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Are Fans Proud of the WNBA's 'Pride' Campaign?

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Abstract

In May 2014, the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) launched its Pride campaign and became the first professional sport league in the US to explicitly reach out to gay fans. As the public opinion toward homosexuality has been changing, sport marketers need to understand how to reach and respond to heterosexual and gay fans without alienating one or the other. The purpose of this study was to investigate heterosexual and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) fans' attitudes toward the Pride campaign, and the impact of fandom, attitude toward the Pride campaign and sexual orientation on consumption intentions. One-way ANOVAs, a one-way ANCOVA, and hierarchical multiple regression analyses were performed to investigate the hypotheses. The main finding of the study was that LGB fans had more favorable attitudes toward the Pride campaign than heterosexual fans, yet their consumption intentions were comparable, and attitude toward the Pride campaign had no influence on fans' consumption intentions.

Keywords: fan attitudes, gay-themed marketing, consumption intentions, LGBT, WNBA

Introduction

In May 2014, the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) launched its Pride campaign and became the first professional sport league in the US to explicitly reach out to gay fans. The league's president, Laurel J. Richie, said "For us it's a celebration of diversity and inclusion and recognition of an audience that has been with us very passionately" (Weiner-Bronner, 2014, p. 1). As part of the campaign, the WNBA's first pride game was played between the Tulsa Shock and Chicago Sky on June 22 and televised nationally by ESPN2 (Dwyer, 2014). In addition to the pride game, individual teams had pride nights and attended local pride events and grassroots events advocating for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights (Associated Press, 2014) as part of the campaign. Previously, individual WNBA teams such as the LA Sparks and Phoenix Mercury had targeted the LGBT community, but this was the first league wide marketing campaign.

The WNBA's large following among the LGBT community has been well known. The league studied its fan base closely in 2012 and identified that 25% of WNBA

fans were lesbians (Morris, 2014), while statistics could be higher for some teams such as NY Liberty reporting 40% (Kort, 2002). However, the league had not publicly acknowledged the fact and made it a part of its marketing strategy until 2014. The league's 18 years of hesitancy toward marketing to the LGBT community was due to the fear of alienating other fan segments and negative public reaction. For example, the Washington Mystics were caught in a controversy when a local lesbian group was shown on their scoreboard. Similarly, the Sacramento Monarchs had a stir because team officials refused to display the name of a local lesbian group, claiming the name was offensive (Hruby, 2001). In addition, the LA Sparks' marketing staff refused to display gay and lesbian families on a billboard, and as a result lost a sponsorship deal with the LA Gay and Lesbian Center (Bower & Stukin, 2001). In New York, lesbian fans staged a protest over the lack of acknowledgement the Liberty provided them as the largest fan segment in their arena by kissing during every time-out (Kort, 2002).

However, the political, legal and social realm has changed in the US within recent years. For example, in 2013, the Supreme Court struck down Section 3 of the

Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) giving same-sex couples equal federal rights. According to a 2014 Gallup poll, 55% of Americans reported supporting same-sex marriage (Becker, 2014). Changes also took place in the sport landscape in 2014 with 109 athletes, coaches, officials and sport administrators coming out as gay, lesbian or bisexual. The list included the NFL's Michael Sam and WNBA's Brittney Griner (Out Sports, 2014). Along with these shifts, the WNBA created the Pride campaign to embrace their loyal LGBT fan base in 2014.

The LGBT community is not only important for the WNBA due to their long standing support of the league, but also because of the potential the community has as consumers. In general, LGBT consumers have become an important target market for all industries due to large amounts of disposable income and an estimated \$830 million spending power (Pages, 2015). According to a 2010 Harris Poll as cited in Out Think Partners (Roth, nd), there are approximately 15 million Americans over the age of 18 who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, and over 3 million same-sex households, less than 25% of which have children. As a result, the LGBT market is largely comprised of "dinks" meaning double income with no kids, which has resulted in some marketers calling the LGBT consumer segment a "dream market" (Bagnall, 2011). In addition, a WNBA market research study found that 25 percent of lesbians watch the league's games on TV, while 21 percent have attended a game (Associated Press, 2014). Therefore, the LGBT community is an important market segment for the league.

Although the importance of the LGBT fan base to the WNBA is undeniable, and public opinion toward homosexuality has been changing, marketers still see marketing to this population as risky. Prior studies have found that gay-themed advertising has negative effects on heterosexual consumers (Bhat, Leigh, & Wardlow, 1998; Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2005; Oakenfull, McCarthy, & Greenlee, 2008; Um, 2014; Wilkie, 2007). On the other hand, LGBT consumers tend to show more interest in advertising and brands that they can identify with (Jaffe, 1991; Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2005; Oakenfull et al., 2008). As a result, it is not clear how to target heterosexual and LGBT consumers at the same time. Given this shifting landscape, sport marketers need to understand how to reach and respond to heterosexual and LGBT fans without alienating one or the other. Furthermore, the impact of marketing to the LGBT community is unknown among all professional sport properties. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by investigating heterosexual and LGBT fans' attitudes toward the Pride campaign, and the impact of fandom, attitude toward the Pride

campaign and sexual orientation on consumption intentions.

LGBT Marketing

Gay marketing is any marketing strategy targeting strictly LGBT consumers and may include marketing campaigns, advertising in media, offering tailored products or services to LGBT people or supporting LGBT initiatives as part of a business' community relations (Wheeler-Quinnell, 2010). Marketing campaigns could be publicized in gay media or mainstream media, and gay-themed advertisements could include implicit or explicit references. Implicit references, which are also known as "gay window advertising" (Bronski, 1984), vaguely imply gay identity and may include language, gestures, and symbols of gay subculture that appeal to LGBT consumers but go unnoticed by heterosexual customers (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2005). On the other hand, explicit references are known as "out of closet advertising" (Wan-Hsiu, 2004) and show self-identified LGBT characters to target consumers and display a clear position of identification for both LGBT and heterosexual consumers.

