming that everyone who fits the descriptor would behave a certain way. As Bhat (1996) goes on to suggest, and as this research supports, not everyone in a demographic or psychographic segment would perceive all marketing activities in the same way.

Even if one were to disregard Bhat's (1996) concern about the meaningfulness of sexual orientation as a segmentation variable, the idea of a market segment where gay and lesbian consumers form a homogenous consumer group based on their sexual orientation seems intractably linked to societal intolerance of homosexuality. While the current need for political power to achieve basic human rights draws gays and lesbians together, it may be a mistake to assume that the market should do likewise. Hence, it may be that marketers' current practice of targeting gay males while excluding lesbians is in fact sound marketing practice, if the objective is to effectively target a homogeneous market segment.

As this research suggests, gays and lesbians are difficult to target as one consumer segment. The problem with the current marketing practice of using predominantly gay male imagery in gay-oriented advertising may lie not in the execution but in the stated intent. Marketers' (and owners of mixed gay media's) claims that their activities (or media) are designed to reach both gays and lesbians result in either the disenfranchisement or, at the very least, the negligence of lesbians. Sender (2004) points out an asymmetry that exists in marketers' perceptions of advertising in mixed gay media. While they consider the use of lesbian ad imagery in mixed gay and lesbian media, such as *The Advocate*, as uneconomical due to the lost 70 percent of male readers, there is no such concern about the lost 30 percent of lesbians when using gay male imagery in advertising (Sender 2004).

DISCUSSION

Because of a paucity of data on gay consumers, advertisers eyeing the gay market often are left either to make assumptions about the segment's spending and media habits or to advertise via gay publications and grassroots marketing efforts, which reach only smaller number of the market. Additionally, when conducted, research on the gay market has tended to group lesbians with gay males, without offering specific information on the lesbian market. While there's no doubt that lesbians have different demographics and buying habits than gay males, little is formally known about their purchase motivation or attitudes.

While stereotypes about gay males have drawn the attention of marketers (they earn more money than the general population, have expensive tastes, enjoy fashion, theater, home decorating, dance, music, art, design, gourmet goods). lesbian stereotypes have caused most mainstream marketers to stay away. Common stereotypes label them as politically-minded feminists who don't subscribe to consumerism and, as a result, don't like fashion, makeup, or shopping in general (Wilke 2005). Additionally, lesbian couples are wrongly assumed to suffer twice as much as a heterosexual couple from the sex differential in incomes in the US, making a lesbian household less attractive than both gay male and heterosexual households to marketers (Badgett 1997.) Analysis of the US Census also indicates that 57 percent of same-sex couples have both partners of a household working, compared to 48 percent of opposite-sex couples. Additionally, in a recent survey, 59 percent of lesbians lived with a partner compared with 37 percent of gay men. Hence, while lesbians are likely to earn less than all men, lesbian households are more likely to consist of two incomes than are either gay male or heterosexual households.

The recent advent of *The L Word*, the series on Showtime, has challenged some of these stereotypes and put a sexy, contemporary gloss on lesbian life and has brought lesbians more to the forefront. A deeper look at lesbian incomes and spending patterns reveals the need for a treatment of lesbians as an attractive consumer segment separate from both heterosexual women and gay males. On average, lesbians earn 20 percent to 34 percent more than heterosexual women according to a 2005 Simmons Gay and Lesbian Consumer Study. Readers of *Curve*, a major lesbian-oriented print magazine, report annual salaries averaging \$71,000 and 61 percent are college graduates (Warn 2006). According to the 2007 Lesbian Consumer Index by Community Marketing, 96 percent of lesbians hold at least one credit card, compared to 76 percent of US households overall. Additionally, in 2002, Ford Motor Co. learned from collaborative research with Harris Interactive that specific differences existed between lesbians and gay men in the types of vehicles they drove and the features they preferred

The gay media landscape has finally begun to recognize the potential of the lesbian market and is becoming slightly representative of the full spectrum of the gay rainbow in the past few years. *Curve*, with a circulation of 63,000, is now joined by a number of regional lesbian magazines, such as New York City's *Velvet Park* and Los Angeles' *Lesbian News*. Additionally, *Jane & Jane* was launched this summer as a quarterly upscale lifestyle magazine, while *Olivia*, best known for its lesbian cruise line, has plans to launch a magazine directed to its direct-mail list of over 275,000 current and previous customers, 89 percent of whom make over \$50,000 and 58 percent have incomes exceeding \$100,000 (Warn, 2006.)

