THE IMPACT OF GENDER ON AD PROCESSING: A SOCIAL IDENTITY PERSPECTIVE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Advertising is often seen as an efficient but sometimes ineffective external influence on buyer behavior. Marketers are therefore seeking ways to make advertising more effective. This paper provides a theoretical framework explaining how ads can influence attitude and purchase intentions by activating an identity with one's gender group. A gender group identity is an example of a social identity in which one sees oneself as a member of his or her gender group. Such an identity could potentially be activated through exposure to ads that pair a brand with members of one's gender group. The identity activation is thought to bring about a gender group salience that results in behaviors consistent with group norms and an in-group bias. The readiness or ease with which a gender group identity becomes salient may depend on how strongly a person identifies with one's gender group. In this paper, we propose that ads that activate identification with one's gender group will have a more favorable impact on future brand and ad judgments than ads that do not activate this identity. A conceptual model is suggested for representing the proposed relationships between ads that activate a gender group identity, gender group identity salience and strength, and ad and brand judgments. We draw from three areas of the literature to support our propositions and conceptual model: social identity theory, ad processing, and gender research.

Gender Group Identity Activating Ads.
Gender in marketing literature has mostly been conceptualized as a personal identity. In contrast, a gender group identity is a self-conceptualization that is derived from acknowledging oneself as a member of one's gender group and all the meanings and values associated with that gender group. Looking at gender identity through a social identity perspective provides a broader approach to understanding the influence of gender. This is consistent with Risman's (1998) viewpoint

that gender is more than the property of individuals and must be looked at from a multilevel perspective. Concepts of gender are developed in a social context that influences the values and meanings associated with that membership group. We internalize these values and meanings, identify with our gender group, see ourselves as representatives of that group and model our behavior accordingly. Since identification is believed to favorably influence attitudes and behavior, this paper proposes that ads which activate identification with one's gender group will favorably influence future brand and ad judgments.

A social identity approach to understanding gender influence on advertising results is also consistent with marketing literature on ad processing. Marketing literature identifies categorization, elaboration, and congruency as three important concepts in ad processing. Categorization theory holds that individuals automatically attempt to match new stimuli with an evoked category description. If a gender group identity is activated by an ad, then the product depicted in the ad may become linked to the gender category thereby triggering the use of category attributes in evaluating the product. Elaboration is thought to facilitate the categorization of stimuli. Gender group activating ads would require an advanced type of elaboration known as semantic analysis. A semantic analysis requires the spreading of an activated concept to other related concepts held in memory. It is anticipated that the expectancies generated by the gender group depicted in the ad would be used to create expectancies about the products depicted in the ad. A key factor in this process, however, is congruency. Congruency refers to the match between the stimulus and the category prototype or exemplar. The closer the fit between the gender depicted in the ad and the prototype a person holds of his/her gender, the more likely that the appropriate gender schema will be activated and the more likely it is that those schema evaluations will be used to evaluate the targeted product.

Gender Group Identity Salience and Strength.
We propose in this paper that ads which contain depictions of the gender group will prime gender salience. In social identity theory, salience is the psychological significance of the social category. In other words, it refers to the identity that is functioning psychologically to increase the influence of group membership on behavior. Salience is believed to be the result of accessibility and fit. Accessibility is the readiness of an individual to use a particular self-category, and fit is the degree to which the stimuli in the given context actually match the criteria which define the category. Gender is believed to rate high on both accessibility and fit. A strong identification with one's gender group may further enhance the accessibility of a gender group identity.

Ad and Brand Judgments.
The effects of a salient gender group identity should be seen in conformity to gender group norms, and an in-group bias. People who identify with a particular gender group tend to think, feel, and behave in terms of the group norms, and have a favorable evaluation and attitude toward in-group members. Therefore, according to social identity theory, a salient gender group identity should result in outcomes consistent with and favorable toward the activated gender identity. We therefore propose that ads which activate a gender identity are more likely to result in favorable judgments than ads that do not activate a gender identity. Favorable ad and brand judgments could include such outcomes as brand inclusion in a consideration set, likelihood of purchase, attitude toward the ad, and attitude toward the brand.

Contributions.
Social identity provides a fresh approach to understanding the influence of gender identity on ad processing. Identifying with a social group such as one's gender group has been shown to create an in-group bias favoring the norms and prototypes of the group, leading to attitudinal and behavior conformity. This paper proposes that these favorable outcomes may be carried over to associated ad and brand judgments. Employing the use of social identity activation in ads may increase the value of advertising dollars.