Gay-themed advertising and marketing campaigns reach out not only to LGBT people but to their families and friends, and also to heterosexual consumers who make purchasing decisions based on their own values and lifestyle (Wheeler-Quinnell, 2010). These marketing activities may create negative backlash among heterosexual consumers who may then develop negative attitudes toward the advertisement and the brand (Angelini & Bradley, 2010; Um, 2014). Marketers need to make careful decisions on placement of gay-themed advertisements and marketing campaigns when considering gay or mainstream media. Similarly, the decision whether to use implicit or explicit references must be thoughtfully considered.

While studies on gay-themed advertising and consumers' attitudes toward ads and brands were found within the marketing literature, we could not locate any studies focusing on consumers' attitudes toward gay-themed advertisements and brands in the sport context. In this process, multiple databases (i.e., Academic Search Premier, Emerald, Eric, JSTOR, MainFile, ProQuest, PsychINFO, and Sage Journals) were searched with several keywords such as gay marketing and sports, gay fans and sport marketing, LGBT, sport, and marketing. Several studies focusing on the Gay Games were found, however they focused on the economic impact of the games (Pitts & Ayers, 2000, 2001), use of the Gay Games in destination marketing (Pitts & Ayers, 2000), and sponsorship of the Gay Games (Pitts, 2004). With such limited research

focusing on the LGBT market within sport, the bulk of the literature review will focus on consumers' attitudes toward gay-themed advertising and brands in general.

Consumer Attitudes Toward Gay-Themed Advertising

Prior studies investigating consumers' attitudes toward gay-themed advertising have found that gay-themed advertising has negative effects on heterosexual consumers. Heterosexual consumers reported lower purchase intentions (Bhat et al., 1998; Wilkie, 2007) and less favorable attitudes toward ads and brands featuring gay imagery (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2005; Oakenfull et al., 2008; Um, 2014). In addition, Angelini and Bradley (2010) found that while gay-themed advertising could generate greater attention and recall, the responses to the ad, brand and the publication were negative. Um (2014) also suggested that ads featuring gay imagery could lead to negative brand evaluation and placing these advertisements in mainstream media could produce a backlash among heterosexual consumers. Researchers explained the negative attitudes of heterosexual consumers utilizing the identity theory (Angelini & Bradley, 2010; Bhat et al., 1998). According to Jaffe (1991), consumers respond more favorably to marketing that they can identify with and less favorably to marketing contrary to their self-identity. In alignment with this theory, LGBT consumers have more positive attitudes toward gay-themed advertising and show more interest in affiliated brands (Jaffe, 1991; Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2005; Oakenfull et al., 2008). Smith and Malone (2003) found similar results and reported that LGBT consumers were more interested in and more likely to purchase brands that advertise directly to them. Therefore, it was hypothesized that:

H1: LGBT fans will have more favorable attitudes toward the WNBA's Pride campaign than heterosexual fans.

The reviewed literature presented negative attitudes toward gay-themed advertising among heterosexual consumers in general. However, there is also a sex difference in attitudes toward gay-themed advertising. Oakenfull et al. (2008) studied the effects of heterosexually and homosexually oriented advertising on men and women. Their results indicated that heterosexual women responded more positively to gay-themed advertisements than did heterosexual men. They explained the difference between men and women with homophobic attitudes and gender roles. Heterosexual men, generally, hold a more negative attitude toward homosexuality than heterosexual women (Herek, 1988; Kite & Whitley, 1996; Moskowitz, Rieger, & Roloff, 2010) due to having more traditional views of gender

roles (Kite & Whitley, 1996) and perceiving homosexuality as a gender role violation (Um, 2014). Therefore, it was hypothesized that:

H2: Heterosexual women will have more positive attitudes toward the WNBA's Pride campaign than heterosexual men.

H3: Heterosexual men will hold more traditional views of gender roles than heterosexual women.

Fandom, Attitude Toward Gay-Themed Advertising, and Consumption Intentions

Prior studies demonstrated brand commitment, which was defined as an emotional or psychological attachment to a brand within a product category (Lastovicka & Gardner, 1979), as a factor related to the attitudes toward brands and their gay-themed advertising. According to Ahluwalia, Brunkrant, and Unnava (2000), high-commitment consumers process negative publicity with bias, while low-commitment consumers view it unfavorably. The study sample was university students in business and marketing courses, and the experimental design investigated attitude changes toward sport shoe brands between self-identified high and low commitment consumers. With a sample of young heterosexual consumers, Um (2014) studied the impact of brand commitment on attitudes toward a brand and its gay-themed advertisement. The high-commitment consumers held more positive attitudes toward the brand with gay-themed advertisement than the low-commitment consumers, while attitudes toward the gay-themed advertisement were not influenced by the consumer's level of brand commitment.

In the sport marketing field, a similar connection has been built between fan identification, which was defined as "the personal commitment and emotional involvement customers have with a sport [team]" (Sutton, McDonald, Milne, & Cimperman, 1997, p. 15), and attitudes toward sport brands and teams. Gau and Kim (2011) and McCabe (2011) presented positive relationships between fandom and attitudes toward sport brands. Furthermore, having favorable attitudes toward a sport property whether a team or a league increases fans' and spectators' likelihood of attending events, watching games on TV, purchasing sport property products and online consumption via social media and web (Dwyer, 2013; Funk & James, 2006; Lim, Martin, & Kwak, 2010; Mumcu, Lough, & Barnes, 2016). Finally, the relationship between sport fandom and consumption intentions has been validated. Murrel and Dietz (1992), Wann (2006), and Brown, Devlin and Billings (2013) reported that fans with stronger attachment to a sport team attend more events, consume related media more, and purchase more merchandise than the fans with lower fandom.

