

ATTITUDES TOWARD HOMOSEXUAL IMAGERY
IN ADVERTISEMENTS:
AN EXAMINATION OF
MODERATING VARIABLES

By

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Abstract: This study considers how consumers respond to advertising with explicit homosexual imagery and what factors may moderate the response. A post-test only with control group experiment used Target brand ads – one with heterosexual imagery and one with explicit homosexual imagery – as the stimuli for the data analysis. Through a series of pre-existing scales, participants responded to survey questions regarding their individual attitudes toward the Target brand, attitudes toward lesbians and gays, and religious devoutness prior to stimuli exposure. Post-exposure, participants' attitudes toward the ad, measured by Wells' (1964) Emotional Quotient Scale, indicated that there was not a significant difference in the general population's attitudes toward the ad with heterosexual imagery versus the ad with homosexual imagery. However, variables such as age, religiosity, attitude toward the brand and attitude toward lesbians and gays were all found to moderate participant attitudes toward the ad. Results are considered within the framework of Goffman's (1979) hyper-ritualization theory, which argues that advertising reflects prevailing societal norms and serves as an educational tool by which cultural expectations are reinforced.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It has been suggested that successful advertising is usually reliant upon accurate depiction of prevailing and conventional values (Kolman & Verčić, 2012). Given this, advertising is a reflection of culture, so it stands to reason that as culture changes, advertising will follow suit. Therefore, successful advertising needs to be further examined in light of recent cultural shifts. Traditionally, advertisers were reluctant to champion progressive ideology and they shied away from linking a brand to evolving cultural norms. This has been and continues to be true for multiple societal shifts, including gender representation (Slachmuisjlder, 2001); lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) representation (Um, 2012); and racially diverse representation (Chambers, 2008). However, as attitudes toward minority or marginalized populations have changed, it is helpful to understand how these societal shifts are impacting advertisers and if ads are simply reflecting the changing attitudes or if the ad imagery is playing a role in changing these attitudes.

Advertising historian Richard Pollay (2000) noted in his article, *The distorted mirror*, that standard influential institutions, such as family and church, were becoming decentralized and less impactful throughout the generations. If these institutions, which Pollay (2000) suggested

were central to shaping attitude, are continuing to be overshadowed by an ever-increasing advertising presence, the societal and marketing implications could be significant – particularly as it relates to entrenched cultural norms such as race and homosexuality. However, despite a recent uptick in homosexual representation in mainstream media (Tsai, 2010; Um, 2012), there are still hard-fought battles, during which opposing sides seek to progress or reverse cultural ideology. Earlier, sociologist Erving Goffman (1979) suggested that carefully constructed advertising imagery functions as an educational device, explaining social structure and culture to the viewer, thus serving as a primary source of information about acceptable cultural norms. Alwin and Tufis (2016) later argued that polarization among the general public is increasing as individuals upend their own economic interests in an effort to maintain their position on these traditionally controversial societal issues. If advertising is attempting to reflect an increasingly diverse society and serving as a primary source of cultural information, as many scholars suggest, it is important to understand how culturally progressive ads affect the consumer's attitude, specifically given consumer age, religiosity and other identifying demographics.

Background

At the height of the civil rights movement, the boundaries of racial integration were being tested in multiple ways. As in daily life, blacks and whites had their own publications and were generally depicted separately in advertisements. Initially, advertisers believed that depicting both blacks and whites in the same advertisement would have adverse effects on both populations (Chambers, 2008). Advertising scholar, Jason Chambers (2008) reported in his book, *Madison Avenue and the color line: African Americans in the advertising industry* that civil rights activists were interested in strategically using advertising by depicting integration in ads in a normalizing manner, thus giving consumers visual cues by which to live. Beyond the creation of the integrated ads, activists fought for agencies to place these ads outside of black-centric publications, aiming for mainstream media (Chambers, 2008).

While true racial integration in advertising took many years and researchers are still studying the effects on both white and black consumers, Cooper (2008) stated that advertisers now consider the minority representation central to drawing minority consumers, and thus integral to business. Today, the issue of racial integration in advertisements largely revolves around stereotypical representation. Cooper (2008) noted that minority representation in advertising serves to either confront or strengthen audience perceptions.

Several years after activists strategically used ads as tools by which to communicate progressive, yet desired social constructs, Goffman (1979) examined advertising as a socialization tool – particularly as it related to gender representation. Relying heavily on approved social constructs, Goffman (1979) argued that advertising provided parameters by which the viewing audience could assess their lifestyles and roles. By examining nearly 400 advertisements for gender representation, Goffman (1979) determined that marketers were simply sanitizing, restructuring and recreating standard social constructs. This research led to seminal work regarding the ritualization of society and cultural education through ad images. Goffman (1979) theorized that ads are simply hyper-ritualizations of a ritualized culture. Goffman's (1979) hyper-ritualization theory will be further discussed and used as a theoretical framework for the present study.

Similar to the civil rights era, attitudes toward the LGBT population have been changing for decades and, to a large degree, societal norms have shifted. As in the 1960s, ad agencies were slow to follow suit and audience responses have been mixed. In 1994 both pro- and anti- LGBT groups were reeling after IKEA dared to air a commercial featuring two homosexual men shopping the showroom floor on mainstream television. While IKEA was praised by pro-LGBT organizations, the company was forced to remove the advertisement after airing just twice — once in Washington D.C. and once in New York City — due to a bomb threat at one of the stores (Italie, 2013).

Following the IKEA ad, non-alcoholic beverage, Mystic, gave a relatively overlooked go at targeting lesbians through mainstream advertising (Kramer, 1998). Mystic Beverages released a television ad featuring a young white woman who declares she has found the person she wants to spend her life with and subsequently introduces her girlfriend to the camera (Tsai, 2010). Virgin Cola entered the ring two years later and aired a television commercial featuring a gay couple getting married on a beach in Santa Monica, Calif. The first mainstream commercial to feature two men kissing, Virgin Cola aimed to separate themselves from the soda powerhouses of Pepsi Co. and Coca Cola by airing daring advertisements targeted at a young, open-minded audience (Tsai, 2010). This ad was only scheduled to air in Baltimore, Boston, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, Washington and some of the surrounding markets.

Generally, mainstream gay and lesbian ad representation in the 1990s and early 2000s, consisted of white, affluent men – such as those in the IKEA commercial – and white, feminine women — usually considered “lipstick lesbians”. The lesbian portrayals generally only suggested orientation through depictions of flirtation and were often viewed as appealing for heterosexual viewers due to a sanitized, but sexualized, display (Tsai, 2010). For instance, Disaronno liquor ran an ad in 1998 that featured two attractive women, clad in mini-skirts and black stockings, ordering drinks at a bar while one woman seductively rubbed the other woman’s leg with her foot and provocatively glanced at men who are watching the flirtatious encounter. Tsai (2010) noted that while affluent white gay men and lipstick lesbians were becoming more commonplace in mainstream marketing during the 1990s and early 2000s, other subgroups, such as butch lesbians and bisexual men, became the invisible cousins, often unrepresented in mainstream media.

Fejes (2011) argued that unrepresentative depictions of gays and lesbians – particularly those designed to address the population’s need to be seen while simultaneously intended to be appealing for heterosexual consumers – creates unrealistic expectations and identities for the homosexual population, while often serving as a primary, yet incomplete, reference for many

heterosexuals.

Though lesbian and gay representation in mainstream advertising had a tumultuous, nevertheless, important start through the 1990s, advertisements targeting the gay consumer were most often distributed through LGBT-specific media outlets, such as *The Advocate* or *Out* magazine (Um, 2012). By the early 2000s, some other major companies launched mainstream campaigns aimed at the gay and lesbian communities, including MillerCoors, Absolute, Toyota, American Express, The Gap and Banana Republic (Um, 2012).

In 2000, gay-themed advertisements hit an all-time high, resulting 81 campaigns and 106 ads (Wilke, 2001). Though some messaging was laden with negative stereotypes, this was considered a sharp increase in visibility when compared to the 19 gay-themed campaigns that existed in 1994. Despite the growth, Wilke (2001) noted that the ad campaigns usually ran in progressive cities such as New York or San Francisco and even there, the campaigns were generally short-lived.

By 2006, approximately 183 of the Fortune 500 brands were targeting the LGBT community via gay media outlets (Um, 2012). As major companies began to further experiment with mainstream gay-friendly ads, the term “gay-vague” was frequently used to describe their efforts, as there was some question as to whether the intention was homosexual or ambiguous in nature (Klara, 2013). Today, blatant representations of homosexuality are evident in multiple advertising campaigns for large corporations. Target stores, Macy’s, Hallmark, Tylenol and Allstate are just a few of the highly visible corporations that have taken up mainstream advertising to lesbian and gay communities. While they are becoming more prevalent, attitude toward these ads continues to be varied. When Honeymaid graham crackers revealed its gay-inclusive Wholesome ad in March 2014, the brand received a great deal of praise from consumers, but also faced backlash from anti-LGBT groups and individuals, such as Pastor Kevin

Swanson of Colorado, who compared homosexuality to axe murder and cannibalism (Wong, 2014).

Um (2016) conducted research regarding implicit and explicit representation in advertisements. Controlling for consumer attitudes toward homosexuality, implicit ads appeared to be favored over explicit ads, and resulted in higher purchase intentions and more positive brand evaluation. However, research studying how explicit homosexual representation in advertising will effect populations segmented by age cohorts and tested for moderating variables, is missing in the overall body of literature.

Statement of Problem

While there has been a general societal shift in attitude toward lesbians and gays since 2001, there is evidence that age cohorts have not progressed ideologically at the same pace. Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project (2016) attributed some of the overall progression reported in attitudes among adults to Millennials coming of age – particularly as it pertains to same-sex marriage. Furthermore, mainstream advertising that includes blatant gay and lesbian representation is becoming more common, but research continues to show that consumers prefer implicit over explicit imagery (Um, 2016). Thus, there may be an increase in negative impact on brands that continue to display explicit lesbian and gay imagery. Examining participant responses toward ads with heterosexual and homosexual imagery, while accounting for other possible moderating factors such as age, attitude toward homosexuality and religiosity may provide insight to the overall societal attitude change, what role advertising media have played or will play, and how advertisers should approach large societal issues, such as homosexuality, in the future.

Purpose of the Study

Multiple moderating factors have been independently considered as researchers have

studied the effects of gay and lesbian representation on attitudes toward the ad. These studies will be discussed at length in the literature review. However, understanding how multiple moderating factors impact an audience response to an ad could help better clarify and segment target audiences, and help researchers to understand the overall persuasive nature of culturally progressive ads on a given audience. The purpose of this study is to examine, within the confines of Wells' Attitude Toward the Ad (1964), consumer attitudes toward ads with blatant homosexual representation, while studying possible moderating variables such as age, religiosity and attitude toward lesbians and gays.

Significance of Study

Of course, normalizing integration and challenging stereotypes required societal changes across many spectrums — some of which America is still struggling with. At the same time, understanding the impact of consumer-based media on society and grasping how minority representation influences consumer ideology and brand reputations can give activists and ad agencies a map by which to navigate the rapidly evolving cultural shifts currently at play in the U.S.

Klapper (1960) noted that media rarely have a direct influence, but rather numerous elements influence beliefs and social stances in individuals. Establishing theory around selective processes, Klapper (1960) argued that media served as a reinforcing element to other influencers, specifying five mediating components that could result in a direct effect of mass communication: (a) how well opinion leaders exerted their message; (b) the standards of membership within a given social group; (c) the nature of mass media in a capitalist society (d) social distribution of communication content; and (e) natural inclinations as they relate to selective exposure, selective retention and selective perception. Specific to the current study, Klapper's (1960) understanding of influencing variables may better assist advertisers in the development of progressive

advertising and the analysis of consumer response.

