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The Role of Women, Sexualization and Objectification in Lgbtq Advertising

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The sexualization of women is taking place in LGBTQ TV Advertising. Within LGBTQ advertisements, for women, the most dominant appeal is sexual. In terms of LGBTQ connotation, for female characters, the positive LGBTQ connotation is dominant. If the main character is female, then she is portrayed as a protagonist.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

In advertising, the sexualization of women is taking place in the LGBTQ target market segment. Whilst LGBTQ advertisements continue to target males using humor as the dominant appeal; for women, the most dominant appeal is sexual. When the main character in the advertisement is portrayed in terms of LGBTQ connotation, a positive and negative connotation is fairly evenly distributed for male characters, however; for female characters, the positive LGBTQ connotation is dominant. If the main character is female, she is more likely to be portrayed as a protagonist.

Marketers and organizations alike, balance a fine line between appealing to both LGBTQ and mainstream clients without ostracizing one or the other, specifically their mainstream clients, as they are a larger portion of the population (Flounders & Mabry-Flynn (2016). Heterosexuals desire lesbian imagery over gay male imagery, therefore, advertisers targeting the gay market will use lesbian imagery because not only does it reach homosexual consumers, but also reduces the chance of heterosexuals identifying the advertisement as LGBTQ (Hootens et. al., 2009). The heterosexual audience has a positive attitude towards lesbian ads, and these results are compounded when the level of intimacy displayed in the advertisements are amplified (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2005). It is significant to note that lesbians are often depicted as highly sexualized in mainstream media (Flounders & Mabry-Flynn, 2016).

This exploratory research examines the the portrayal of women when either the main character and/or voiceover (gender, sexuality, antagonist, protagonist) in LGBTQ TV advertisements. In the first instance, the aim was to determine the dominant appeals (emotional, fear, humor, rational, sexual) and LGBTQ connotations (positive, negative) that are associated with women in advertisements to the LGBTQ community.

The diversity of the LGBTQ community has meant there isn't one, single 'LGBTQ' identity. Oakenfull (2007) found clear distinctions between gay and lesbian consumers and argued that marketers had to use lesbian imagery and not just gay imagery in advertisements to be effective in the two communities. Um (2014) found heterosexual consumers to respond less favorably to gay themed advertising, including a differential in heterosexual males more negatively evaluating gay-themed advertising and the brand advertised than did heterosexual females. Oakenfull & Greenlee (2004) cautioned marketers to consider both the gender of their target gay or lesbian audience and the gender of the heterosexual audience likely to view the advertising when creating their advertisements.

Hypothesis 1: Women are featured less prominently in LGBTQ TV advertising campaigns

Using sex as a method of selling supports the influence of silencing a woman's appeal by exhibiting women in an objectified manner for male pleasure and utilization. This common portrayal accentuates physical attractiveness, prominent displays of the body, and sexual mannerisms of women. Then, marketers used more explicit messages, though this was imagery that was unique and recognizable to the LGBTQ community, these methods were used to mask

the underlying LGBTQ message from the non-LGBTQ population (Peñaloza, 1996).

Hypothesis 2: For female characters in LGBTQ TV advertising campaigns, the most dominant appeal is sexual

The study examined the characteristics of LGBTQ TV advertisements (n = 300) that ranged from the years 1952 to 2016. It examined the portrayal of the main character and voiceover (gender, sexuality, antagonist, protagonist), dominant appeal (emotional, fear, humor, rational, sexual) and LGBTQ connotations (positive, negative).

When comparing the Western world (US, EU, Oceania) and less developed countries (Asia, Africa, South America), LGBTQ advertisements continue to target males ($\chi^2 = 4.74$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$). The broader focus remains on the Western world (135 ads, 46.7% male; 50 ads, 17.3% female), whilst similar in less developed countries (63 ads, 21.8% male; 41 ads, 14.2% female), the gap between genders is much smaller.

If the main character is male, then the voiceover is traditionally male as well (87%), hence it is congruent ($\chi^2 = 18.59$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). For females, the voiceover gender is more evenly distributed (54.3% male, 45.7% female). However only very few cases occur where advertisements have a female voiceover (33 ads, 19.9%). In terms of how the main character of the advertisement is portrayed with regards to LGBTQ connotation, a positive and negative connotation is fairly evenly distributed for male characters, however, for female characters (36 ads, 62.1%), the positive LGBTQ connotation is dominant ($\chi^2 = 12.92$, $df = 2$, $p < .01$). Lastly, if the main character is female (46 ads, 79.3%), she is more likely to be portrayed as a protagonist ($\chi^2 = 6.32$, $df = 1$, $p < .05$).

The sexualization of women also takes place in the LGBTQ community ($\chi^2 = 12.94$, $df = 4$, $p < .01$). For male characters, the most dominant appeal is humor (80 ads, 36.5%), followed by sexual appeals (56 ads, 25.6%). For female characters, the most dominant appeal is sexual (24 ads, 41.4%), with all other appeals evenly distributed. If the character is male (175 ads, 63.2%), the target audience is more likely to be straight rather than identify as LGBTQ ($\chi^2 = 7.57$, $df = 1$, $p < .01$).

The dominant appeals in LGBTQ advertisements are humor, eroticism, and leisure. Reichert & Ramirez (2000) discovered four predominant traits of sexual advertisements including: physical appearance of models, behavior or movement, intimacy between models, and contextual features. Gill (2009) argues that the proliferation of sexually explicit imagery within both contemporary and LGBTQ advertising indicates that sexualization is neither a homogenous or singular process. Individuals within the LGBTQ community are sexualized in specific ways and in a visual culture, lesbian, bisexual, and queer women are often easily recognizable 'figures' in LGBTQ advertising, yet sexualization doesn't necessarily maneuver outside of class, gender and/or radicalization due to the fact that it remains overwhelmingly ageist and heteronormative (Evans, Riley & Shankar, 2010). In this respect, findings from the current research are possibly the first evidence that women are underrepresented in LGBTQ advertising and female characters are often portrayed with a positive

LGBTQ connotation. The perspectives of the sexualization of women in LGBTQ advertising highlights two key areas for consideration (1) the portrayal of women compromising the relationship they have with their own and other women's bodies, and (2) LGBTQ advertising sensibility, underwrites the discussion around the sexualization of women, including the prospects of empowering female sexuality rather than demonizing it (Randazzo, Farmer & Lamb, 2015).

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