Attitudes toward gay-themed marketing and the relationship with sport fandom and consumption behavior are yet to be investigated in the sport marketing field. Therefore, we formulated the following hypothesis:

H4: WNBA fandom will moderate the relationship between sexual orientation and attitude toward the Pride campaign.

H5: WNBA fandom, sexual orientation and attitude toward the Pride campaign will predict consumption intentions in terms of attendance, viewership, social media consumption and online consumption.

H6: WNBA fandom will moderate the relationship between sexual orientation and consumption intentions.

Method

Participants

Individuals from the WNBA's database were invited to participate in the study with an email sent by the league office during the 2015 WNBA season.

"Dear Fan, We value your opinion and would appreciate your input on a set of questions about the WNBA and its marketing. Your responses will be very helpful as we look to understand more about our fans. We look forward to seeing your responses. Please click on the following link to take the survey."

The WNBA database is composed of individuals, who have expressed interest in receiving WNBA related news, updates, alerts, and offers. These consumers were expected to be aware of the WNBA's marketing campaigns and have an opinion about the league and its campaigns. Therefore, they were the most suitable sample to use in examining fans' perceptions of the WNBA's Pride campaign.

Instruments

The survey instrument, which was hosted by Survey Monkey, included four sections including demographics (age, sex, race & ethnicity, sexual orientation, team affinity, and season ticket holder status), Sport Fandom Questionnaire (Wann, 2002), items measuring attitudes toward the Pride campaign, consumption intention items, and personality traits items. Descriptions of each instrument used to measure the construct identified follows.

Sport Fandom Questionnaire. A five-item Sport Fandom Questionnaire (Wann, 2002) was used in the study to assess respondents' WNBA fandom level. The SFQ was used due to the ease of modification (the word sport was replaced with WNBA), limited number

of items, and frequent use in previous studies (i.e., Melnick & Wann, 2004; Mumcu, Lough, & Barnes, 2016; Mumcu & Marley, in press; Wann, Dunham, Byrd, & Keenan, 2004). A sample item read, "I consider myself to be a WNBA fan." Response options to the items ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 8 (strongly agree), and higher scores indicated greater level of fandom among participants.

Attitude Items. Attitudes toward the Pride campaign were measured with 12 items (e.g. Pleasant-Unpleasant, Welcoming-Offensive, and Positive-Negative) on a 7-point semantic differential scale which was adapted from Bruner, James and Hensel (2001). The word pairs were chosen in consultation with the NBA league office to meet their expectations from the research. The word pairs used targeted respondents' approval and acceptance of the Pride campaign. Higher scores indicated a more positive attitude toward the pride campaign.

Consumption Intention Items. WNBA fans' consumption intentions in terms of attending WNBA games, TV viewership, and online consumption (social media and web) were measured with four items adapted from Dwyer (2013) and Mumcu et al. (2016). A sample item reads, "I am likely to attend a WNBA game in the next 12 months." Response options to the items ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores represented a higher likelihood of consumption among participants.

Personality Trait Items. The aforementioned literature stated that sex differences on evaluation of gay-themed advertising could be explained by the differences in gender role views held by men and women. Gender roles are the roles that men and women are expected to hold based on their sex. An individual with a traditional gender role orientation believes that men and women should conduct behaviors appropriate to their sex (Blackstone, 2003). Although we planned to use the Social Interaction scale of the Male-Female Relations Questionnaire (MFRQ; Spence, Helmreich, & Sawin, 1980), which is a validated instrument measuring gender roles with 16 statements focusing on societal roles men and women should play (i.e., When there is an important job to be done, I prefer to have a man as a leader than a woman), the WNBA league officials did not find the instrument suitable to send to the consumers in their database. They proposed using personality traits instead. Therefore, in the interest of working collaboratively with our industry partner, items were changed to reflect those approved by the league.

In coherence with gender roles, men and women are expected to demonstrate traits classified as masculine and feminine. Instead of using the MFRQ (Spence,

Helmreich, & Sawin, 1980), to capture respondents' evaluation of male and female roles in society, we asked if they found ten personality traits (five stereotypical feminine traits and five stereotypical masculine traits) as being suitable for men or women. The personality traits used were in alignment with the MFRQ statements. For instance, for the item stated above we included dominant, decisive, and confident as personality traits and asked respondents "which of the following descriptions do you associate most strongly with women or men?" Each word could only be applied to one sex, creating a forced choice.

Analyses

The data were analyzed via SPSS 23. Hypothesis one was tested with a one-way ANOVA in which sexual orientation of the fan was entered as a between subjects variable and attitude toward the Pride campaign was the dependent variable. A separate one-way ANOVA was performed to test the sex effect on attitude toward the Pride campaign among heterosexual respondents. In order to examine sex differences on gender roles, cross tabs were run with sex (male vs. female) and personality traits. The fourth hypothesis was investigated with a one-way ANCOVA to examine the moderating effect of WNBA fandom between sexual orientation and attitude toward the Pride campaign. Finally, to test the fifth and sixth hypothesis, a series of hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. Consumption intention items were regressed on WNBA fandom, sexual orientation (2-level dummy coded variable), attitude toward the Pride campaign, and an interaction term (sexual orientation*WNBA fandom) to determine the significant predictors of future consumption behaviors and their additive effect.