Conversely, Pollay (2000) argued that the cultural role of advertising has been underestimated and is a “socializing agent structuring assumptions, feelings, attitudes, and beliefs in the internal consciousness of contemporary individuals” (para. 6). While Pollay (2000) recognized that social constructs of family, faith and education influence acculturation, he argued that these have become weak, thus allowing advertising to influence individuals more profoundly. Pollay (2000) built upon Goffman’s (1979) hyper-ritualized theory to argue that advertisers are not only influencing societal ideology, but that they are misrepresenting the reality of society, particularly for underrepresented or traditionally marginalized populations.

Research shows that the U.S. LGBT population, which, in 2016, had an estimated buying power of \$917 billion (Green, 2016), tends to show high brand loyalty to companies that show LGBT representation in advertisements (Um, 2016). Since the early 2000s, there has been an increased presence of homosexual representation in entertainment media, advertisements and news media. Research suggests that individuals disseminate information in advertisements differently and that backgrounds and familiarities play customizing roles (Bhat, Leigh & Wardlow, 1998). As each generation has been exposed to homosexual representation to varying degrees, this research is important to understand how generational responses to homosexual ad imagery representation may or may not be impacting the societal attitude shift and if an outlying factor, such as overall reduced religiosity in younger generations (Maschi, 2016), is driving the more favorable societal attitude toward homosexual representation.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions are used for discussion of this study:

- *Explicit Homosexual Imagery*: Obvious and overt references to homosexuality, with or without the use of iconography or symbolism (Um, 2016).

- *Gay-Vague*: Imagery that is not clear as to whether the intention is homosexual or ambiguous in nature (Klara, 2013).
- *Gay Window Advertisements*: Ads designed to be interpreted as appealing to lesbian, gay and bisexual consumers, while appearing innocuous to heterosexual consumers. These ads must have at least two possible interpretations (Sender, 1999).
- *Heteronormative*: Based on the belief that heterosexuality is the only normal and biological expression of sexuality (Heteronormative, n.d.).
- *Heterosexual*: characterized by a tendency to direct sexual desire toward the opposite sex (Heterosexual, n.d.).
- *Homosexual*: Characterized by a tendency to direct sexual desire toward the same sex (Homosexual, n.d.)
- *LGBT*: Abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT, n.d.)
- *Lipstick Lesbian*: Slang term referring to lesbians who exhibit stereotypical or exaggerated feminine traits (Human Rights Campaign LGBT Terms Introduction, n.d.).
- *Religiosity*: Degree of religious devoutness (Fam, Waller & Erdogan, 2002).
- *Self-identification*: The act of identifying yourself as a particular kind of person (Self-identification, n.d.)
- *Self-report*: A report about one's behavior (Self-report, n.d.). This may differ from self-identify as one's behavior may not be representative of their internalized feelings about what kind of person they are. This is a particularly important distinction when measuring sexual-orientation (Gallup, 2017).

This study will focus primarily on gay representation and imagery. Bisexual representation will not be considered because it is not a visually identifiable trait and may be misinterpreted by study participants. Additionally, transgender representation will not be considered, as this refers to gender identity and does not imply any specific sexual orientation (Human Rights Campaign,

n.d.).

Method

This study is designed to examine responses to explicit homosexual representation in advertising, and examine if and how religion, attitude toward lesbians and gays, age cohort and attitude toward the brand moderate attitude toward the ad. Ambiguous homosexual representation will not be considered in this study.

The dependent variable that will be examined is respondents' attitude toward the ad (Wells, 1964). A post-test only experimental design will randomly assign a treatment group exposed to explicit homosexual imagery in an advertisement and a controlled variable group, exposed to a similar ad with no homosexual representation. Moderating variables that will be accounted for include: age cohort, attitude toward the brand, religiosity and attitude toward lesbians and gays. This study is designed to examine the differences in attitude toward the ad when confronted with explicit homosexual imagery. Accounting for numerous moderating variables, this research is also designed to identify moderating factors known to contribute to attitudes toward homosexual representation.

This study will specifically examine overall consumer attitudes toward retail ads featuring homosexual representation and how consumer response is different when presented ads with heterosexual representation. To determine a baseline for consumer responses, this study will examine attitude toward the ad in general. Additionally, this study will examine potential moderating variables, such as age, religiosity, attitude toward the brand and attitude toward lesbians and gays, to determine if they affect how consumers view ads with heterosexual representation and homosexual representation. Furthermore, this study will discuss, within the confines of the experimental findings, how hyper-ritualization has occurred in the context of the more recent homosexual cultural norms.

Overview

Chapter 2 provides a review of past literature, including: (a) relationship between attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the brand; (b) a brief, summarized history of societal progression in advertising; (c) implicit versus explicit gay and lesbian ad imagery; (d) an examination of how attitudes toward homosexuality have progressed in the U.S. (e) an examination of how homosexual imagery in media has traditionally been received; (f) an examination of how contributing factors such as religiosity and attitude toward homosexuality may impact the attitudes of consumers; and (g) an overview of Millennial and Baby-Boomer attitudes toward homosexuality and advertising. Additionally, theory by which to frame the study will be discussed.

Chapter 3 the chosen methodology will be discussed and implemented. Research questions, sample details, measurement scales and procedures will be expanded upon.

Chapter 4 will give a detailed analysis of the experimental results, including sample demographics.

Chapter 5 will discuss the findings within the context of the research questions and evaluate possible implications given the findings. Additionally, research limitations and possible future research will be discussed in this section.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The following chapter will review literature that has examined the relationship between progressive ad representation and societal attitudes, as well as possible variables that may influence attitudes toward an ad with homosexual imagery, including age, religiosity, attitude toward homosexuality and attitude toward the brand. Additionally, theory will be discussed to provide a framework by which to examine the study. The conclusion of this section will discuss the author's proposed research questions.

Attitude Toward the Ad and Attitude Toward the Brand

Multiple studies have examined and found a relationship between attitude toward the brand (Ab) and attitude toward the ad (Aad). Spears and Singh (2004) noted that studying attitudes as they relate to advertising is helpful in predicting buyer behavior and studying social psychology constructs. MacKenzie, Lutz and Belch (1986) defined Aad as "a predisposition to respond in a favorable or unfavorable manner to a particular advertising stimulus during a particular exposure occasion" (p. 130). Shimp (1981) and Burton and Lichtenstein (1988) proposed that consumers process and judge an ad based on both tangential and direct visual cues, and these judgments can have a direct impact on Ab and purchase intent (PI). Likewise, Sallam

and Walhid (2012) reported that Ab has some mediating effect on Aad and PI. Curlo and Chamblee (1988) argued that consumer Aad and the represented brand are contingent on the consumer's identification of the brand, thus speculating that pre-conceived brand attitudes influence the immediate identification.

Martin, Lee and Yang (2004) studied the effects of self-referencing and model ethnicity on majority and minority respondents' Aad, Ab and PI. The study examined possible ethnicity effects among Asian minority and white majority participants regarding attitudes, and found that Asian consumers reported more positive attitudes toward ads with Asian representation. Martin et al. (2004) also reported that white majority respondents did not show a significant change in attitude when their ethnicity was represented. Thus, findings supported that Aad, Ab and PI were more positive among the minority group when respondents could self-reference visually.

Societal Progression Represented in Advertisements

As noted in previous research (Cooper, 2008; Pollay, 2000; Goffman, 1979), viewer perceptions of minority or marginalized groups may be highly influenced by representation in advertisements. Be it stereotypical representation or progressive representation, multiple studies have been conducted in an effort to determine what societal platform advertisements traditionally reflect. Craig (1992) examined major network television commercials to determine how gender roles were represented. Accounting for characters, primary visual character, role, product, setting and primary narrator, Craig (1992) found that advertisers develop ads with gender representation that reinforces gender roles that are most common and contextual for the target audience. For instance, daytime ads depicted women in stereotypical housewife fashion and usually as the primary character, and men, when they appeared in daytime ads, were depicted as authority figures and patriarchal. Weekend ads were primarily geared toward escapism and emphasized masculinity and strength by depicting women, assuming women are represented in the ad, in a

subservient and minor role. When examining prime time television ads, Craig (1992) noted that the audience is usually broader and “working women” would only be exposed to the evening ads, thus requiring a targeted push toward the working female demographic. Marketing to this demographic required advertisers to depict a broader, more progressive sense of gender, often showing women in positions of authority and men as integral to the family. The content analysis led to a conclusion that advertisers capitalize on pre-conceived or fanciful constructs of gender identity, as it is perceived by the target audience. Craig’s study (1992) is in-line with Goffman’s (1979) theory of hyper-ritualization.

Grady (2007) researched the possibility of a connection between advancement in U.S. race relations, as reported in the General Social Survey and the U.S. Census, and images depicted in *Life* magazine advertisements between 1936 and 2000. Grady (2007) argued that advertisements are visual documentations of societal expectations among consumers and creators, but not necessarily direct reflections of society. By comparing government survey data, attitude surveys and magazine depictions, Grady (2007) reported that the magazine ads often reflected race relations reported in government survey data, but attitude surveys, meant to report tangible and real change in outcomes, measured slower change in how whites actually placed themselves in interracial situations and living arrangements. Grady (2007) argued that magazine ads can be indicators of social change and attitudes, but transforming deep-rooted cultural appropriations to noticeable societal adoption is a process that, though reflected in advertisements, occurs more slowly.

Rubie-Davies, Liu and Lee (2013) analyzed television advertisements in New Zealand to study gender and ethnicity representations. Researchers found that there was equal representation among men and women, but traditional gender roles were frequently adhered to — specifically depicting men as decision makers and women as being concerned with attractiveness. Rubie-Davies et al. (2013) noted that there was evidence that commercials have evolved somewhat

regarding gender roles, as traditional household chores were not solely depicted by women. Regarding minorities, researchers found that though there was representation, it often presented negative stereotypes. Rubie-Davies et al. (2013) suggested that “advertising is powerful and therefore advertisers have the authority to change perceptions by presenting females and minority groups as leaders, problem solvers, imitators and creators. Such portrayals would provide positive role models for children and adults of all groups and may help to reduce and overcome the pervasive and destructive stereotyping currently evident in television advertisements” (p. 193).

Ad Interpretation: Explicit v. Implicit

Consumer response to progressive ads requires proper identification of intended audience and subtext. Sender (1999) examined respondent attitudes toward advertising designed to covertly appeal to the lesbian, gay and bisexual consumer. Initially, the examination was meant to determine if heterosexual consumers interpreted gay window advertisements – ads that could be interpreted as homosexual or heterosexual -- differently or if they too recognized the intention of the advertiser. Five focus groups were asked to review nine different ads with varying images or subtexts, including a gay-vague and lesbian-vague, more overt gay, lesbian and bisexual subtext, two overtly heterosexual accounts, a single woman, a single man, a same sex group of women, and a same sex group of men. Overall, gay, lesbian and bisexual participants were more likely than heterosexual participants to report gay interpretations of the ads, though not all gay, lesbian and bisexual participant responses were alike. Since the focus groups resulted in a wide-range of interpretation among heterosexual and homosexual respondents, Sender (1999) examined the causal relationship. Sender (1999) suggested that gay participants appeared to read the ads as gay due to their amplified awareness of the coding with which advertisers appeal to the gay, lesbian and bisexual community; their motivation to find significance; their ability to reference and articulate their perceptions of gay and lesbian representations; and support from other homosexual members in the focus group. Sender (1999) noted that self-identified orientation did

not automate gay readings, as some homosexual participants failed to identify ads with gay subtext and some heterosexual participants successfully identified ads with gay subtext. In part, Sender (1999) attributed participant interpretation to knowledge of gay cultural cues rather than a resistance to a particular reading.