The Impact of Gender on Ad Processing: A Social Identity Perspective

Advertising is typically thought of as one of many external influences on buyer behavior. Some may argue that it does not always have as much impact on behavior as other external influences such as salespeople, culture, family, reference groups, and social and situational influences. Additionally, as consumers become bombarded with more and more advertisements, many claim that ads have little or no influence on their judgments or actions. In spite of these criticisms, advertising is considered an efficient way of reaching many consumers. Therefore, marketers continue to seek ways to increase the influence of advertising on their audience. For instance, an ad could be linked to another source of external influence such as one's gender group. While most external influences have been well studied, the potentially powerful influence of gender group identity has received little attention. The question becomes, how can the activation of a gender group identity result in favorable ad and brand judgments? This paper provides a theoretical foundation and conceptual model explaining how ads may influence attitudes and purchase intentions by activating an identity with one's gender group.

The model in Figure 1 depicts the process by which ads may activate a gender group identity and thereby influence ad and brand judgments. The discussion of the first box in the model addresses the question: Can an ad activate a gender group identity? A gender group identity is an example of a social identity in which one sees oneself as a member of the gender group. It is possible that such an identity could be activated through exposure to ads that pair a brand with members of one's gender group. The activation of a gender group identity is thought to result in that identity gaining salience over other existing identities. Given that individuals hold many social identities simultaneously, it is necessary that the context (ads) bring the desired social identity to the forefront. In other words, the ads must make a gender identity salient in order to have the desired effect. The second box focuses on the issue of salience and the internal consequences of a salient gender group identity. The third box indicates that salience may be influenced by how strongly one identifies with one's gender group. Finally, the discussion of the fourth box addresses the question of whether or not the internal consequences of a salient gender identity can influence ad and brand judgments. This paper proposes that ads which activate identification with one's gender group will have a more favorable impact on future brand and ad judgments than ads that do not activate this identity. The foundation for this proposed influence is based on social identity theory, ad processing, and gender research.

FIGURE 1

Proposed Model of Social Identity Activation on Ad Effectiveness
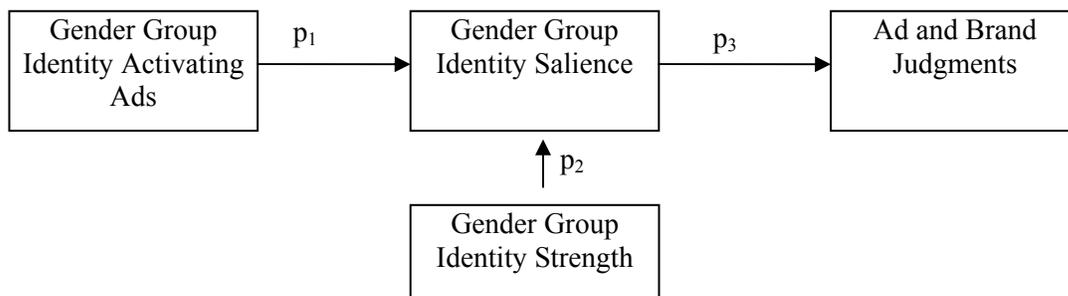
GENDER GROUP IDENTITY ACTIVATING ADS

We begin our discussion of the dynamics involved in using gender group identity to influence ad and brand judgments by providing a theoretical underpinning for the notion that ads can prime identification with a gender

group and cause that identity to become salient. This requires an understanding of the concept of gender identity from a social identity perspective.

Social Identification and Gender

Consumer behavior studies have a strong history of looking at individual characteristics and their influence on behavior. For example, in the United States, self-concept has been conceptualized as a personal identity (Sirgy 1982), reference group influence measured as susceptibility to interpersonal influence (Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel 1989), and gender identity as the degree to which an individual identifies with masculine or feminine personality traits (Palan 2001). While these perspectives have some robust findings in explaining consumer behavior, they fail to take into consideration the influence of the larger, social context in which consumers make their decisions. Risman points out that gender is more than the property of individuals and must be looked at from a multilevel perspective (Risman 1998). Consistent with Risman's viewpoint, recent investigations have been emphasizing the importance of looking at how individuals fit into a broader social context and the influence this context has on their consumer responses (Briley and Wyer 2002; Grier and Desphandé 2001; Maldonado 2001). Social identity theory (as presented by Tajfel 1981) or self-categorization theory (as presented by Turner 1987) proposes that self-categorization, or identification of oneself as a member of a social group, has a powerful influence on behavior. Identification with a group produces behavior that is representative of the norms of that group. Behavior then, is influenced not only by how you see yourself as an individual, but also by seeing yourself as a member of a social group.