Results

A total of 1,323 individuals from the WNBA database participated in the study, and 1,095 of which were identified as WNBA consumers based on their past consumption habits including attendance, viewership and online engagement. Only 52% of these WNBA consumers were aware of the league's Pride campaign; thus, the final sample size for the study was reduced to 544. Of the 544 respondents, 70.4% were female; the majority of the sample was Caucasian (54%), followed by African American (27%), with the remainder of individuals reporting to be Hispanic/Latino (5.9%), Asian/Pacific Islander (1.4%), or other (5.4%). Respondents were from various age groups; 3.1% was 18–24 years old, 6.8% was 25–34 years old, 11.6% was 35–44 years old, 27.6% was between 45–54 years old, 31.1% was between the ages of 55–64, and 19.9% was

65 years old or older. Finally, 43.3% of respondents were heterosexual and 38.8% reported identifying as lesbian/gay/bisexual. Note, from this point on instead of LGBT the LGB acronym is used when reporting results due to the absence of transgender respondents in the study. In addition to demographics, respondents were asked to report their favorite WNBA team. Every WNBA team was represented within the sample with Minnesota Lynx (13.6%) being the most popular and the Tulsa Shock (2.9%) being the least popular WNBA team.

Prior to conducting data analyses for the hypotheses, reliability of scores derived from the attitude toward the pride campaign items and the SFQ were examined. Both scales reported good reliability exceeding the cut off value of .70 for social sciences (Nunnally, 1978). The Cronbach's alpha for the 12 attitude items was .993, and .861 for the SFQ. In addition, a principle component analysis was performed and a single factor emerged explaining 92.82% of the variance in the 12 items measuring attitudes toward the Pride campaign. The list of items is provided in Appendix 2.

Sexual Orientation on Attitude Toward the Pride Campaign (H1)

The first hypothesis was tested with a one-way ANOVA to examine the differences between the LGB fans and heterosexual fans on their attitudes toward the Pride campaign. The homogeneity of variance assumption was violated (Levene's $F = 4.80, p = .03$). However, with large group sizes even a small difference in variances could result in significant Levene's F results, and the assumption should be double checked with Hartley's F_{\max} (Pearson & Hartley, 1954), which is also known as the variance ratio (Field, 2012). The variance ratio for the heterosexual and LGB groups was 1.17 (4.04/3.46) providing support for the interpretation of the ANOVA results because a variance ratio smaller than 2.0 indicates that data is suitable (Field, 2012). ANOVA results revealed a statistically significant difference between LGB fans' and heterosexual fans' attitude toward the Pride campaign $F(1, 445) = 10.58, p = .001$. This result indicated that LGB fans ($M = 5.69, SD = 1.86, n = 211$) had more favorable attitudes toward the Pride campaign than the heterosexual fans ($M = 5.09, SD = 2.01, n = 236$), and Cohen's d for the statistically significant difference was .31 which indicates a small to medium effect size (Cohen, 1992).

Heterosexual Fans' Attitude Toward the Pride Campaign (H2 and H3)

The second hypothesis aimed to determine whether heterosexual men and women held different attitudes

toward the Pride campaign. Data met the homogeneity of variance assumption (Levene's $F = 2.69, p = .10$). The one-way ANOVA result indicated no statistically significant sex differences ($p = .79$) among heterosexual WNBA fans' attitude toward the Pride campaign (men $X = 5.14, SD = 1.91, n = 92$; women $X = 5.06, SD = 2.07, n = 144$). To further investigate this finding and to answer the third hypothesis, crosstabs were used to examine perceptions among heterosexual men and women regarding personality traits as male or female appropriate. Both men and women rated traditional female traits (helpful, kind, nurturing, understanding and reliable) as appropriate for women. On the other hand, traditional male traits (competitive, confident, decisive, dominant and independent) were not agreed upon. With the exception of one trait - dominant, the majority of the female respondents rated all traditional male traits as appropriate for women. Men consistently reported an approximate 50-50 split on traditional male traits as being male or female appropriate (See Appendix 1 for crosstab results). Therefore, the majority of respondents regardless of their sex presented progressive views of men and women in society.

Moderating Effect of WNBA Fandom (H4)

A one-way ANCOVA was conducted to examine the difference between sexual orientation groups on attitude toward the Pride campaign controlling for WNBA fandom. The homogeneity of regression slopes assumption was met, $F(1, 443) = .555, p = .46$. The ANCOVA revealed a statistically significant main effect for sexual orientation, $F(1, 444) = 10.78, p = .001, \eta^2 = .024$, and WNBA fandom, $F(1, 444) = 6.81, p = .009, \eta^2 = .015$. Although the effect size was small (Cohen, 1992), attitude toward the Pride campaign was statistically higher for the LGB fans (estimated marginal $X = 5.69$) than the heterosexual fans (estimated marginal $X = 5.09$) after controlling for the WNBA fandom. See Figure 1 for the ANCOVA plot. In addition, there was a statistically significant positive relationship between the covariate—WNBA fandom and attitude toward the Pride campaign. The interaction effect between sexual orientation and WNBA fandom was not statistically significant, $F(1, 443) = .555, p = .46$ indicating that WNBA fandom did not moderate the relationship between sexual orientation and attitude toward the Pride campaign.