Borgerson, Schroeder, Blomberg and Thorssén (2006) conducted research examining how homosexual families are represented in advertisements and how consumers interpret these portrayals. Utilizing five advertisements as stimuli, Borgerson et al. (2006) conducted 25 interviews to determine how consumers identified the relationship couple in the ad, what elements signified a family was represented in the ad, and how consumers identified elements as gay. Participants were also asked about their overall attitude toward the ad and if the ad affected their attitude toward the advertiser. To avoid respondents identifying the purpose of the study, they were also asked to review two ads with clear heterosexual representation in addition to three gay-themed ads, of which two were considered implicit. The study found that participants often used physical signals to assess the ad. For instance, body contact signified intimacy, physical attributes such as hair color signified blood relation or lack thereof, and the presence of children indicated family. Borgerson et al. (2006) also found that often participants perceived the ads through a lens that best represented their personal situation or definition – though this was not necessarily true for the ads with homosexual imagery. For instance, participants expressed clear indicators of family imagery, though the majority of participants failed to detect a homosexual family, with or without children. Participants suggested that they derived gay interpretations either through suggestive copywriting or blatant physical intimacy. Borgerson et al. (2006) refers to the concept of failing to recognize a clearly gay theme as “straightening up”. Researchers attributed straightening up of ads to either an attribution of family values, a failure to focus on the ad image, or denial. The findings indicated that consumers “may not even see gay themes:

further, via straightening up, they may avoid gay interpretations even in the face of ads intended to be gay” (p. 969).

Attitude Toward Homosexuality

Keleher and Smith (2012) suggested that a major shift in societal acceptance of gays and lesbians began occurring in 1991. Studying the General Social Survey (GSS) to determine trends, research showed that between 1973 and 1991, 70-78% of adults thought that gay and lesbian relations were always wrong. By 2010, this number had dropped to 46% and the study went on to show a sweeping change in overall societal attitudes. The study examined if the increasingly positive attitudes toward homosexuals was contingent upon the lifecycle argument or if generational replacement was more likely. Lifecycle would suggest that though younger generations are more tolerant of homosexuals, as the generation ages, a natural conservatism would result, thus creating a stagnation in the population’s attitude toward homosexuals. Conversely, the generational replacement model suggests that younger, more tolerant generations retain their tolerance throughout their lives, making up more of the population as the older generation expires. To further examine the societal change, the researchers accounted for period effects, general social occurrences that result in an overall shift of public opinion across cohorts. To determine attitude-change among these three models, the researcher examined GSS data responses categorically: race, geographic location, age, religion, education, political party and ideology. Though the results of this study demonstrated that tolerance for homosexuality varied greatly depending on the respondent’s categorization, as outlined above, the analysis showed that all groups did, in fact, become more accepting over time and groups largely progressed at the same pace (Keleher & Smith, 2012).

Fetner (2016) examined social science data, including the GSS, Gallup Poll and the American National Election Study, about changing attitudes toward homosexuality after the U.S.

Supreme Court granted gays and lesbians the right to marry in 2015, a right that had been federally denied for the duration of the country's history. Policies, such as this, are becoming more prevalent, though, Fetner (2016) stated that in 2016 there were only 21 states that had antidiscrimination laws regarding gays and lesbians in place. Despite the policy lag, social science data explored by Fetner (2016) showed public attitude in support of homosexuals shifted faster than similar societal rifts, including racial tensions and positions regarding immigrants. Gallup Poll data showed that less than 60% of the population believed that homosexuals should have equal rights regarding job opportunities in 1977, but by 2008 nearly 90% of the population believed that homosexuals deserved the same opportunities as straight individuals. The American National Election Study showed that even though certain demographics such as gender, race and education level, resulted in more positive attitudes toward homosexuals, all demographics had a positive shift overtime, at different intervals. Additionally, research findings showed that although the population increasingly supported same-sex rights, there is still more of a national divide when it comes to the moral question of homosexuality.

Doan, Loehr and Miller (2014) conducted a study to examine if changing attitudes toward gays and lesbians are merely policy and human rights based, or if the attitudes truly are overarching and reflective of complete acceptance. Referring to these differences as "formal rights," government granted such as employment benefits, versus "informal privileges," societal advantages usually granted to the perceived superior such as public displays of affection. Vaquera and Kao (2005) noted a distinction among interracial couples who were less likely to publicly exhibit affection because the relationship was not viewed as a social norm. Doan et al. (2014) examined lesbian, gay, heterosexual female and heterosexual male responses to hypothetical character plots that included a heterosexual couple, a gay couple and a lesbian couple. After reading their assigned plot, researchers measured the acceptance of formal rights by asking the respondents if the characters in the plots should receive certain government protected rights, such

as family leave and partner insurance benefits. Additionally, researchers measured approval of informal privileges by asking the respondents if the characters should have the ability to display affection in a public park and publicly announce their relationship. This study also examined attitudes toward marriage prior to the 2015 Supreme Court ruling. Since Fetner's (2016) study examines attitudes post-2015, Doan et al.'s (2014) findings will only briefly be mentioned. Doan et al. (2014) found that heterosexuals, men and women, were equally as likely to allow same-sex couples formal rights as they were heterosexual couples. Lesbians and gays showed significantly more approval of same-sex formal rights than they were of heterosexual formal rights – though Doan et al. (2014) noted that this may be due to the lack of formal rights granted to the homosexual population and that these outcomes may change as formal rights become more prevalent for the homosexual community. The study reported less favorable outcomes for informal privileges. Heterosexual men reported significantly less favorable attitudes toward gay displays of affection than lesbian displays of affection, but had overwhelmingly negative attitudes toward both. Similarly, heterosexual women were unfavorable of all homosexual displays of affection, and did not show a significant difference in gay versus lesbian. The study also reported that gays and lesbians showed unfavorable attitudes toward most of the in-group public displays of affection. Doan et al. (2014) noted that this may be due to heteronormativity, internalized stigma or an awareness of public homophobic tendencies and actions. Same-sex marriage was treated as a separate factor because the study showed that heterosexuals viewed same-sex marriage as more closely related to an informal privilege, thus they were less accepting than they were of formal rights, while gays and lesbians viewed marriage as a formal right, thus they were more accepting. As mentioned in Fetner's (2016) study and demonstrated through the 2015 U.S. Supreme Court decision, acceptance of same-sex marriage has become more widely accepted.

Consumer Response to Homosexual Ad Imagery

As shown in the IKEA and Honeymaid instances, homosexual imagery in advertising has not and is not always well-received. Even though overall acceptance and frequency has greatly increased, Angelini and Bradley's (2010) study suggested that ads with homosexual representation had adverse effects on consumer attitudes toward corresponding brands. For this study, students were asked to rate how familiar they were with sample brands and then they were presented with 32 ads that represented the pre-tested brands. The ads featured blatant homosexual representation and implied homosexual slogans or imagery. After being presented with the ads, subjects' attitudes toward the ad were rated using the following dimensions: good-bad, pleasant-unpleasant, favorable-unfavorable, enjoyable-not enjoyable, disliked it-liked it, and irritating-likeable. Participants were also asked to rate their attitude toward the brand after reviewing the advertisements, and participants also reported feelings of arousal utilizing the Self-Assessment Manikin scale. Unaided recall and recognition memory were also tested. The study resulted in participants spending more time looking at the ads with homosexual imagery and demonstrating better recall for the gay-themed ads than the heterosexual ads. The researchers suggested that this was due to the incongruity of homosexual imagery for the heterosexual viewers. Angelini and Bradley (2010) concluded that, because the homosexual representation was schema incongruent for the majority of consumers, the ads violated expectancies, and thus elicited negative — though memorable — responses.

Hooten, Noeva and Hammonds' (2009) study measured pre- and post-attitudes toward brand and purchase intentions among 127 undergraduate and graduate students ranging from 20 to 60 years of age. This study found that male homosexual imagery in advertisements created negative attitude toward the ad, which resulted in more negative post-test attitude toward the brand and purchase intent results. Hooten et al. (2009) reported that heterosexual consumers preferred implicit homosexual imagery and tended to respond more positively toward lesbian

women than gay men. It should be noted that the study participants are described as having been drawn from a southeastern university and this “population tends to have a relatively high incidence of adherence to the Christian religion and be politically conservative” (p. 1237). Hooten et al. (2009) did not report any other possible moderating variables.

Bhat et al. (1998) examined prior participant attitudes and prejudices on ads containing homosexual imagery. From a sample of 325 college students, the research measured attitudes toward homosexuality and attitudes toward ads that depicted homosexuals. A portion of the participants represented a West Coast metropolitan area with a visible homosexual community, and the other portion of the participants represented a rural southern community with minimal homosexual representation. Bhat et al. (1998) found “strong evidence that homosexual imagery elicits disapproving emotions from heterosexuals corresponding to their attitude toward homosexuality” (p. 22). This research also suggested that prior attitudes on emotionally charged issues had particularly strong influence on emotional reaction to the ad. However, this study showed mixed results regarding how attitudes toward the ad reflected on the brand.

Oakenfull (2007) conducted research to determine what moderated attitude toward an ad with homosexual imagery among lesbian and gay consumers. To measure attitude, self-identified gays and lesbians were presented three ads – one with explicit gay male imagery, one with explicit lesbian imagery and one with implicit imagery – and asked to answer a three-item questionnaire about their like or dislike of the ad. Additionally, researchers measured level of gay identity to determine level of perceived familiarity and participation with the gay community. Research indicated that an individual’s gender and gay identity moderated attitude toward ads with homosexual imagery. Oakenfull (2007) noted that, as advertisers segment the heterosexual population for best targeting results, homosexuals should not be lumped together and expected to respond to an ad similarly simply because of their sexual orientation. For instance, Oakenfull’s (2007) results indicated that lesbians were unable to identify with the explicit gay male imagery,

but showed very positive attitudes toward the implicit imagery that represented the socio-political landscape. Oakenfull's (2007) research reiterated the necessity for advertisers and marketers to consider differences within a specific population.

Religiosity

Religion influences individual thought processes and cultural responses, including products consumed and gender roles. Fam et al. (2002) conducted an international study to determine how self-reported Buddhists, Christians, Muslims and the non-religious interacted with advertisements of culturally controversial products, and if a participant's practiced religion influenced the participants' personal feelings toward the product. Additionally, Fam et al. (2002) studied the degree of religiosity compared to the degree of insult. Researchers used a series of studies to determine which products consumers have traditionally deemed controversial. These products included cigarettes, alcohol, contraceptives, services such as abortion and psychological assistance, ads relating to politically charged topics and undergarments. Additionally, each religion was briefly examined to understand rituals and standard practice, and Fam et al. (2002) noted that non-religious may not strictly adhere to a particular religion, but are often influenced by religious norms in societies heavily dominated by a particular religion. Participants were exposed to four different controversial product groups and reported levels of offensiveness and levels of religious devoutness in a post-exposure survey. Fam et al. (2002) reported all studied participant groups were offended by social and political advertisements, including those relating to racially extreme groups and guns. Buddhists and Muslims found ads depicting addictive goods, such as cigarettes and alcohol, offensive to the same degree. When compared to Buddhism, Christianity and non-religious, Islam was found to be most offended by three of the product types — social/political; gender/sex; health/care (i.e. STD prevention and weight-loss programs). The other three religions reported similarities in degree of offensiveness. Fam et al. (2002) reported that among all groups — not including the non-religious, as their response to devoutness would

not have been able to be measured — the more devout respondents reported higher levels of perceived offensiveness toward gender/sex advertisements, health/care advertisements and addictive goods advertisements. There was a statistically significant difference between devout and casual believers regarding social/political advertisements. Overall, researchers found that Muslims were most offended by controversial advertising, even though all studied religions showed offensiveness toward at least one category of advertisement. Fam et al. (2002) attributed this to the religion's lack of cultural evolution as society has modernized. Regardless of religion practiced, Fam et al. (2002) noted that the more zealous and devout a participant was in religion, the more offended they were toward controversial ads.