Hogg and Terry (2000) point out that there is a revival of interest among social psychologists in the study of groups with a new emphasis on the self-concept in relation to how the self is defined by group membership. Social identity theorists point out that in addition to the traits or characteristics people use to describe themselves as unique individuals, they also locate themselves in the social context through their claims to social categories such as race, religion, gender or age. Thus, membership in social groups or collectives such as one's gender group provides an important basis for self-definition (Deaux et al. 1995). The individual self (me) and the collective self (we) are viewed as two possible cognitive representations of oneself that can determine the current self-concept (Simon, Pantaleo and Mummendey 1995).

Turner views self-concept as a mental representation that includes social category and group memberships, and mediates (under appropriate circumstances) between the social environment and social behavior (Turner 1982). Social identity is defined as, "that *part* of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel 1981, p. 255). Social identity, then, is a subsystem of the self-concept that monitors and construes social stimuli and provides a basis for regulating behavior.

Identification with a social group such as one's gender is one of the key tenets of social identity theory. A social identity approach to understanding the impact of gender on ad processing may best be understood within the gender framework provided by Risman (1998). Risman describes four theoretical traditions to help understand sex and gender. The first tradition, labeled individualistic or gendered selves, focuses on sex differences as biological or social in origin. The second tradition, interactional theories, opposes the individualistic tradition and focuses on how the social structure creates gendered behavior. The third tradition also opposes the individualistic perspective and considers gender at institutional levels; how notions of gender are perpetuated and how enacting gender creates inequality during interaction. Risman points out the dangers of attributing behavior to any one of these traditions, and instead supports a fourth emerging tradition of integrating the three previous traditions, allowing each to shed a different, and contributing light to understanding impact of gender on behavior.

The integrated tradition views gender from multiple levels and treats gender as being built into social life via socialization, interaction and institutional organization. This tradition views gender as an internalized state and external social control. It is the result of both personal and cultural construction. Risman (1998) states that gender structure at the interactional and institutional levels so systematically organizes our work, family, and community lives that even those who reject gender inequality in principle at times end up being compelled by the "logic" of

gendered situations and cognitive images to opt for gendered strategies. The cultural rules and cognitive images that give shape and substance to our daily lives are profoundly attached to our biological sex and may be inescapable.

Social identity theory incorporates many of the aspects of the integrated tradition supported by Risman. Gender is one example of a social category (or group). Social identity theory recognizes that our concepts of social categories such as gender are developed in a social context that influences the values and meanings associated with that membership group. Members of that social group internalize these values and meanings. The members identify with the gender group, see themselves as representative of that group and model their behavior accordingly. This paper proposes that a gender identity can be activated by an advertisement. Since identification is believed to influence attitudes and behavior, it is proposed that ads that activate identification with one's gender group will result in a more favorable impact on future brand and ad judgments than ads that do not activate this identity. In congruence with Risman's interactional tradition described above, social identity theorists view self-concept as an expression of a dynamic process of social judgment rather than a relatively fixed mental structure as would be depicted by the individualistic tradition. Self-concept is seen as a "flexible, constructive process of judgment and meaningful inference in which varying self-categories are created to fit the perceiver's relationship to social reality. The emerging and varying self-concepts represent the individual in terms of his or her changing social contextual properties" (Turner et al. 1994, p. 458).

Gender as a Social Categor- Social categorizations are discontinuous divisions of the social world into distinct social categories or groups. We structure our perception of ourselves and others by means of these abstract social categories which we internalize as aspects of our self-concepts. This social cognitive process of self-conception then produces group behavior (Turner 1982). Consider this discussion by Tajfel and Turner:

> Social categorizations are conceived here as cognitive tools that segment, classify, and order the social environment, and thus enable the individual to undertake many forms of social action. But they do not merely systematize the social world; they also provide a system of orientation for *self-reference:* they create and define the individual's place in society. Social groups, understood in this sense, provide their members with an identification of themselves in social terms. These identifications are to a very large extent relational and comparative: they define the individual as similar to or different from, as 'better' or 'worse' than, members of other groups. It is in a strictly limited sense, arising from these considerations, that we use the term *social identity*. It consists, for the purposes of the present discussion, of those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceives himself as belonging (1986, p. 15).