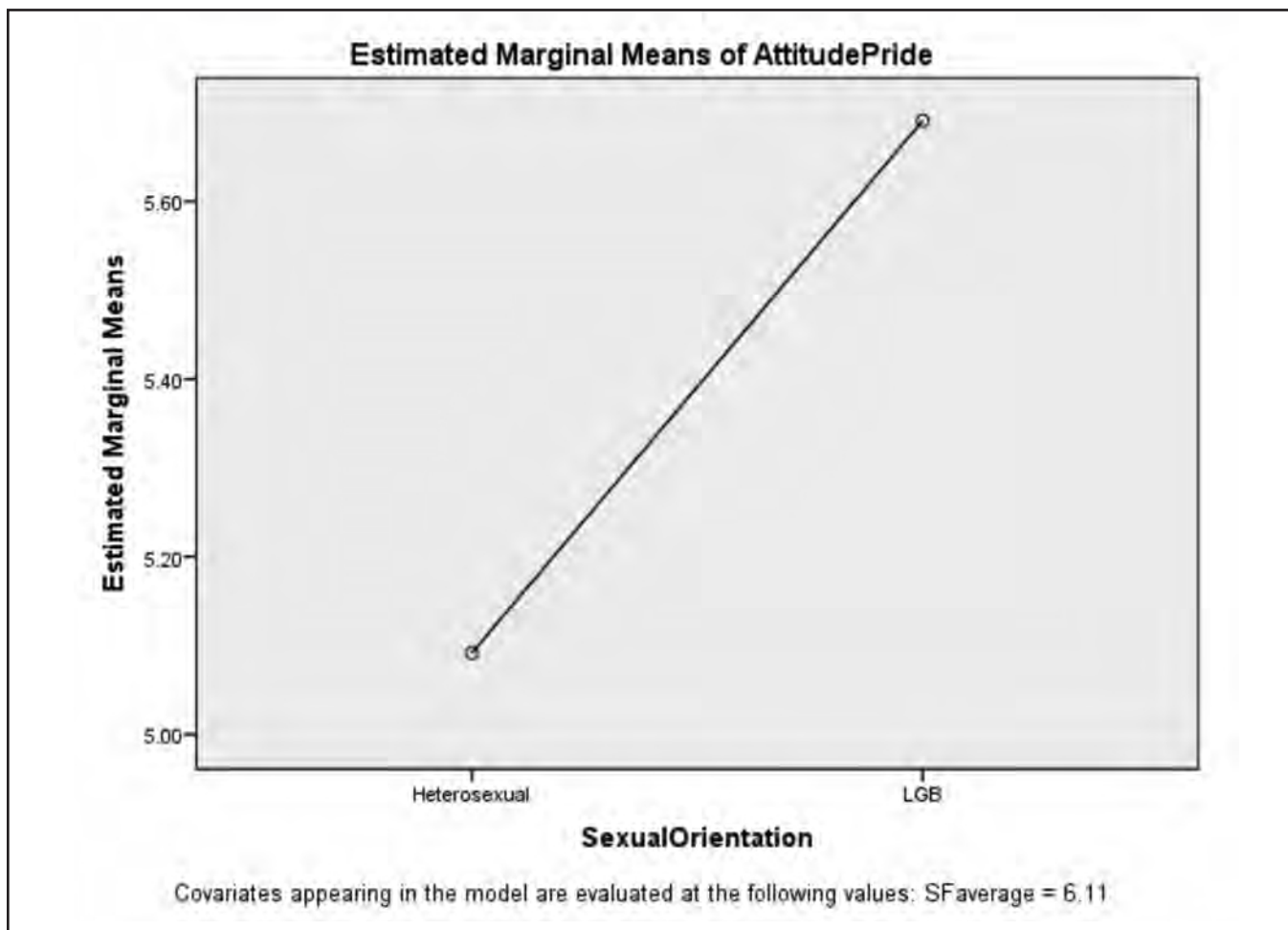


Figure 1. ANCOVA for attitude toward the Pride campaign by sexual orientation and WNBA fandom.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations for Consumption Intentions and its Predictors ($n = 544$)

	CI1	CI2	CI3	CI4	WNBA Fan- dom_c	Sexual Orien- tation	Attitude Pride	iFandom _c*SO	Mean (SD)
CI1-Attendance	1								5.67 (1.79)
CI2-Viewership	.272***	1							6.50 (1.06)
CI3-Social Media	.225***	.348***	1						5.68 (1.71)
CI4-Web	.300***	.650***	.415***	1					6.40 (1.14)
WNBA Fandom_c	.374***	.631***	.424***	.622***	1				.00 (.95)
Sexual Orientation	.052	-.075	-.078	.009	-.003	1			.47 (.50)
Attitude Pride	.076	.106*	.022	.135**	.145**	.152**	1		5.39 (1.96)
iFandom_c*SO	.314***	.527**	.371***	.471***	.744***	.009	.068	1	.01 (.71)

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$
WNBA Fandom_c: Centered WNBA fandom scores
iFandom_c*SO: Interaction term calculated by multiplying centered WNBA fandom scores with dummy coded sexual orientation variable

Predictors of Consumption Intentions (H5 and H6)

Four hierarchical multiple regression analyses were performed to identify the predictors of the consumption intentions in terms of attendance, viewership, social media consumption and web consumption. In the first block, WNBA fandom and dummy coded sexual orientation (LGB group being the reference group) were the predictors in the model. WNBA fandom and sexual orientation were entered in to the model first because prior studies had shown that sport fandom predicted consumption intentions (Brown et al., 2013; Murrell & Dietz, 1992; Wann, 2006) and consumers were inclined to have higher purchase intentions for products that aligned with their sexual identity (Bhat et al., 1998; Smith & Malone, 2003; Wilkie, 2007). In order to determine the influence of the marketing campaign on consumption intentions, over and above the influence of WNBA fandom and sexual orientation, attitude toward the Pride campaign was entered separately in the second block. Finally, the interaction term (sexual orientation * WNBA fandom) was entered in the third block to examine the moderating effect of WNBA fandom on the relationship between sexual orientation and consumption intention items. As suggested by Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003) the moderator, WNBA fandom scores, was centered on its mean and the interaction term was created with the centered WNBA fandom scores to control the multicollinearity between the predictor, WNBA fandom and the interaction term (sexual orientation * WNBA fandom). See Table 1 and 2 for correlations among the variables and the results of the hierarchical regression analyses.

The overall regression models predicting attendance, viewership, social media and web consumptions were statistically significant ($p < .001$), and the variance explained by the regression models ranged from 42.5% for viewership to 14.1% for attendance. The associated F statistics, R^2 and adjusted R^2 for each model are provided in the Table 2. The addition of attitude toward the Pride campaign in the second block did not improve the regression models statistically for any of the future consumption behaviors. The addition of the interaction term (iFandom_c*SO) in the third block only contributed to the prediction of future viewership ($\Delta R^2 = .006$, $\Delta F = 4.45$, $p = .035$), and did not improve future attendance, social media or web consumption. The change in R^2 and the associated F statistics of each block for all hierarchical regressions are provided in Table 2.