Even though homosexuality has become more visible in recent decades and tolerance seems to have increased, society has also developed proponents with polarizing views (Keleher & Smith, 2012). Mainline Christians have historically advocated against gay rights and reported higher levels of discrimination in numerous studies (Cadge, Olson, & Wildeman, 2008; Keleher & Smith, 2012). Crowley (2007) examined the culture of Christianity within the context of a society that does not strictly adhere to Christian moral standards. By exploring Christian content and analyzing statements made by public figures — namely then Pennsylvania Senator and self-described Christian Rick Santorum — Crowley (2007) noted that social tolerance among the Christian conservative is viewed as a nuisance that restricts Christians from publically passing judgment on socially acceptable acts that they deem immoral. Crowley (2007) used same-sex marriage as an example to argue that the moral intolerance traditionally displayed by Christians toward homosexuals has evolved into intolerance for equality and justice. Noting the popular Christian phrase, “love the sinner, hate the sin,” the analysis examines if conservative Christians indeed separate the act from the individual given that the choice of sexual partner is a fundamental social element of identification.

LaFave, Helm, and Gomez (2014) conducted research that measured the tolerance of

homosexuality among students at a conservative Christian university in the Midwest. Students were given 21 situations designed to measure their comfort of homosexuality. Responses were measured on a 9-point Likert scale. Additionally, students were asked to respond to the Religious Fundamentalism Scale, designed to gauge participant religiosity, and to the Attitude Toward Lesbians and Gays (ATLG) scale. These results were compared to other research conducted by Zelle (2004), in which the sample was collected from students at a small liberal arts university in Pennsylvania. LaFave et al.'s (2014) sample showed a significantly higher level of negative attitudes toward homosexuality than those of Zelle's (2004) study. Additionally, participants from LaFave et al.'s (2014) study scored higher on the Religious Fundamentalism Scale than those of Zelle's (2004) study. The study showed a strong positive correlation between the Religious Fundamentalism Scale and the ATLG scale. LaFave et al. (2014) suggested that the disparity between the two studies was due to the location and the typical, fundamental environment at a conservative Christian university.

Regardless of the longstanding opposition to homosexual tolerance within the conservative Christian community, Bean and Martinez (2014) argued that as societal attitudes shifted in favor of LGBT rights, some in the Evangelical Christian community moved from opposition to ambivalence. This stems from two opposing views: progressivism which is open to modification and diversity, and orthodoxy which remains rooted in one, unchanging archetype. Evangelical Christians – defined as the most conservative in the Christian community – have also been highly politically engaged, particularly regarding marriage equality. Bean and Martinez (2014) examined how those defined as “Evangelical Ambivalent” differ in belief and subculture views in relation to other Evangelicals, and how they differ from the culturally progressive and gay rights opponent. By examining specified groups and survey responses, Bean and Martinez (2014) concluded that a purposeful ambivalence has occurred within Evangelicalism as a result of the same social influences – knowing someone who identifies as LGBT, greater exposure to

LGBT lifestyles – that appear to have influenced the greater population. This is to say that Evangelicals in this study maintained their heteronormative mantra and within the ranks there were extreme views displayed. Despite outliers and a continued preference for “traditional marriage” – marriage between one man and one woman – Bean and Martinez (2014) concluded that the religious conservative will increase in ambivalence as society continues to shift in favor of LGBT rights.

Millennial Mindset

Millennials are largely characterized as being born between 1980 and 2000, and many may have been exposed to homosexual representation throughout their lives. The Harris Poll (2010) reported that the biggest shift in attitudes among teens and tweens since 1989 is the increased acceptance of gays and lesbians. In 1989, 56% of students in grades 7-12 believed that homosexual relations were never acceptable because it was considered unnatural. Of the same survey population, 40% said that a friendship would end if it was discovered that a friend was homosexual. When students in grades 7-12 were interviewed in 2010, these numbers changed drastically — representing the largest attitude shift of all topics covered during the interview, including attitude toward smoking, sex before marriage, abortion, environmental concerns, etc. In 2010, 30% of the students believed homosexuality was always wrong and only 14% believed a friendship would end due to a person revealing their homosexuality (The Harris Poll, 2010). Seventh to 12th grade students in 2010 would have been born in 1998 or before — making them part of the millennial generation. Students polled in 1989 were part of Generation X, a cohort born between 1965 and 1980.

In addition to many Millennials exposure to homosexual media imagery throughout their lives, Millennials differ from their predecessors in how they respond to media — particularly advertising. Millennials represent 21% of discretionary purchases among consumers — that

equates to more than \$1.3 trillion in spending power (Fromm, 2014). A marketer's audience has changed through the decades and with tremendous buying power and the ability to create online content, Millennials have become a major player in consumerism (Fromm, 2014). Those born after 1997, commonly referred to as Generation Z, have grown up in a world where homosexual equality was common and will remember marriage equality occurring while they were still in their formative years (Merriman, 2015). Millennials are the most recent generation to be termed civic idealist, and their purchase trends reflect their ideology. According to Fromm (2014), nearly 50% of Millennials are more likely to make a purchase from a brand if the brand supports a cause that the buyer believes in. Of these, 37% would be willing to pay more for the product, as well (Fromm, 2014).

Baby Boomer Attitudes

Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, were brought up in a very different world — one in which gender roles were shifting but rules about homosexuality were still hard and fast (Gay, Lynxwiler & Smith, 2015). Nevertheless, their attitudes toward homosexuality have become more tolerant in recent years and just prior to the Supreme Court ruling on same-sex-marriage, 45% reported they were in favor, while 48% opposed (Pew Research Center for the People and the Press, 2015). Even though tolerance toward homosexuality increases with each generation, Gay et al. (2015) note that age is not necessarily the primary factor.

No longer the largest segment of the population — outnumbered by Millennials by only 500,000 — they still have tremendous buying power (Fry, 2016). Baby Boomers account for \$230 billion in sales of consumer packaged goods and are expected to inherit \$13 trillion in the next 20 years (Olenski, 2015). Generally, this cohort places little value on brand loyalty and is willing to pay more for a service or product if there is a high degree of customer service or if it somehow simplifies their lives (Business Wire, 2007). Additionally, Baby Boomers are driven by

informational marketing and much less likely to respond to marketing that is image-oriented or directed at younger generations — particularly Millennials (Roberts & Manolis, 2000).

Theoretical Framework

Hyper-Ritualization

Persuasive marketing often relies on the audience's ability to relate to a message in such a way that they can see themselves in the ad or they wish to see themselves in the ad. In an effort to understand why staged ads that are meant to represent culture, but often produce unrealistic or watered-down portrayals of society, Goffman (1979) intensely examined gender roles in advertisements. Arguing that advertisements are often inaccurate and sterilized reflections of culture, Goffman (1979) suggested that these representations were serving as the guide by which social constructs were formed. For instance, Goffman (1979) found that women were often portrayed in advertisements as lightly caressing objects, while men were portrayed forcefully grasping; women were more often portrayed as sitting, while men stood – suggesting that a place of higher position implies authority; and women were often pictured taking refuge in a man's embrace, suggesting they were incapable of comforting or protecting themselves. These representations were found multiple times in Goffman's (1979) research and gender roles rarely, if ever, reversed. Goffman (1979) argued that cultural expectations laid the groundwork for these ad images, but by stripping them down to unidimensional concepts, the advertisements served as social and cultural cues for the audience. Goffman (1979) understood gender to mean the cultural parameters society has placed on men and women and recognized that gender norms can change and are subject to cultural expectations. Due to the cultural expectation of gender roles, Goffman (1979) argued that advertisers merely relay a simplified reflection or ritual, thus hyper-ritualizing prevailing societal norms and creating a societal standard by which an audience gauges themselves.

Jhally (2009) further examined gender roles through Goffman's (1979) hyper-ritualization framework and argued that the "representations of advertising are part of the context within which we define our understanding of gender" (para. 14). Jhally (2009) suggested that while the reality of gender is multi-dimensional and might be defined in any number of ways, advertisements tend to relate gender to sex. This, in turn, reinforces a narrow perspective about women, who they are and what they are capable of doing. Thus, as Goffman (1979) argued, hyper-ritualization serves to reinforce cultural expectations. Related to gender roles, Goffman (1979) suggested that this hyper-ritualization is what reminds society that women should be seen as a weaker sex, while Jhally (2009) conducted research a decade later and related gender roles portrayed in advertising to the cultural objectification of women. Further reinforcing Goffman's (1979) theory, Jhally (2009) suggested that advertisers use conventional expectations to relate to an audience, and in doing so reaffirm the hegemonic codes in society.

Given the theory of hyper-ritualization, any cultural norm or evolving cultural norm that marketers choose to focus on has the ability to become a standard by which to measure societal acceptance. In Goffman's (1979) study, this served to perpetuate a patriarchal society that failed to fully recognize the many factors that may define a woman outside of her traditional gender role. In the present study, as gays and lesbians have become increasingly visible, hyper-ritualization may serve to solidify their place in society and create the cultural norm of their visible existence. Additionally, it has the potential to perpetuate stereotypes – as shown in Goffman's (1979) research.

Research Questions

Attitude toward the brand, attitude toward homosexuality, participant religiosity, attitude toward homosexual imagery and generational predispositions may all have moderating effects on participant attitudes toward an ad featuring homosexual imagery versus heterosexual imagery.

The purpose of this study is to determine if respondents' attitude toward the ad differs depending on heterosexual or homosexual ad imagery, and to examine possible moderating variables.

This study will evaluate:

- RQ1: Are U.S. adults' attitudes toward ads with homosexual imagery more or less favorable than ads with heterosexual imagery?
- RQ2: Does religiosity moderate the attitude toward the ad with heterosexual representation versus homosexual representation?
- RQ3: Does age moderate consumer attitudes toward the ad with heterosexual representation versus homosexual representation?
- RQ4: Does attitude toward the brand moderate attitude toward the ad with heterosexual representation versus homosexual representation?
- RQ5: Does consumer attitude toward lesbians and gays moderate consumer attitudes toward the ad with heterosexual representation versus homosexual representation?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter specifies the research design, including independent and dependent variables, and the experimental design used to analyze this study's research questions. Additionally, this chapter will explain the sampling method, research instruments and data collection procedures. Finally, the chapter discusses data processing and analysis techniques.

Research Objective

The objective of this study is to examine the relationship between explicit homosexual imagery in advertising and consumer response to the ad. Prior to the Supreme Court marriage equality ruling of 2015, multiple studies (Angelini & Bradley, 2010; Bhat et al., 2008; Sender, 1999) examined consumer response to homosexual ad imagery and possible moderating factors that may have influenced consumer response.

This study will build on previous research by examining consumer response to progressive advertising featuring explicit homosexual imagery while accounting for moderating factors such as age, religion, attitude toward homosexuality and attitude toward the brand. The results from the present research may be beneficial to advertisers in understanding how progressive ads are received and what moderating variables may improve or damage

reception. Additionally, as gay and lesbian imagery has become more prevalent in recent decades this study may provide insight regarding hyper-ritualization and advertising's reinforcement of recently-accepted cultural cues. Understanding how consumers respond to the increase of homosexual representation in advertising will better inform the industry.