Finally, people identify with numerous social groups or categories. These multiple identifications exist simultaneously within the general umbrella of self-concept. Across time and situations, different identities may come to the forefront, thereby exercising priority, but it is important to note that this does not negate the existence of the other identities (Deaux 1996). This would indicate, for example, that senior adult women would be apt to identify with both a gender group and an age cohort.

Groups- Throughout the social identity literature, groups and social categories are often defined in terms of each other and are used interchangeably. For example, gender, ethnicity, age, nationality, or religion are often referred to as both categories and groups. Much of social identity theory is based upon what Turner calls the psychological group. According to Turner (1982), psychological group formation is based on self-categorization in terms of a relevant category. It does not matter whether the group is small, ad hoc, face-to-face, a short-lived experimental group, or a large-scale, widely dispersed, culturally produced social category.

According to social identity, awareness of a common category membership may be both the necessary and sufficient condition for individuals to feel themselves to be, and to act, as a group (Turner 1982). "Groups form (at least in a psychological sense) when people see that they share some basis of in-group and out-group categorization" (Deaux 1996, p. 782). According to Tajfel and Turner (1986), the essential criteria for

membership in large-scale social categories are that the individuals concerned define themselves and are defined by others as members of a group. The groups do not depend on size, the frequency of inter-member interaction, physical contact, systems of role relationships, or interdependent goals. Apparently, what matters is how people perceive and define themselves and not how they feel about others or how others feel about them.

Social or group categorization not only locates a person's identity within a categorical hierarchy, it also brings with it a sense of what it means to belong to that social grouping. For example, the "female" category brings with it issues of gender, or what it means to be female in a particular culture. According to Deaux (1992), social identity without the meanings that individuals use to fill these categories remains an empty container.

Bem's Gender Schema Theory offers us some insights into these meanings in a gender category. This theory deals with sex typing, which is the process by which a society metamorphoses male and female into masculine and feminine (Bem 1981). A gender schema is a cognitive structure of what it means to be male and female. According to Bem's Gender Schema Theory, from early in life, individuals categorize people, objects, and behaviors as masculine or feminine, and usually have pre-set notions as to what is appropriate for each gender (Kolbe and Langefeld 1991). The sex-role stereotypes become internalized to varying degrees among individuals in a society and new or incoming information is processed in relation to the existing schemas. Appropriate gender stereotypes are learned from a variety of sources, including advertising. However, some researchers note that much of advertising contains idealized images and can create unattainable or aspirational perceptions of gender expectations that can have a negative impact on self image (Martin and Gentry 1997; Martin, Gentry and Hill 1999; Richins 1991). This appears to be especially detrimental for pre-adolescent and adolescent females.

Individuals concerned about sex typing regulate their behavior so that it conforms to the culture's definitions of gender appropriateness (Schmitt, Leclerc and Dubé-Rioux 1988). West and Zimmerman (1987) point out that we expect and want to know the sex category of those around us and we presume that others are displaying it for us, in as decisive a fashion as they can so that we can act accordingly. In their words, gender is something "we do" in order to make life more manageable. Although Schmitt, Leclerc, and Dubé-Rioux did not find the support they expected for gender schema theory, as we will see later in this paper, the salience of one's gender (a situational characteristic) may have a stronger influence on behavior than whether or not one is a sex-typed individual (a personality characteristic).

Ad Content
Ads designed according to the first box of the model in Figure 1 must convey or bring to mind membership in one's gender group. This is accomplished through context, contrast of social groups, and identification.

Context- One's self-concept consists of numerous concurrent social group or category identities. Across time and different situations, different identities come to the forefront. Social identity, then, is situational or contextually based. "Different situations tend to 'switch on' different conceptions of self so that social stimuli are construed and social behavior controlled in the appropriately adaptive manner" (Turner 1982, p. 20). Turner (1994) further argued that self-categorizing is inherently variable, fluid, and context dependent, inasmuch as self-categories are socially comparative and are always relative to a frame of reference. Similarly, shifts in social identification are totally dependent on context, a result of the particular distribution of people and attributes in the environment (Deaux 1996). It follows then, that group memberships have a variable impact on our working self-concept, and whether we categorize ourselves (and others) as group members, and which groups we categorize ourselves (and other people) into and the resulting behavior depends to a large extent on the social context (Simon, Hastedt and Aufderheide 1997). The ads in the first box of the model provide this context by depicting targeted brands and members of the gender group.