However, despite the growing availability of gay-targeted media offerings, readers of lesbian magazines represent a small proportion of all lesbians in the population, making them difficult to target. While dedicated lesbian publications suffer from low circulation, mixed audience gay publications don't attract substantial numbers of women. For example, only 25 percent of readers of *The Advocate*, titled the leading gay and lesbian magazine in the world, are lesbian. The 2004 Gay/Lesbian Consumer Online Census, consisting of 5000 mostly 18 – 24 year olds, found that lesbians consume less of all types of gay media than gay males. 29 percent of gay males read gay-oriented magazines weekly, compared to only 15 percent of lesbians; 28 percent of gay males read gay-oriented newspapers weekly, compared to only 14 percent of lesbians; and 48 percent of gay males visit gay-oriented U.S.—based Web sites daily, compared to 23 percent of lesbians.

That said, convincing marketers of the viability of the lesbian consumer market is not without its challenges. Lesbian consumers suffer from stereotypes of anti-consumerism stemming from the tenets of

Second Wave feminism's opposition to capitalism in general, and the beauty and fashion industries specifically (Sender 2004.) While new stereotypes of lesbians in popular culture (e.g. Lipstick Lesbians, Sexy Androgyny) have permeated over recent years, the anti-consumer, anti-feminine stereotype of lesbians continues to shape marketers' perceptions of the attractiveness of the market. Additionally, marketers often defend their negligence of the lesbian market by citing the difficult of accessibility. Sender (2004) quotes the head of an ad agency that supposedly focuses on the LGBT market as saying, there are just hundreds of thousands, millions of lesbians who are paired off, living together, who are living quiet lives on the edge of woods or in the heart of the city or whatever, that ... are very hard to reach. Apparently, what makes lesbians inaccessible is their lack of similarity to the distinct behavior patterns of gay men. Lesbians are more likely than gay men to be in a relationship (Hughes, 2006). are more likely to have children, are less likely to socialize at gay bars or events, are more oriented toward private social and entertainment behavior, and may not live in urban neighborhoods. However, rather than being insular and invisible, this places them in line with mainstream culture, especially at similar life-stages. The bigger challenge for lesbians who do want to see themselves represented in the marketplace may be their lack of representation among marketing and agency decision makers. While gay male professionals have played a large role in the development of the gay male market as educators, consultants, and decision-makers within corporations and agencies, lesbians have yet to evolve as an influential force within the same professional sphere.

Limitations

This research represents the first study that focuses exclusively on lesbians as a credible consumer segment. To date, the majority of published consumer research in this area is heavily focused on the gay male market (see Bhat et al. 1996, Grier and Brumbaugh 1998, Kates 1998, 1999, 2002, 2004). This research attempts to explore the impact of lesbians' dual identity as gay and female on their responses to gay-oriented advertising. However, the author does not mean to imply nor reinforce a binary or static notion of queerness as gay male or lesbian with this study's in-group/out-group theoretical treatment of self-identified lesbians as a distinct consumer segment. The binary perspective adopted in this study merely reflects an attempt to move beyond the assumption that gay means *gay male* and an attempt to provide a conceptualization of a lucrative, sizeable and identifiable market segment that has been ignored by practitioners and academics alike. In fact, the tenets of social identity theory applied here can be stretched to provide a very interesting conceptual basis upon which to incorporate the identities of bisexual and transgendered individuals into marketing thought.

The author recognizes the limitation of using advertisements with real brands. However, real advertisements were not used in this study to control for a variety of potential confounding variables. As reported, the existence of a-prior brand factors such as brand usage, brand familiarity, and brand affect were found to have no effect on participants' responses to advertising depicting the brands.

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