Research Design

The independent variable in this study is ad imagery — one print ad depicting a heterosexual couple and the other depicting a homosexual couple will serve as the treatment stimuli. Other than the sexual orientation of the models, the ads are identical in layout style and copy with each representing the same brand and product (see Appendix A and Appendix B). The dependent variable in this study is attitude toward the ad (Aad).

The experiment uses a basic post-test only with control group design. Prior to stimulus exposure attitude toward the brand, attitude toward lesbians and gays, and religiosity are measured. Measuring attitude toward the brand prior to exposure should provide a baseline by which to gauge further responses, and the other variables are measured prior to exposure so as not to bias the results. Following randomly assigned exposure to the ad, attitude toward the ad is measured. Demographic information, including sexual orientation and age, is gathered at the end of the experiment (See Appendix G).

Research Questions

Multiple studies have examined consumer response to socially progressive ads, often demonstrating that numerous factors may influence attitude (Craig, 1992; Grady 2007). Blatant homosexual representation in advertisements has become increasingly prevalent, even though studies have shown that consumers respond more positively to implicit homosexual ad imagery versus explicit homosexual ad imagery (Hooten et al., 2009; Angelini & Bradley, 2010).

Therefore,

RQ1: Are U.S. adults' attitudes toward ads with homosexual imagery more or less favorable than ads with heterosexual imagery?

Degree of religious devoutness is shown to impact the way consumers respond to socially progressive advertising (LaFave et al., 2014; Fam et al., 2002). Additionally, religion has been a moderating factor for how study participants respond to homosexuality (Cadge et al., 2008; Keleher & Smith, 2012; Crowley, 2007), however there is some evidence some that religious sects are becoming more tolerant or ambivalent toward the homosexual community (Bean & Martinez, 2014). Therefore,

RQ2: Does religiosity moderate the attitude toward the ad with heterosexual representation versus homosexual representation?

Additionally, Millennials and Baby Boomers have responded to both advertising and the issue of homosexuality in different ways, however, both cohorts show increasing acceptance (Fetner, 2016; Doan et al., 2014). Though age has been a factor in other studies regarding homosexual imagery, this study will examine if this moderating variable significantly affects consumer response.

RQ3: Does age moderate consumer attitudes toward the ad with heterosexual representation versus homosexual representation?

Though research has traditionally studied the effect attitude toward the ad has on attitude toward the brand there is some discussion that attitude toward the brand can have a moderating effect on attitude toward the ad and purchase intent (Sallam & Walhid, 2012; Curlo & Chamblee, 1998). Therefore,

RQ4: Does attitude toward the brand moderate attitude toward the ad with heterosexual representation versus homosexual representation?

Despite the evidence that implicit homosexual ad imagery is preferred to explicit imagery, there is evidence that attitude toward the ad can be moderated by attitude toward lesbians and gays (Bhat et al, 1998). With attitudes toward lesbians and gays growing increasingly positive in recent years and explicit homosexual ad imagery becoming more common, are consumer attitudes toward homosexual ad imagery still somewhat reflected in consumer attitudes toward gays and lesbians? Therefore,

RQ5: Does consumer attitude toward lesbians and gays moderate consumer attitudes toward the ad with heterosexual representation versus homosexual representation?

This study will account for multiple moderating effects, including: religiosity, attitude toward the brand, attitude toward homosexuality and age cohort.

Sample

A sample of 229 U.S. adult participants generally representative of the U.S. adult population in terms of geographic distribution, gender, age and household income, were randomly recruited through SurveyMonkey.com, an online Internet survey request platform from their national panel of survey respondents. By utilizing a sample of 229 participants, this research will out-number the participant samples used by LaFave et al. (2014), which used 92 participant responses. Additionally, 229 participants are required for 30-participant per cell distribution during analysis. There are no other parameters for the sample.

Procedure and Instrument

The stimulus advertisements were chosen from a well-established and generally familiar brand — Target stores. The ad displaying homosexual imagery shows two men dressed in suits, holding hands, with their smiling faces pressed close together (See Appendix A). The ad displaying heterosexual imagery shows a man dressed in a suit dancing with a woman dressed in

a white gown (See Appendix B). In the upper left-hand corner of both ads is the tagline “that’s love” displayed under the Target logo. Copy centered over both images reads, “Be yourself, together. Build a Target Wedding Gift Registry as unique as the two of you.” The call to action, “start your registry,” completes the copy.

Participants took part in the experiment in a setting of their choosing online via SurveyMonkey.com. Ad treatments were randomly assigned to the participants via Survey Monkey A/B software, which distributes the treatments randomly and evenly to participants. Prior to viewing the advertisements, participants rated their attitude toward the Target brand, attitude toward lesbians and gays and self-reported religiosity using established scales. After these measures, participants were exposed to one of the two stimuli and given a two-section post-exposure survey. The two post-exposure sections were Attitude Toward the Ad and demographics, respectively.

Part one of the pre-stimulus survey regarding brand attitudes was expected to gauge if participants have a predisposed attitude toward the brand that may moderate how they respond to the ad, regardless of imagery. The dependent variable survey – attitude toward the ad – was designed to determine the initial consumer response regarding the ad. The additional sections of the survey were necessary to determine any moderating variables to the ad response, particularly an overall tolerance level for homosexuality and general religious piety.

In order to ensure the protection of participants, this study was subject to approval by the Institutional Review Board at Oklahoma State University. The survey and consent form were electronic. If participants agreed to consent, they were asked to click “NEXT” after having read the consent statement. By clicking “NEXT,” participants consented and advanced to the survey. If they did not click “NEXT,” which implied they did not consent, they were not able to participate. Participants were asked to complete the entire survey in one sitting, but were allotted as much

uninterrupted time as necessary. On average, participants took five minutes and four seconds to complete the survey.

Variables and Scales

Attitude Toward the Brand. Utilizing Spears and Singh's (2004) Attitude Toward the Brand (A_b) 7-point semantic differential scale, participants described their overall feelings toward the Target brand (unappealing/appealing; bad/good; unpleasant/pleasant; unfavorable/favorable; unlikeable/likeable). (See Appendix C)

Attitude Toward Lesbian and Gays. The ATLG-S portion of the survey required participants to respond to 10 items, 5 pertaining to gay men and 5 pertaining to lesbians (See Appendix D). This is the shorter version of the original ATLG-R, which was found to be highly correlated to its original 20-item scale. The original scale, developed by Herek (1998), has undergone some minor modifications in order to "update and clarify" meaning (Rosik, 2007, p. 135). Rosik noted that the revisions did not appear to change the "psychometric properties of the original scale" (p. 135). Examples of these statements include: a) "Lesbians just can't fit into our society" b) "Male homosexuality is merely a different kind of lifestyle that should not be condemned", and c) "Female homosexuality is a sin." Higher scores indicate higher levels of homosexual intolerance. This portion was conducted on a 9-point Likert scale, with 1 being *strongly disagree* and 9 being *strongly agree*. The number of points on this scale mirrors the LaFave et al. (2014) study and is consistent with the original scale by Herek (1998).

Perceived Religiosity. To measure self-reported religiosity, this research used the same scale used by Zullig, Ward and Horn (2006). The scale required participants to respond to two items, 'Religion is very important to me' and 'I am very religious' (See Appendix E). The response options were on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly disagree (1)* to *strongly agree (5)*.

Attitude Toward the Ad. Attitude toward the ad (Aad) was measured utilizing Wells' (1964) Emotional Quotient (EQ) scale. The EQ scale requires participants to answer 12 questions relating to the ad on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree (1)* to *strongly agree (5)*. Examples of these questions include: a) "This ad is very appealing to me" b) This is a heart-warming ad c) I dislike this ad (See Appendix F). The EQ scale has been used in numerous similar advertising studies over the past five decades and has been shown to be highly reliable (Boucher & Campbell, 2014; McBeath, Fullerton, McKinnon & Weir, 2008; Zaichkowsky, 1994).

Data Analysis

The independent variables, homosexual ad imagery and heterosexual ad imagery, were first recorded to better categorize the results. The dependent variable examined was attitude toward the ad (Aad). To examine moderating variables, (religiosity, attitude toward lesbians and gays, attitude toward the brand and age cohort) Babbie's (2001) Elaboration Model was used.

The researcher calculated an independent samples *t*-test to determine the difference between mean scores of the two ads in order to answer the first research question, which determined the main effect. To examine the moderation effects of the other variables, the sample was divided into two groups based on that variable (i.e. high/low religiosity; positive/negative attitudes toward lesbians and gays; high/low brand perception; Millennial/Baby Boomer). Each group was re-tested for the main effect. If the outcome was different for the separate groups when compared to the sample-as-a-whole, it was determined that the third variable had a moderating effect on the relationship.

Reliability and Validity

Ab, Aad, and ATLG-S are existing scales, the validity and credibility of these scales have been established in previous studies (Teng & Laroche, 2006; LaFave et al., 2014; Rosik, 2007;

Calzo & Ward, 2009). The perceived religiosity scale, modeled after Zullig et al. (2004) was reported to display excellent reliability and returned an alpha coefficient of 0.91. After assessing the results of this study, researcher used Cronbach's alpha to determine internal consistency.

The findings of the experiment will be discussed in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The following chapter details the findings of the experiment that measured respondents' attitudes toward an ad with homosexual representation. This study examined ad attitudes, while accounting for numerous moderating variables, including age, religiosity, attitude toward the brand and attitude toward lesbians and gays. The respondents were also asked numerous demographic questions.

Respondents were shown one of two ads, identical in layout and copy, though one featured a heterosexual couple and the other featured a homosexual couple. The ad was for Target stores' wedding registry, therefore the models were featured in wedding attire and posed in a way that suggested they were a romantic couple. The homosexual ad (Appendix A) featured two men standing nose-to-nose, holding hands and smiling, while the heterosexual ad (Appendix B) featured a man and woman appearing to playfully dance together – all figures were in wedding attire. Both ads displayed identical copy: "Be yourself together. Build a Target Wedding Gift Registry as unique as the two of you. Start your registry." Additionally, each ad displayed the Target brand logo in the upper left hand corner with the slogan, "that's love" just below.

The experiment used a post-test only with control group design. Prior to stimuli exposure, three measurement scales were used to measure participants' attitude toward the brand advertised, self-reported religiosity and attitudes toward lesbians and gays. A fourth scale was used post-treatment to measure attitude toward the ad. Demographic variables were collected at the end of the experiment.

Attitude toward the ad (Aad) was measured utilizing Wells' (1964) Emotional Quotient (EQ) scale, which required participants to respond to 12 items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (5). Negatively phrased statements were reverse coded and items for each scale were averaged to produce a score for each variable. Cronbach's alpha was generated to assess the reliability of the scale. Alpha ($\alpha = .952$) indicated that these questions were highly correlated, resulting in the formation of one variable.

Attitude Toward the Brand (A_b), by Spears and Singh (2004), contained five items on a 7-point semantic differential scale. The responses were measured with seven indicating the most positive opinion of the brand and one indicating the most negative. Cronbach's alpha was generated to assess the reliability of the scale. Alpha ($\alpha = .988$) was acceptable because it exceeded .70 (Nunnally, 1978; Garson, 2004). Because the items were highly correlated, they were collapsed into one variable for later analysis.