Contrast- One critical aspect of the context is the relevant "other." Social identities or self-categorizations are established in contrast to some other class of stimuli. Thus, the identification process involves not only recognition of one's membership in a group, but a contrast of the individual's own group with another group (Deaux 1992; Turner 1987). The comparison group is not just any out-group, but one that differs on dimensions

that are believed to be relevant and correlated with the categorization (Abrams 1992; Tajfel and Turner 1986). Clear physical differences between groups help maintain the separateness and clarity of the categorizations, but only if the differences are relevant, relational attributes that have evaluative significance (Tajfel and Turner 1986; Turner 1987). Gender is a viable social group for the proposed study as for the most part it contains two distinct groups that are easily recognized and compared.

Identification- Identification with a social category is another important factor in social group influence on behavior. There is a difference between personal and social or shared identity. Personal identity refers to self-categories that define a person as a unique individual in terms of his or her individual differences from other in-group persons. Social identity refers to self-categories that define the individual in terms of his or her shared similarities with members of certain social categories in contrast to the differences of other social categories (Deaux 1996; Turner et al. 1994). In other words, a personal identity refers to how people view themselves as individuals whereas social identity refers to how they view the social groups to which they belong (Luhtanen and Crocker 1992) and their membership in that group. Social identity, then, embraces a shift towards the perception of oneself as an interchangeable exemplar of a social category and away from the perception of self as a unique person (Brewer 1991; Turner 1987).

Identification begins with the application of a label to oneself (Deaux 1996). It is not enough that other people place a person in a particular group. The individual must accept and acknowledge the categorization (Brewer 1991). It is particularly important to note that some social identities are based upon categories with distinguishing physical features such as age, race, and gender, making it tempting for the researcher to impose categorization. Despite agreement by researchers that the category is appropriate, the person may not choose to endorse that identification for the self (Deaux 1996). There may also be instances where one person may be simultaneous members of more than one demographic group such as a person of mixed ethnic heritage, or the rare instance where an individual may be of mixed sex (for a discussion of five possible sexes, see Fausto-Sterling 2002). To accommodate this need for self-identification, subjects in studies dealing with gender group identity, for example, should be asked to identify the gender group with which they mostly closely identify, the gender group associated with males or the gender group associated with females. While there may be a rare case where an individual finds a need for more than the two gender categories, as Fausto-Sterling points out, in today's society, most hermaphrodites and pseudohermaphrodites are surgically treated at birth to align with one or the other sex, and the child raised as either a male or a female. Regardless of the social label selected, the critical point is that the subject must accept and acknowledge the categorization and apply the label to himself or herself.

Ad Processing
Marketing literature identifies categorization, elaboration, and congruency as three important concepts in ad processing. Categorization theory holds that people naturally divide their world into categories that enable them to efficiently understand and process information in the environment (Sujan 1985). When a new stimulus is encountered, the perceiver automatically attempts to match it with an evoked category description. The evoked category attributes, links and exemplars are then used to aid in the evaluation of the new stimulus (Goodstein 1993). A gender group identity can be an example of such a category. It may be that if a gender identity (a social category) is activated, then the product depicted in the ad may become linked to the category, thereby triggering the use of category attributes, etc. in the evaluation of the product. In this case, the perceiver would be responding to the category level rather than on the basis of the individual attributes of the product (see Sujan 1985). According to Putrevu's review of ad processing differences between men and women, females may be especially adept at processing ads that appeal to a category level rather than individual product attributes (Putrevu 2001).

Elaboration studies offer further insights into how the categorization of stimuli works. Elaboration is the generation of associations to new message information and the integration of these associations with knowledge already stored in memory (Malaviya, Kisielius and Sternthal 1996; Meyers-Levy 1991). You might say that elaboration facilitates the categorization of stimuli.

Previous studies suggest that people can employ two types of elaboration (see Meyers-Levy 1991). The first and most basic is item-specific or feature analysis (Meyers-Levy and Malaviya 1999). Greenwald and Leavitt (1984) refer to this type of analysis in the preattention stage of their four-level model of involvement. In this stage, they describe the preattentive analysis as involving a sensory perusal of visual or auditory inputs. According to Shapiro (1999, p. 16), "a feature analysis implies that the memory trace produced at exposure only contains information regarding the perceptual features of the ad content (e.g., contours, brightness, contrasts) and not its meaning." MacInnis and Jaworski (1989) proposed that a feature analysis is only the first of six levels of mental processing. The remaining five levels of mental processing (basic categorization, meaning analysis, information integration, role-taking and constructive processes) relate more to the second level of elaboration, which is a relational or semantic analysis.