Examination of the regression coefficients revealed that WNBA fandom was the only statistically significant predictor of future attendance, social media and web consumption controlling for sexual orientation, attitude toward the pride campaign and the interaction between WNBA fandom and sexual orientation. As the WNBA fandom increased, respondents' likelihood to attend games, and follow WNBA on social media and through web increased. The regression analysis also reported a statistically significant difference on future game viewership of heterosexual and LGB fans controlling for WNBA fandom and attitude toward the Pride campaign. Heterosexual fans reported higher viewership intentions than the LGB fans. However, there was also a statistically significant moderation effect (iFandom_c*SO) in prediction of future viewer-

Table 2
Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Consumption Intentions ($n = 447$)

CI1 – Attendance	Variable	Model F	R^2	Adj. R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF	B	SE	β
Model 1		36.39***	.141	.137	.141	36.39***			
	WNBA Fandom_c						.68	.08	.37***
	Sexual Orientation						.18	.15	.05
Model 2		24.58***	.143	.137	.002	.96			
	WNBA Fandom_c						.67	.08	.37***
	Sexual Orientation						.16	.16	.05
	Attitude Pride						.04	.04	.04
Model 3		18.89***	.146	.138	.003	1.69			
	WNBA Fandom_c						.55	.12	.30***
	Sexual Orientation						.16	.16	.05
	Attitude Pride						.04	.04	.05
	iFandom_c*SO						.21	.16	.09
CI2 – Viewership	Variable	Model F	R^2	Adj. R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF	B	SE	β
Model 1		159.52***	.418	.415	.418	159.52***			
	WNBA Fandom_c						.72	.04	.64***
	Sexual Orientation						-.16	.08	-.07*
Model 2		106.60***	.419	.415	.001	.87			
	WNBA Fandom_c						.71	.04	.64***
	Sexual Orientation						-.17	.08	-.08*
	Attitude Pride						.02	.02	.03
Model 3		81.69***	.425	.420	.006	4.45*			
	WNBA Fandom_c						.62	.06	.55***
	Sexual Orientation						-.17	.08	-.08*
	Attitude Pride						.02	.02	.04
	iFandom_c*SO						.17	.08	.11*
CI3 – Social Media	Variable	Model F	R^2	Adj. R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF	B	SE	β
Model 1		50.42***	.185	.181	.185	50.42***			
	WNBA Fandom_c						.77	.08	.42***
	Sexual Orientation						-.27	.15	-.08
Model 2		33.54***	.185	.180	.000	.00			
	WNBA Fandom_c						.77	.08	.42***
	Sexual Orientation						-.27	.15	-.08
	Attitude Pride						-.00	.04	-.00
Model 3		26.32***	.192	.185	.007	3.97			
	WNBA Fandom_c						.59	.12	.33***
	Sexual Orientation						-.27	.15	-.08
	Attitude Pride						.00	.04	.00
	iFandom_c*SO						.31	.16	.13

Table 2, continued

Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Consumption Intentions ($n = 447$)

CI4 –	Variable	Model F	R^2	Adj. R^2	ΔR^2	ΔF	B	SE	β
Model 1		138.45***	.384	.381	.384	138.46***			
	WNBA Fandom_c						.74	.04	.62***
	Sexual Orientation						.03	.09	.01
Model 2		93.48***	.388	.384	.004	2.56			
	WNBA Fandom_c						.73	.05	.61***
	Sexual Orientation						.00	.09	.00
	Attitude Pride						.04	.02	.06
Model 3		70.04***	.388	.382	.000	0.22			
	WNBA Fandom_c						.71	.07	.59***
	Sexual Orientation						.00	.09	.00
	Attitude Pride						.04	.02	.06
	iFandom_c*SO						.04	.09	.03