Attitude Toward Lesbians and Gays (ATLG-S) was borrowed from Herek (1998) and contained five questions pertaining to attitudes toward lesbians and five questions pertaining to attitudes toward gays, measured on a 9-point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (9). For the purpose of this study, the scale was not split into two-item subscales for lesbians and gays, but used as a singular scale for attitude toward homosexuality. Negatively phrased statements were reverse coded and items for each scale were averaged to produce a score for each variable. Cronbach's alpha was generated to assess the reliability of the scale. Alpha ($\alpha =$

.937) indicated that these items were highly correlated, therefore they were collapsed to form one variable.

Perceived religiosity was measured using the same scale used by Zullig et al. (2006), which required participants to respond to two items, 'Religion is very important to me' and 'I am very religious.' Participant responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly disagree (1)* to *strongly agree (5)*. A reliability test was run on the items ($\alpha = .927$). Cronbach's alpha indicated high correlation, resulting in the formation of a single variable.

Respondent Profile

A total of 229 respondents were randomly recruited through surveymonkey.com respondent pool at a cost of \$4.59 per completed response. Funding was provided by a university research account and presented no conflict of interest with the study.

After the survey was created online (Appendices C-G), demographic parameters corresponding to the U.S. adult population were set within Survey Monkey, which were then used to recruit participants. The survey went live at 10:25 a.m. on April 4, 2017 and was completed by 6:45 p.m. on the same day. Of the respondents, 54% were female and 46% were male. Respondents ranged in age from 19 to 73, with a median age of 42. Respondents who self-identified as heterosexual made up 87.3% of the surveyed population and 12.7% identified as a sexual minority or non-hetero, given the options of *heterosexual*, *homosexual*, *bisexual*, *other* or *prefer not to answer*. Comparatively, the United States Census Bureau (2010) reported that the U.S. population is 50.8% female and 49.2% male, with a median age of 37.2. Reports regarding the U.S. population who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual vary from 4.1% (Gallup Poll, 2017) to 8% (Reece, Herbenick, Fortenberry, Dodge, Sanders & Schick, 2010). Gallup Poll (2017) noted that research often yields higher percentages of individuals engaged in same-sex sexual behavior than individuals who identify as a sexual minority, and that multiple variables can affect

the willingness of individuals to identify as LGBT. See Table 1 for more demographic information for the sample. Listwise deletion was used for missing data.

Table 1

Respondent Profile

Education Completed	Frequency	Percent
College Associate's Degree or Less	94	42.7
College Bachelor's Degree	73	33.2
College Master's Degree or Higher	50	22.8
Prefer not to answer	3	1.4
Political Affiliation		
Republican	42	19.1
Democrat	67	30.5
Independent	61	27.7
Other	18	8.2
Prefer not to answer	32	14.5
Aware of a Gay or Lesbian Family Member		
Yes	80	36.4
No	129	58.6
I am not sure or prefer not to answer	11	5.0
Ethnicity		
White/Caucasian	171	77.7
Hispanic/Latina	16	7.3
Black/African American	12	5.5
Other	11	5.0
Prefer not to answer	10	4.5

Research Question Testing

RQ1: Are U.S. adults' attitudes toward ads with homosexual imagery more or less favorable than ads with heterosexual imagery?

Research question one examined the main effect of how consumers respond to the ad with heterosexual imagery versus the ad with homosexual imagery. The analysis found no statistically significant difference between consumer attitude toward the heterosexual ad ($M = 2.96, SD = .600$) and the homosexual ad ($M = 3.11, SD = .104; t(220) = -1.27, p = .206$). Thus, there is not a relationship between ad imagery and overall attitude toward the ad.

RQ2: Does religiosity moderate the attitude toward the ad with heterosexual representation versus homosexual representation?

Research question two examined if degree of religiosity moderated attitudes toward the ad with heterosexual imagery and attitudes toward the ad with homosexual imagery. For the sample as a whole, religiosity scored 3.09 on a 5.0 scale. To determine if religiosity was a moderating variable, subject responses were split into high/low groups according to the median score of the religiosity variable ($Mdn = 3.0$). Twenty-one percent of the sample indicated 3.0 (neutral) as their perceived religiosity score, thus the score of 3.0 was removed from the analysis to form the high/low groups. Respondents who self-reported as high in religiosity, were less likely to report positive attitudes toward the homosexual ad than the heterosexual ad ($M = 2.70, SD = 1.12$ v. $M = 3.16, SD = .603; t(99) = 2.44, p = .017$; See Table 2). Additionally, respondents who self-reported as low in religiosity, were more likely to report positive attitudes toward the homosexual ad than the heterosexual ad ($M = 3.65, SD = .860$ v. $M = 2.69, SD = .499; t(72) = -5.76, p = .001$; See Table 3). Therefore, according to the Elaboration Model (Babbie, 2001) analysis, religiosity moderated attitude toward the ad.

Table 2

T-Test Comparing Attitude Toward the Ad to Ad Imagery with High Religiosity Moderator

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	η	η^2
Heterosexual Ad	43	3.16	.603	2.44*	.238	.057
Homosexual Ad	58	2.70	1.12			

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 3

T-Test Comparing Attitude Toward the Ad to Ad Imagery with Low Religiosity Moderator

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	η	η^2
Heterosexual Ad	35	2.69	.499	-576**	.562	.316
Homosexual Ad	39	3.65	.860			

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

RQ3: Does age moderate consumer attitudes toward the ad with heterosexual representation versus homosexual representation?

Research question three examined Millennial respondents', ages 18-37 ($n = 94$), attitudes toward the ad and Baby Boomers', ages 53-71 ($n = 64$), attitudes toward the ad. For research question three, respondents outside of the Millennial and Baby Boomer age groups were not considered. The Baby Boomer group did not show a statistically significant difference in attitudes toward the heterosexual ad versus the homosexual ad ($M = 2.93$, $SD = .570$ v. $M = 2.80$, $SD = .957$, $t(62) = .625$; $p = .535$), keeping with the overall main effect. Millennial respondents reported more positive attitudes toward the ad with homosexual imagery ($M = 3.46$, $SD = .938$ v. $M = 3.00$, $SD = .588$) than the ad with heterosexual imagery ($t(92) = -2.74$, $p = .007$). Thus, age cohort moderated attitude toward the ad (See Table 4).

Table 4

T-Test Comparing Attitude Toward the Ad to Ad Imagery with Millennial Cohort Moderator

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	η	η^2
Heterosexual Ad	41	3.00	.587	-2.74**	.275	.075
Homosexual Ad	53	3.46	.938			

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

RQ4: Does attitude toward the brand moderate attitude toward the ad with heterosexual representation versus homosexual representation?

Research question four examined how attitude toward the Target store brand moderated attitude toward the Target ad. For the sample as a whole, mean attitude toward the Target store brand was 5.35 on a 7.0 scale with 1 being *unfavorable* and 7 being *favorable*. To determine if attitude toward the brand advertised was a moderating variable, subject responses were split into high/low groups according to the median score on the attitude toward the brand scale ($Mdn = 5.8$). There was not a statistically significant difference between those who reported low brand attitudes ($M = 2.81, SD = .616$ v. $M = 2.75, SD = 1.01; t(106) = .358; p = .721$), keeping with the main effect. However, respondents who reported high brand attitudes were more likely to respond favorably to the homosexual ad ($M = 3.44, SD = .968; t(112) = -2.18, p = .032$) than to the heterosexual ad ($M = 3.10, SD = .553$; See Table 5). Thus, attitude toward the brand moderated attitude toward the ad.

Table 5

T-Test Comparing Attitude Toward the Ad to Ad Imagery with High Brand Moderator

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	η	η^2
Heterosexual Ad	49	3.10	.553	-2.18*	.202	.041
Homosexual Ad	65	3.44	.968			

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

RQ5: Does consumer attitude toward lesbians and gays moderate consumer attitudes toward the ad with heterosexual representation versus homosexual representation?

Research question five examined if participant attitudes toward homosexuality moderated their attitudes toward the ad featuring homosexual imagery versus heterosexual imagery. For the sample as a whole, mean attitudes toward homosexuality were 6.87 on a 9.0 scale with 1 being *strongly disagree* and 9 being *strongly agree*. To determine if attitude toward homosexuality was a moderating variable, subject responses were split into high/low using a median split on the ATLG-S scale ($Mdn = 7.8$). Respondents who reported less favorable attitudes toward lesbians and gays responded less favorably to the ad with homosexual stimuli, ($M = 2.47, SD = .902$ v. $M = 3.11, SD = .573$) than the ad with heterosexual stimuli, ($t(102) = 4.00, p = .001$; See Table 6). Additionally, respondents who reported more favorable attitudes toward lesbians and gays indicated statistically significant more positive attitudes toward the homosexual ad ($M = 3.78, SD = .722$ v. $M = 2.85, SD = .600$; $t(113) = -7.49, p = .001$) than the heterosexual ad (See Table 7). Thus, attitudes toward lesbians and gays moderated attitudes toward the ads.

Table 6

T-Test Comparing Attitude Toward the Ad to Ad Imagery with Low ATLG Moderator

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	η	η^2
Heterosexual Ad	41	3.11	.573	4.00**	.368	.135
Homosexual Ad	63	2.47	.902			

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Table 7

T-Test Comparing Attitude Toward the Ad to Ad Imagery with High ATLG Moderator

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	η	η^2
Heterosexual Ad	56	2.85	.600	-7.49**	.576	.331
Homosexual Ad	59	3.78	.722			

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

The purpose of this research study was to examine factors influencing attitudes toward homosexual imagery in advertising. The research questions tested several variables that may have moderated attitudes toward the ad. Research question one tested the main effect, consumers' general attitudes toward an ad featuring heterosexual representation versus explicit homosexual representation. This study found that there was not a significant difference in attitudes toward the ad with heterosexual imagery versus the ad with homosexual imagery among the sample-as-a-whole. Research questions two, three, four and five accounted for religiosity, age, brand perceptions and attitudes toward lesbians and gays, respectively. All variables were found to moderate respondent attitudes toward the ad. Specifically, the following sub-groups held more favorable attitudes toward the homosexual ad: those low in religiosity; Millennial cohort; those with high brand attitude; those with more favorable attitudes toward lesbians and gays. No differences in attitude toward the ad were found among Baby Boomers or those with low brand attitude toward Target stores.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This chapter will discuss the findings, implications and contributions of the research study. First, an overview of the findings and their implications followed by limitations of the results. The chapter will conclude with concepts for future study.

Summary

The purpose of this research study was to examine attitudes toward an ad with explicit homosexual imagery – particularly given the increased visibility of gays and lesbians in mainstream media (Tsai, 2010; Um, 2012) and the premise of Goffman's (1979) hyper-ritualization theory. Additionally, this study examined how variables such as religiosity (LaFave et al., 2014; Fam et al., 2002), age (Fetner, 2016; Doan et al., 2014), brand perception (Sallam & Walhid, 2012; Curlo & Chamblee, 1998) and attitude toward lesbians and gays (Bhat et al., 1998) moderated participant attitudes toward the ad. The results of this study did not find a significant difference between general consumer attitudes toward an ad with heterosexual representation versus explicit homosexual representation. However, findings pertaining to all moderating variables were significant, which is consistent with previous research.