This more advanced type of elaboration cultivates the processing of information associated with the categories to which an object might belong (Malaviya, Kisielius and Sternthal 1996). A semantic analysis requires the spreading of an activated concept to other related concepts such as when a stimulus sparks the activation of a particular node (or schema) which automatically leads to the activation of another, somehow, related node. It is like following the connections on a spider web. The memory trace then includes the activation of related schemas and the associated meanings (Shapiro 1999).

Placing the target product within a related contextual scene encourages relational or semantic analysis (Malaviya, Kisielius and Sternthal 1996). Context, in this instance, concerns the visual material surrounding the product within the confines of an ad (as opposed to visual material surrounding the ad itself such as other ads or articles). It appears that the contextual scene information activates a schema for the theme or gist of an ad prior to product identification. The activated schema in turn creates expectancies about the items depicted in the ad (Shapiro 1999). For example, the scene might spark an assessment of different categories of people who might use the product, objects related to its use, or occasions when it might be used (Malaviya, Kisielius and Sternthal 1996).

Prior studies indicate that women may be more apt to engage in elaboration than men. Apparently, men and women differ in their use of message cues and judgments (Meyers-Levy and Sternthal 1991). Women have a lower threshold for elaborating on message cues, and therefore those cues may have a stronger influence on their judgment. In a similar study, Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran (1991) report that women's processing often entails substantial, detailed elaboration of message content. The likelihood of women to engage in the elaboration of message cues and for those cues to have greater implications indicates that they may be very successful in making the connections between the activated social identity and the paired brand.

One of the key factors in elaboration and categorization is congruency. In categorization theory, congruency refers to the match between the stimulus and the category prototype or exemplar. The closer the fit, the more likely that the schema will be activated and the more likely it is that schema evaluations will be used to evaluate the targeted product rather than product attributes (Goodstein 1993; Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989; Sujan 1985). Shapiro's study (1999) indicates that a match between the product and the ad context facilitates semantic analysis. Loken and Ward (1990) cite studies which indicate that a strong match between the product and the category enhances free recall and increases the speed and accuracy of classification.

Heckler and Childers (1992) and Lee and Mason (1999) define congruency as the expectancy and relevancy of the target product and the ad content. The expectancy and relevancy issues of congruity are important to social identity activation as well. One of the key components of social identity theory is the contrast between the in-group and the out-group (Deaux 1992; Turner 1987). For every in-group there must be an out-group. For example, congruity between the brand and the social identity would mean that members of the in-group (women) would associate the product with their gender group rather than with the out-group (males). If members of the in-group perceived themselves to be more likely to use the brand than members of the out-group and the use occasions more typically involved members of the in-group than the out-group, then brand usage would be both a relevant and expected part of group norms. Activation of a social identity would therefore require congruence between the in-group and the depicted brand. For example, an ad pairing Secret deodorant with males should not

be as successful in activating a female gender identity among women as an ad pairing women with Secret deodorant.

GENDER GROUP IDENTITY SALIENCE AND STRENGTH

Overall, the process of identification in which one self-identifies with a category, privately accepts the group norms, sees oneself as an interchangeable representative of the group and defines oneself in terms of the group is called depersonalization and is a very crucial cognitive component of social identity theory (Abrams 1994; Simon, Hastedt and Aufderheide 1997; Turner 1987). Activation of a social identity is thought to be sufficient to result in depersonalization (Burke and Stets 1998) and may be true of activating a gender group identity. In our proposed model of gender effects, this depersonalization process begins with the gender activating ads that provide the necessary context to make a gender group identity salient. We propose that:

p$_1$: Ads that contain depictions of the gender group prime gender salience.

Salience
In social identity theory, context, contrast, and identity strength are all tied together in salience. Salience is the activation of a relevant self category. It is the psychological significance of the social category rather than its perceptual prominence. "By a salient group membership we refer to one which is *functioning psychologically* to increase the influence of one's membership in that group on perception and behavior…The term salience is *not* being used to refer to some 'attention-grabbing' property of a stimulus" (Turner 1987, p. 118). Salience is believed to be the result of accessibility and fit. Accessibility is the readiness of a perceiver to use a particular self-category, and fit is the degree to which the stimuli in the given context actually match the criteria which define the category (Turner 1987; Turner et al. 1994).