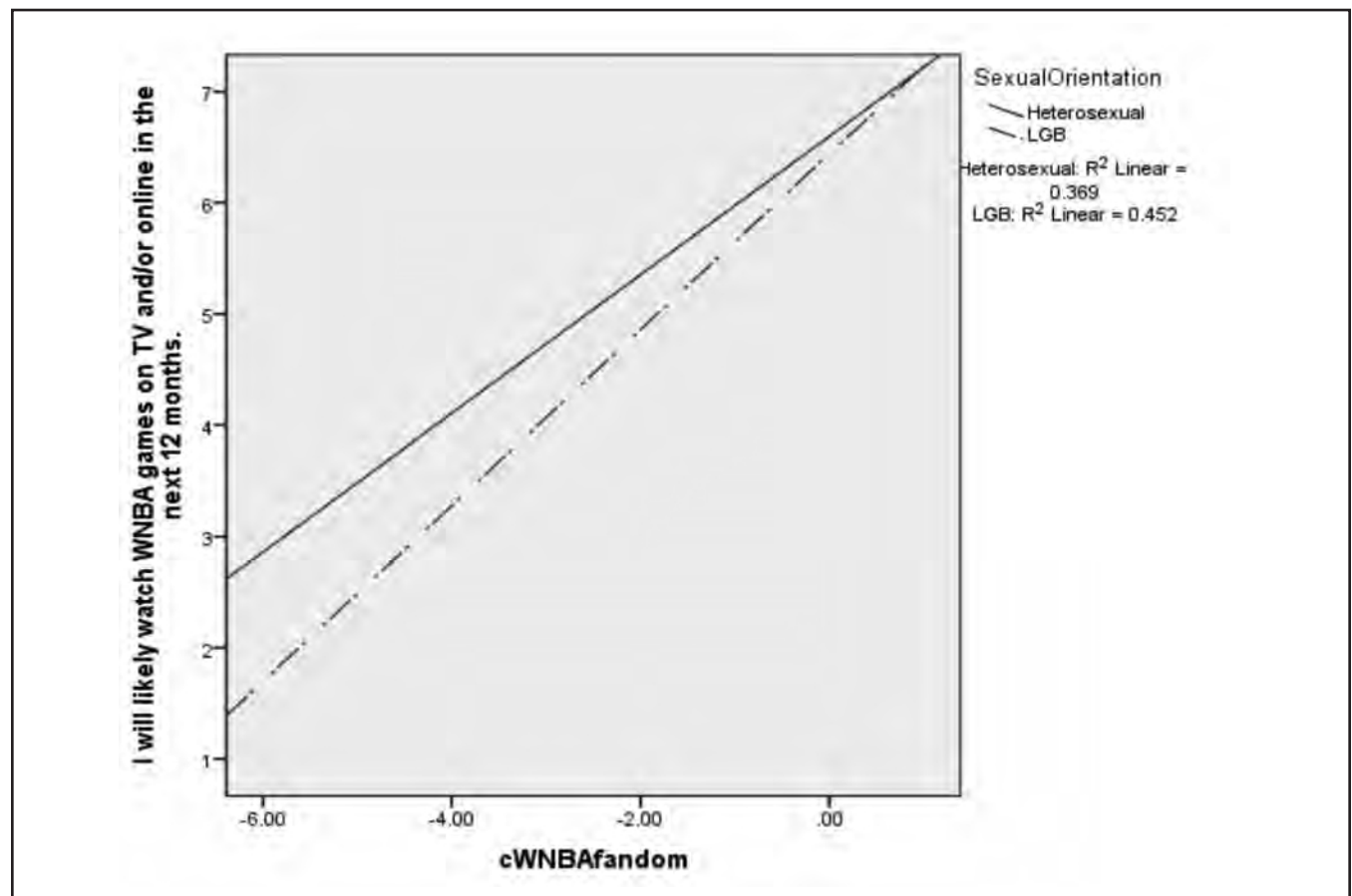
*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$ 

Figure 2. Moderation effect of WNBA fandom on sexual orientation and game viewership intentions.

ship. LGB fans reported higher viewership intentions than heterosexual fans when their WNBA fandom was considered. See Figure 2 for the illustration of this interaction.

Discussion

The most important finding from this study was that the Pride campaign had no adverse effect on heterosexual consumers. As was expected, LGB fans reported higher evaluations of the Pride campaign. Ironically in

this case, the statistically significant difference was not very large, meaning the difference is not likely to be significant from a *practical* standpoint. The question this generates is whether the Pride campaign was more implicit than explicit; given 48% of self-identified WNBA fans in this study were not aware of the Pride campaign, 15% of whom self-identified as LGB. Previous research found the gay community is known to show more interest in brands with which they can identify (Jaffe, 1991; Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2005; Oakenfull et al., 2008), yet in this study LGB fans did not report higher consumption intentions. There is a fine line for marketers to navigate in efforts to avoid offending heterosexual consumers, while directly appealing to LGBT consumers. When it comes to sport, increasing consumption intentions may be possible with improved awareness (Funk & James, 2001).

Another important finding was fandom level being the only predictor of consumption intentions. In fact, heterosexual fans and LGB fans reported similar consumption intentions regarding future WNBA games; as fandom increased fans' likelihood to attend games and follow WNBA on social media and through the internet increased. From this finding it appears that the Pride campaign had no adverse effect on fan's consumption intentions. In fact, heterosexual fans reported higher viewership intentions than the LGB fans, suggesting that in their effort to maintain the delicate balance between marketing designed specifically to appeal to the LGB consumer, while not alienating the heterosexual fan-base, the Pride campaign appears to have succeeded. While it can be argued that the Pride campaign lacked visibility and was not explicitly presented to the fans, the contrasting positive result was the campaign had no adverse effect on the heterosexual fan base, thus the balance was maintained.

Both heterosexual and LGB fans reported high attitude scores (over 5 on a 7 point scale) for the Pride campaign, yet, the only predictor for consumption intentions was the fandom measure. High levels of fandom appear to be the key to increasing consumption among WNBA fans. Murrell and Dietz (1992), Wann (2006), and Brown et al. (2013) reported that fans with stronger attachment to a sport team attend more events, consume related media more, and purchase more merchandise than the fans with lower fandom. This appears to hold true for LGBT fans. When considering the content of the items comprising Wann's Sport Fandom scale, we see that fandom is measured in terms of identity. Smith and Malone (2003) reported that gay consumers were more interested in and more likely to purchase brands that advertise directly to them. Thus, the WNBA should focus on building

deeper emotional ties and enhancing fan identity in their marketing campaigns targeting their LGBT fans.

Lastly, no statistically significant sex differences were found among heterosexual WNBA fans with regards to attitudes toward the Pride campaign. This hypothesis was developed based on prior research indicating that heterosexual males hold more homophobic attitudes than heterosexual females due to carrying more traditional gender roles (Kite & Whitney, 1996; Moskowitz et al., 2010). We further investigated the outcome of this hypothesis by exploring gender roles of heterosexual male and female WNBA fans. Respondents presented progressive views of men and women in society, based on perceptions of personality traits as male and female appropriate. This supports the changing views of society being reflected in the recent events mentioned previously, such as 109 athletes, coaches, officials, and sport administrators coming out as gay, lesbian, or bisexual in 2014, and Supreme Court ruling regarding the Defense of Marriage Act. These societal shifts suggest the opportunity to market to the LGBT consumers may becoming less controversial, and therefore warrant attention by the sport industry. While the WNBA campaign had limitations, their initial step should be viewed positively as a future direction for expanding marketing communication strategies to more effectively target a potentially valuable fan-base that has been largely ignored by the sport industry.