Research question one examined consumer responses toward an ad featuring a heterosexual couple versus responses toward an ad featuring a homosexual couple. Research by Hooten et al. (2009) found that ads featuring homosexual imagery created negative attitudes toward the ad, particularly when the ad featured gay men. However that was not found in this study. Without accounting for moderating variables, which are discussed further later in this chapter, the findings of this study showed no difference among the sample-as-a-whole in attitudes toward a Target store wedding registry ad featuring a homosexual couple and the same ad featuring a heterosexual couple. This finding is inconsistent with the findings of previous research (Angelini & Bradley, 2010; Hooten et al, 2009). The sample may have been the primary cause for differences between this study and research by Hooten et al (2009). This study included participants from across the U.S., while Hooten et al. (2009) noted that the sample had been drawn from a population that tended to be more religious and politically conservative. Religiosity was found to be a moderating variable in this study and will be discussed at length below. Angelini and Bradley (2010) also reported that study participants were significantly more positive toward ads with heterosexual representation than homosexual representation. Angelini and Bradley (2010) suggested that this was due to schema incongruence among heterosexuals, which made up the full sample in both research studies. Though 12.7% of current study respondents did not identify as heterosexual, the timespan between the studies may serve as an additional explanation for the findings – particularly given the general attitude shift that occurred post the marriage equality ruling of 2015 (Fetner, 2016). Additionally, within the confines of this study, these findings may speak to Goffman’s (1979) hyper-ritualization theory. As homosexual ad imagery has substantially increased in mainstream media prevalence (Tsai, 2010), hyper-ritualization suggests that consumers would view these ad images as accepted cultural norms, thus expressing increased tolerance, acceptance and even expectation of gay and lesbian representations in media.

Research question two's findings are consistent with previous research regarding the relationship between religiosity and participant responses to advertising featuring homosexual imagery. Fam et al.'s (2002) study suggested that the higher participants rated themselves in religiosity, the more offensive they found ads deemed controversial, particularly advertisements featuring gender/sex representation. This finding is also consistent with findings of LaFave et al. (2014) that suggested religious devoutness moderates attitudes toward socially progressive ads, particularly those featuring homosexual representation. Additionally, given the research that suggests attitude toward homosexuality is moderated by degree of religiosity (Cadge et al., 2008; Keleher & Smith, 2012), this relationship between religiosity and attitude toward the homosexual ad may be expected. Interestingly, while high religiosity certainly played a role in consumer attitudes, low religiosity appears to have been a stronger moderator, accounting for 31.6% of variance in attitude toward the ads. These findings may relate to Goffman's (1979) hyper-ritualization theory, particularly as Pollay's (2000), which work built upon it, specifying that standard influential institutions such as family and church are becoming less impactful in shaping attitudes. According to respondents in this study, the findings demonstrate that religiosity still plays a defining role, however, the lack of religiosity appears to also be an indicator of attitude. Additionally, the ad subject matter, marriage, should be considered when evaluating the attitudes toward the ad with heterosexual imagery among the highly religious. Bhat et al. (1998) suggested that individual responses to advertisements are largely dictated by personal background and cultural familiarities. If highly religious individuals value the sanctity of heterosexual marriage, a stance which Crowley (2007) suggested drives an intolerance for homosexual marriage, then the positive attitudes toward the ad may be in response to the marriage theme, at least in part.

Research question three examined if age, particularly those identified as Millennials, born between 1980 and 2000, and those identified as Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, moderated attitude toward the ad. Consistent with previous research suggesting that Millennials

respond more favorably toward a brand that represents a social cause (The Harris Poll, 2010) and report significantly better attitudes toward lesbians and gays (Fromm, 2014), this study found that those respondents categorized as Millennials were more likely to respond favorably toward the ad with homosexual imagery than the ad with heterosexual imagery. Although previous research indicated that Baby Boomers were less accepting of homosexuality and gay marriage than the following generations (Gay et al., 2015; Pew Research Center's Religion and Public Life Project, 2016), this study found that Baby Boomers kept with the main effect, responding similarly to the ads, regardless of imagery. While age did moderate attitude toward the ad among Millennials, the finding that age did not moderate attitude toward the ad among Baby Boomers further supports hyper-ritualization. Given the increased visibility of lesbians and gays in mainstream media, hyper-ritualization would propose that Baby Boomers in this study have come to accept and perhaps expect homosexual representation in advertising media. In this case, Millennials' significant positive response toward the ad with homosexual imagery may speak to a perceived social cause or platform of homosexuality. Additionally, the marriage imagery may also be a motivating factor and should be considered in future research, given the highly-politicized rhetoric regarding same-sex marriage. Millennial attitudes toward marriage, heterosexual and homosexual, may also play a role in these results.

Research question four examined the relationship between attitudes toward the brand and attitudes toward the ad. The current study showed that favorable attitude toward the Target store brand moderated attitude toward the ad. Establishing a predisposed attitude toward the brand served to determine if the brand itself was influencing participant attitudes toward the ad and to what degree, given the numerous moderating variables that have been shown to affect consumers when viewing homosexual ad imagery. Specific to this study, participants with high brand perceptions were more likely to express positive attitudes toward the ad featuring homosexual imagery, but low brand perceptions were not shown to moderate attitude toward the ad. Past

research suggests that brand perceptions can influence attitude toward the ad (Sallam & Walhid, 2012; Curlo & Camblee, 1998). The findings of this study suggests that disliking the Target brand is not a primary contributor to disliking the ad, regardless of heterosexual or homosexual imagery. Rather, these findings may speak more directly to how Target has positioned itself through progressive advertising and ideology.

Research question five examined if attitudes toward lesbians and gays would moderate attitudes toward the ads. The findings of the current study reiterated research by Bhat et al. (1998) that suggested attitudes toward lesbians and gays strongly influenced attitudes toward ads with gay representation. The relationship was strongest between participants with favorable attitudes toward homosexuality and positive attitudes toward the ad with homosexual imagery. Hyper-ritualization would suggest that the increase of gays and lesbians in mainstream media has led some participants in this study to be more accepting and even develop an expectation of gay and lesbian representation. The findings of this study suggest that hyper-ritualization may have particular influence on those whose attitudes toward lesbians and gays have grown more positive. While negative attitudes toward homosexuality did moderate negative attitudes toward the ad with homosexual imagery, the relationship was weaker among this population. These findings also suggest that those with negative attitudes toward homosexuality found the traditional, heterosexual image more appealing, reporting positive attitudes toward the ad. It should be discussed that the use of the wedding registry ad may have strengthened participant's negative attitudes toward the ad. Doan et al.'s (2014) findings suggested that though some individuals are willing to grant homosexuals policy based rights (i.e. government granted such as employment benefits), many do not exhibit the same willingness regarding socially based rights (i.e. informal privileges such as public displays of affection and marriage). Since the ad explicitly features gay marriage, it may be that those with negative attitudes toward homosexuality were inclined to dislike the explicit imagery given the obvious display of public affection shown in the ad. In

essence, respondents of this study who already reported negative attitudes toward lesbians and gays may have been more inclined to react negatively toward the ad since marriage is viewed by heterosexuals as an informal privilege (Doan et al., 2014).

Implications

As culture shifts continue to play a role in the current sociopolitical environment and the general public's differing views continue to serve as a lens by which media are interpreted, these findings may shed some light on how progressive advertising is received and processed. Situating this study within the framework of Goffman's (1979) hyper-ritualization theory, it stands to reason that homosexual imagery displayed in advertisements may have served as a cultural reference for participants of this study, thus resulting in similar views among the audience-as-a-whole of the heterosexual and homosexual ad imagery.

Without accounting for moderating variables, participants of this study responded similarly to ads with homosexual representation and heterosexual representation. The post-marriage equality era and significant increase in homosexual media representation may be major contributors to this outcome, as studies conducted prior to 2015 indicated consumers preferred heterosexual or implicit homosexual ad imagery, and generally responded negatively toward ads with explicit homosexual imagery. However, this study did not explicitly measure the effect of the marriage equality ruling on attitudes toward the ad. Even though polarizing views are still evident, findings of this study suggests that advertisers who choose to engage consumers through progressive advertising may have more to gain than lose in the coming decades given potential cultural norms emerging regarding homosexuality.

Staying with the main effect, Baby Boomers responded similarly to the ad with heterosexual imagery and the ad with homosexual imagery. Millennials, however, responded more positively toward the ad with homosexual representation. As Millennial buying power

continues to outpace that of Baby Boomers (Fromm, 2014), advertisers may continue to take advantage of Millennials' affinity for supporting brands that reflect their ideology and civic-idealism. Given the significant increase in gay and lesbian ad imagery in the early 2000s (Wilke, 2001; Tsai, 2010), the increased cultural cues could have served as a normalization of gay and lesbian imagery in society, further supporting hyper-ritualization. Advertisers and activists may take note of the findings of this study, particularly as other progressive societal issues arise.

Perhaps indicative of the current culture shifts at play, traditional advertising that reflects traditional values appears to be an important function for this study's population who report as highly religious and intolerant of lesbians and gays. As noted, Pollay (2000) suggested that traditional persuasive elements such as family and church now compete against advertising as persuasive devices. While this study suggests that religion moderates attitudes toward homosexual imagery, findings also show that there was a not a significant difference in Millennials' and Baby Boomers' self-report of religiosity. Thus, given the increased visibility of homosexuality for the duration of Millennials' lifespans, hyper-ritualization would suggest that advertising has normalized the presence of lesbians and gays for this study's respondents, and religiosity has less of an influence on attitude.

Though the religious/intolerant segment responded negatively toward the homosexual ad, as expected, there was a statistical positive significance found with response toward the heterosexual ad. While future studies may find that this is only true regarding ads that depict traditional values, such as heterosexual marriage displayed in this study, advertisers should note that when targeting a highly religious population ads featuring a traditional image may be especially well-received. Additional studies would need to be conducted to assess the potential relationship.

Limitations

Since the ad stimuli depicted a marriage between heterosexuals or homosexuals, the product itself may have influenced the ad response, particularly among those reporting negative attitudes toward homosexuality and high degrees of religiosity. Since marriage is viewed as both an informal and formal privilege (Doan et al., 2014), this study cannot be generalized to all types of products and services. Additionally, since the stimuli used was a magazine ad, this study should not be generalized to other media. With respect to external validity, this study was conducted among a proprietary panel or sample frame of U.S. adults, and while the sample was demographically representative of all U.S. adults, it is that is not necessarily generalizable to the entire U.S. adult population.

Future Research

Understanding consumer attitudes and responses toward the use of gays and lesbians in advertisements is crucial for the continued integration and normalization of homosexuals in mainstream media and culture. Additionally, as companies make decisions to utilize socially progressive advertising it is important to understand how it affects consumer brand perceptions and purchase intentions. Likewise, for companies that continue to remain removed from socially progressive advertising, it is important to understand how current and future consumers, namely Millennials, will respond. This study focused on the complex issue of attitude toward an ad featuring explicit homosexual imagery. While standard moderating variables such as attitude toward homosexuality and religiosity were shown to affect consumer attitudes toward the ad, as predicted, other questions arose during the data analysis.

While these findings may serve particularly well for targeted messages, Keleher and Smith's (2012) research regarding the lifecycle argument and generational replacement will likely play an important role in years to come. If the lifecycle argument is valid, Millennials will

become more conservative with age and the societal progress seen in the LGBT community will remain but become stagnant. However, if generational replacement is more relevant, this societal progression will continue. Given the suggested increase in tolerance toward homosexuals (Keleher & Smith, 2012) among the general population, future research should examine long-term attitude change, particularly as it relates to those who are high in religiosity and report negative attitudes toward homosexuality.

As homosexuality has become a common topic and theme in both entertainment media and news media, future research should establish what type of media outlets may be influencing consumers and if there is a correlation between media type consumed and responses to homosexual imagery. Since media has become a daily part of society and is consumed in any number of ways, a proper breakdown and long-term understanding of media consumption and consumer attitude change would greatly add to the overall body of literature and aid in understanding what role, if any, media type and culturally progressive ads play in changing attitudes.