Accessibility relates to the relative centrality or importance of a particular group membership to an individual's self-definition (Turner 1987). This is influenced by the strength of one's identity with the relevant category and the category's hierarchical level. Strength of identification is a factor of both past experiences with the category and the current situation. It is tied to the current emotional or value significance of a given categorization (Deaux 1996; Turner 1987). Deaux' (1996) studies have indicated that members of privileged groups such as white males may not feel the need to identify with the group as much as people who belong to the less privileged group (such as African Americans or women). Individuals who are more highly identified with their group are believed to be more likely to experience that identity as salient, independent of situational context (Ethier and Deaux 1994).

Centrality can also relate to an identity's hierarchical level. People categorize themselves and others at many levels of abstraction. The first level (the most concrete) is the subordinate level that consists of one's personal (or individual) identity. One's collective self is represented in the more abstract intermediate and superordinate levels. The intermediate levels contain our social identities and consist of in-groups and out-groups. At this level, the collective *we* is distinguished from both *I* and *they* (Burke and Stets 1999). The most abstract is the superordinate level, which places self as a member of the human race (see e.g. Abrams 1992; 1994; Burke and Stets 1999; Turner 1987). The identities higher in the hierarchy are thought to subsume the more specifically defined identities at lower levels (Deaux 1996). Presumably then, an identity that is higher in the hierarchy (such as gender and age and race) will be more accessible, will be more salient in more situations and will therefore be more likely to influence behavior than one's personal or individual identity (Deaux 1992).

Salience is also a factor of contextual fit. It is the context that calls to the forefront a particular identity. For example, gender will be a salient identity in a situation in which gender distinctions are emphasized (Deaux 1992). Fit has both comparative and normative aspects. Comparative relates to the distinctions that are made between the comparative groups. Apparently, the greater similarities within the group and the sharper the contrasts between comparative groups, the more salient the in-group identity tends to become (Turner 1987).

Again, gender should provide a strong study environment, as there would tend to be strong similarities within a gender group and sharp contrasts between gender groups.

Normative fit refers to how well the content of the stimuli group matches the categorical content. In other words, a group must not only differ from the out-group, it must differ in the expected ways. The similarities within the group and the differences between the groups must be consistent with one's normative beliefs and theories about the substantive social meaning of the social category (Turner et al. 1994). The activation of a gender identity in an ad would require a normative fit between the pictures of the gender group and brands that are expected to be used by members of that group. Overall, salience (or self-categorizing) always reflects an interaction both between comparative and normative fit and between fit and accessibility (Turner et al. 1994).

Since individuals hold many social identities simultaneously, it is necessary that the context (ads) bring the desired social identity (in this case gender) to the forefront. Social identity theory posits that even though we all hold multiple identities, the situational context can induce one of the identities to take temporary precedence over the other identities, and thereby have a stronger influence on behavior in that situation. In this situation, the ads must make a gender identity salient in order to have the desired effect. Previous work has shown that advertisements can make a social identity such as gender salient. Grier and Deshpandé (2001), for example, found that their ad primed a gender identity. Activation would be accomplished by pairing pictures of members of the gender group with brands whose use is consistent with the group's norms. Identifying appropriate brands would be accomplished by researching databases such as Simmon's Study of Media and Market, which identify brand usage by demographic groups. Subjects in the experimental group would view ads that paired brands with members of the matching gender group (gender identity activating ads). While it should be acknowledged that a number of executional cues such as models, music, shapes, and even color, might elicit a gender identity, it is likely that a group spokesperson/model is apt to be the most powerful element and most likely to generate an immediate identity activation. Since we all hold multiple identities simultaneously, it is important that the ads be pretested to ensure that the ads activate and make salient a gender identity. Subjects in the control group would see ads that only showed the brands. These ads would also have to be pretested to make sure that the brand only ads did not make the gender identity salient.