Still, an argument can be made that if the campaign was intended to demonstrate the league's *recognition* of LGBT fans (Weiner-Bronner, 2014), it was only marginally successful. With the majority of respondents regardless of their sex expressing progressive views of men and women, the league appears to have considerable space to explore options for marketing toward the LGBT fan base. In fact, a strategic approach to recognize and value their LGBT fan base is most likely the best action to offset the string of protests among LGBT fans in Washington, Sacramento and New York (Hruby, 2001; Bower & Stukin, 2001; Kort, 2002).

Since sexual orientation was the main factor in attitudinal differences toward the Pride campaign, continuing development of identity based marketing campaigns appears to be a viable strategy. This notion is further supported by the finding that WNBA fandom predicted future consumption intentions, and seemingly points to an important concern noted in the demographics of this study with the wide age discrepancies in fan representation. Millennials were under-represented with 9.9% of respondents under 35, while fans over 55 years of age comprised 50% of the respondents. Primarily the concern here lies within the notion of identity. Older female fans represent the "Title IX" era, and often identify with women's sport

with a “cause” type mindset (Rubin & Lough, 2015). They support women’s sport as fans to further the cause of gender equity in sport (Mumcu et al., 2016). In contrast, millennials are known to have more of an entitlement mindset with regard to gender equity (Rubin & Lough, 2015), meaning from an identity perspective, millennials are less likely to view their fandom as a means to support their gender or to see the “cause” aspect as central to their identity. New approaches to target millennial consumers will need to take into consideration these societal shifts that seem apparent in the findings of this study.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

Male and female heterosexual fans reported similar evaluations of the Pride campaign, despite the expectation that sex differences would be found. This hypothesis was based on previous research showing that in general, men hold more homophobic attitudes than women and this difference is typically explained by their views of gender roles. This finding may point to a limitation in the study, given most of the study participants were female, therefore no firm conclusion can be established on this point alone and future study appears warranted. In general, participants expressed more progressive views of appropriate traits for men and women, which could be an important direction for future research considering the shifting perspectives on egalitarian gender roles and how these perspectives may best play out in marketing communication. Similarly, the homogeneity of the fandom scores appears to be a limitation, given respondents are known to be fans of the league. Only 17 participants reported fandom scores of four or lower on the eight point scale. Lastly, over 50% of study participants were 55 years of age and older, and 54% were white. The low representation of millennials and African American fans in this study is clearly a limitation. Additional research is needed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of fan perceptions of specific marketing campaigns deeply aligned with changing societal views.

Conclusion

The Pride campaign among fans surveyed had no adverse effects on their consumption intentions. As expected, LGB fans reported more positive attitudes toward the Pride campaign demonstrating that sexual orientation was the main factor in attitudinal differences toward the campaign. However, WNBA consumption intentions among LGB fans and heterosexual fans were similar with both groups reporting high future consumption intentions. In contrast, previous research in other industries revealed that heterosexual consumers have lower future pur-

chase intentions and less favorable attitudes toward ads and brands that market to the LGBT community. This was not the case for the WNBA with the Pride campaign. Regardless of their sexual orientation, fans who were familiar with the Pride campaign, reported high consumption intentions, including attending and viewing games and seeking out online content. Thus, the WNBA’s first foray into a targeted gay marketing campaign may be considered a success. However, the WNBA has been well aware of this valuable market segment over their 18 years leading up to this campaign. As a result some LGBT fans may view the Pride campaign as an insincere gesture after such a long wait for recognition by the league. For this reason the importance of identity built authentically into a marketing campaign needs to be recognized as an important outcome of this study. The Pride campaign demonstrated that a balance can be achieved when appealing to both the LGBT fan and the heterosexual fan. With the WNBA officially celebrating 20 years as a league in 2016, fans who attend games have become familiar over the years with the diversity represented by both the players and the crowd. Consequently, the WNBA was wise to begin to formally recognize this important fan segment.

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Appendix 1.

Descriptive Statistics of Attitude Scores for Heterosexual Fans and Crosstab Analysis of Gender and Personality Traits

		Male (<i>n</i> = 92)Mean (SD)	Female (<i>n</i> = 144)Mean (SD)
Attitude _{Pride}		5.14 (1.91)	5.06 (2.07)
Personality Traits		Frequency	Frequency
Competitive	Women	45	88
	Men	47	56
Confident	Women	47	114
	Men	45	30
Decisive	Women	45	116
	Men	47	28
Dominant	Women	7	44
	Men	85	100
Independent	Women	51	133
	Men	41	11
Helpful	Women	82	141
	Men	10	3
Kind	Women	88	141
	Men	4	3
Nurturing	Women	88	143
	Men	4	1
Understanding	Women	78	140
	Men	14	4
Reliable	Women	66	135
	Men	26	9

Appendix 2.

List of Items Used in the Study

Attitude toward the Pride campaign	Consumption Intentions Items
Good – Bad	I am likely to attend WNBA games in the next 12 months.
Likeable – Dislikeable	I am likely to watch WNBA games on TV and/or online in the next 12 months.
Appealing – Unappealing	I am likely to follow the WNBA on social media in the next 12 months.
Favorable – Unfavorable	I will likely visit WNBA.com in the next 12 months.
Pleasant – Unpleasant	
Welcoming – Offensive	
Positive – Negative	
Respectful – Insulting	Sport Fandom Questionnaire
Appropriate – Inappropriate	I consider myself to be a WNBA fan.
Inclusive – Exclusive	My friends view me as a big WNBA fan.
Innovative – Monotonous	Watching the WNBA on television or attending games in person is one of the most enjoyable forms of entertainment.
Inspirational - Unexciting	My life would be less enjoyable if I were not able to be a fan of the WNBA.
	Being a WNBA fan is very important to me.

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