Since respondents who reported high degrees of religiosity and negative attitudes toward homosexuality respond so positively toward the heterosexual ad imagery, possibly due to traditional or conservative portrayal, future research to determine what other factors influence positive ad response among this population would be useful, as well. Additionally, future research should consider using different statistical analysis to determine if and how all of the variables are interrelated.

Conclusion

No longer intended for a niched segment of the population, the findings of this study suggest that explicit homosexual advertising can successfully compete with traditional advertising given a balanced populace. However, when attitude toward lesbians and gays, religiosity and age

cohort are considered, targeting ads with homosexual imagery may still in the best interest of advertisers. However, within the context of Goffman's (1979) hyper-ritualization theory and within the confines of this study, there is evidence that the increase in progressive advertising imagery may assist in furthering progressive ideology. While polarizing views are evident by the ad responses elicited, the two defining values, attitude toward lesbians and gays and religiosity, appear to be most the most telling variables. Attitudes toward lesbians and gays will need to continue shifting and normalizing images of lesbians and gays will need to become more commonplace if attitudes toward homosexual ad imagery are to improve. As Millennials have families of their own and a new generation comes of age in the midst of the current sociopolitical environment, this same study may be of interest and reveal new information for subsequent generations. Largely depending on the changing attitudes toward lesbians and gays and the continued normalizing visibility, this study suggests that explicit homosexual representation in advertisements may not be met with so many negative attitudes in the near future.

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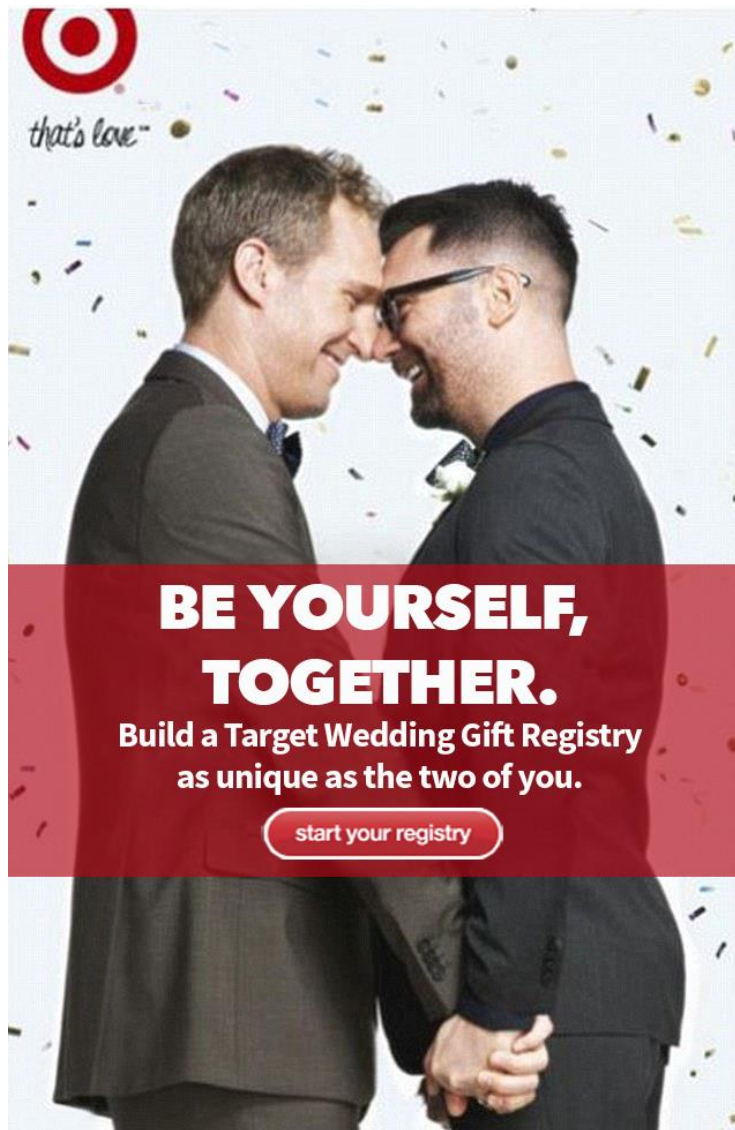
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APPENDICES

Appendix A



that's love™

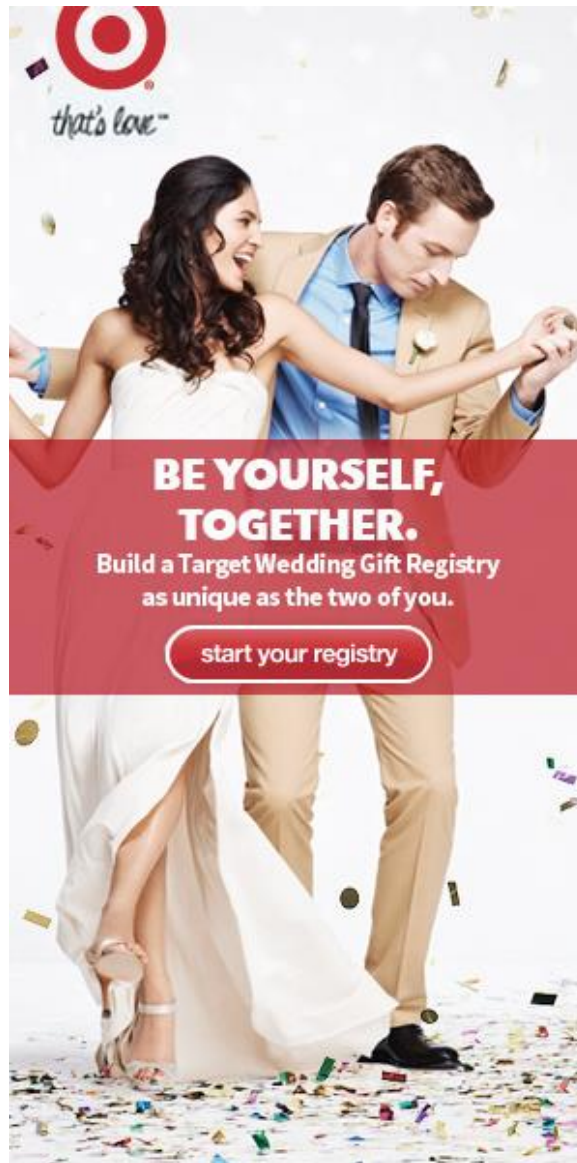
**BE YOURSELF,
TOGETHER.**


Build a Target Wedding Gift Registry
as unique as the two of you.

[start your registry](#)

The advertisement features a photograph of two men in suits kissing. The Target logo is in the top left corner. The background is white with falling confetti. A red banner at the bottom contains the main text and a button.

Appendix B




that's love™

**BE YOURSELF,
TOGETHER.**

Build a Target Wedding Gift Registry
as unique as the two of you.

[start your registry](#)

Appendix C

The Brand	
1. Please describe your overall feelings toward Target stores and brand	
Unappealing	Appealing
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Please describe your overall feelings toward Target stores and brand	
Bad	Good
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Please describe your overall feelings toward Target stores and brand	
Unpleasant	Pleasant
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Please describe your overall feelings toward Target stores and brand	
Unfavorable	Favorable
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. Please describe your overall feelings toward Target stores and brand	
Unlikable	Likable
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix D

Lesbians and Gays									
Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement below about lesbians and gays.									
6. Lesbians just can't fit into our society.									
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Undecided	Slightly Agree	Mostly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. Laws against private sexual behavior between consenting adult women should not exist.									
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Undecided	Slightly Agree	Mostly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. Female homosexuality is a sin.									
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Undecided	Slightly Agree	Mostly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Female homosexuality in itself is no problem unless society makes it a problem.									
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Undecided	Slightly Agree	Mostly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. Lesbians are sick.									
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Undecided	Slightly Agree	Mostly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. I think male homosexuals are disgusting.									
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Undecided	Slightly Agree	Mostly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. Male homosexuality is a perversion.									
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Undecided	Slightly Agree	Mostly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. Male homosexuality is a natural expression of sexuality in men.									
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Undecided	Slightly Agree	Mostly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. Sex between two men is just plain wrong.									
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Undecided	Slightly Agree	Mostly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. Male homosexuality is merely a different kind of lifestyle that should <u>not</u> be condemned.									
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Undecided	Slightly Agree	Mostly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix E

Religion				
Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement about religion.				
16. Religion is very important to me.				
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17. I am very religious.				
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix F

The Ad				
Please answer the questions below regarding the ad you just reviewed.				
23. This ad is very appealing to me.				
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
24. I would probably skip this ad if I saw it in a magazine.				
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
25. This is a heart-warming ad.				
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
26. This ad makes me want to buy the brand it features.				
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
27. This ad makes me feel good.				
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
28. This ad has little interest for me.				
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
29. I dislike this ad.				
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
30. This is the kind of ad you forget easily.				
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
31. I'm tired of this kind of advertising.				
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
32. This ad leaves me cold.				
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
33. This is a fascinating ad.				
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
34. This is a wonderful ad.				
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Appendix G

Demographics
35. What is your self-identified gender?
<input type="text"/>
36. What is your ethnicity?
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
37. What is your self-identified sexual orientation?
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
38. What is your age?
<input type="text"/>
39. What is your highest level of education completed?
<input type="text"/>
40. What is your political affiliation?
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
41. What is your level of individual annual income?
<input type="text"/>
42. Are you aware of someone in your immediate family who identifies as gay or lesbian?
<input type="text"/>

Appendix I

Attitude Toward the Ad

Welcome

Thank you for participating in this study sponsored by Oklahoma State University. The purpose of this research study is to determine how individual attitudes toward an ad may or may not differ. Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time. The survey takes about 15 minutes to complete. It includes an advertisement that you will review and give your opinions about. Please click NEXT if you choose to participate. By clicking NEXT, you are indicating that you freely and voluntarily agree to participate in this study and you also acknowledge that you are at least 18 years of age.

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, Dr. Hugh Crether at 223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Mandie Rowden at mandie.rowden@okstate.edu.



Appendix H

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Wednesday, March 29, 2017

IRB Application No AS1727

Proposal Title: Homosexual Imagery in Advertisements: Similarities and Differences in Generational Responses

Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 3/28/2020

Principal Investigator(s):
Mandie Rowden Jami Armstrong Fullerton
OSU-Tulsa 700 N. Greenwo
Stillwater, OK 74078 Tulsa, OK 74106

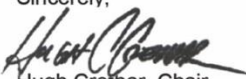
The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

- 1Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms
- 2Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
- 3Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of the research; and
- 4Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Dawnett Watkins 219 Scott Hall (phone: 405-744-5700, dawnett.watkins@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Hugh Crethar, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Mandie Nicole Rowden

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science/Arts

Thesis: HOMOSEXUAL IMAGERY IN ADVERTISEMENTS: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN GENERATIONAL RESPONSES

Major Field: Mass Communications

Biographical:

Education: Received Bachelor of Science degree in Mass Communications from Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee in May 2008. Completed the requirements for the Master of Science degree with a major in Mass Communications at Oklahoma State University in July, 2017.

Experience: Employed by Taylor Basden & Associates as Marketing and Communications Coordinator in Tulsa, Oklahoma 2008-2012; Employed by *Urban Tulsa Weekly* as Managing Editor in Tulsa, Oklahoma 2010-2012; Employed by Operation Aware of Oklahoma as Community Relations Manager in Tulsa, Oklahoma 2012-2013; Employed by Cancer Treatment Centers of America as Outreach Coordinator in Tulsa, Oklahoma 2013-2016; Employed by YWCA Tulsa as Communications Manager in Tulsa, Oklahoma 2016-2017.

Professional Memberships: Association for Women in Communications, Tulsa, Oklahoma, 2016-2017