Strength of Gender Identity
Although self-identifying and defining oneself in terms of a group are thought to be indicative of high levels of group identification (Terry and Hogg 1996), several measures have been developed to gauge an individual's strength of identification with a group (e.g., Biernat, Green and Vescio 1996; Ethier and Deaux 1994; Terry and Hogg 1996). The lower box in the model depicted in Figure 1 is the strength of the social identity. How strongly one identifies with one's gender group is expected to impact salience. As stated in the following proposition, a strong identification with one's gender group should increase the likelihood of gender salience:

p_2: A gender identity is more likely to be salient when the individual's identification with the gender group depicted in the ad is strong than when it is weak.

A gender identity should be highly salient in women. As discussed earlier, social identity salience is believed to be the result of accessibility and fit. Gender rates high on both accounts. A gender identity is thought to be highly accessible (Deaux 1992) because it is a central part of one's self-definition. It is an identity with which the individual has a great deal of past experience, it has a high emotional and value significance and, along with age and race, it represents a higher hierarchical level. Gender also rates high on contextual fit. One of the key elements of contextual fit is comparative aspects between groups (Turner 1987). The greater the distinctions are between groups, the more likely one is to identify with one's social group rather than the out-group. The differences between men and women in our society are taught to us from birth. According to Risman (1998), gender structure can be conceived as both cultural rules and cognitive images, as tacit knowledge or expectations attached to a sex category. Such images are experienced as social facts whether or not the actors deviate from them, as they exist autonomously of their internalization as personality. Thus, gender is conceived as an emergent feature of social situations rather than the property of individuals, both as an outcome of and a rationale for

various social arrangements. According to West and Zimmerman (1987), one "does" gender based upon normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category. Gender activities emerge from and bolster claims to membership in a sex category. Since gender is both highly accessible and contains sharp distinctions between member groups, a gender identity should be readily activated.

AD AND BRAND JUDGMENTS

The effects of a salient social identity can be seen in conformity to group norms, and an in-group bias. Social identity theory depicts a fairly direct relationship between self-categorization as a group member and normative in-group attitudes and behavior based upon the social group's prototype and norms (Abrams 1994; Biernat, Green and Vescio 1996).

A group's prototype describes and prescribes beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors that optimally minimize in-group differences and maximize inter-group differences (Terry and Hogg 1996). Social identity proposes that group members are evaluated positively to the extent that they are perceived as prototypical of the self-category to which they are compared (Deaux 1996). Similarly, a person who identifies with a group will be more attracted to members who typify group attributes. The prototype also serves as a basis for self-definition:

> The process of self-categorization not only is responsible for the construction of a contextually salient in-group prototype but also assimilates self to the prototype and thus transforms self: Self-perception, beliefs, attitudes, feelings, and behaviors are now defined in terms of the group prototype. In this way, group membership causes people to think, feel, behave, and define themselves in terms of group norms rather than unique properties of the self (Terry and Hogg 1996, p. 779).

In other words, consumers who identify with a particular social group would tend to think, feel, and behave in terms of the group norms. This may have an influence on how they evaluate products and brands as well as on what they buy, and how they use what they purchase.

Just as groups are closely tied to social categories, norms are closely tied to the prototype. The prototype includes a representation of accepted norms of a social category or group. Norms are the accepted or implied rules that specify how group members should behave (Terry and Hogg 1996). They are an emergent property of group formation (Turner 1987) and represent the group's socially desirable and expected attitudes and behaviors that group members will strive to enact (Turner 1982).

Norms are said to "prescribe the context-specific attitudes and behaviors appropriate for group members" (Terry and Hogg 1996, p. 780). Norms are seen as part of the social identity process leading from categorical inclusion to expected behavior. According to Turner (1982), individuals first define themselves as members of a distinct social category. They then form or learn the stereotypical norms of that category. They discern that certain ways of behaving are correlated attributes of category membership and that certain appropriate, expected, or desirable behaviors are used to define the category as different from other categories. They then assign these norms to themselves along with other stereotypical attributes of the category, making their behavior become more normative as their category membership becomes salient. It is assumed that people define themselves in terms of their social group memberships and they enact roles as part of their acceptance of the normative expectations of in-group members. The norms become privately accepted and are both privately and publicly enacted, resulting in conformity (Abrams 1994; Turner et al. 1994).

In-group bias is represented by a favorable evaluation and attitude toward in-group members. Studies have shown that the mere perception of belonging to a group is sufficient to trigger inter-group discrimination favoring the in-group (Tajfel and Turner 1986). The resulting intra-group cohesion may be evidenced by more positive attitudes towards and more reported liking of in-group than out-group members, ethnocentric biases in perception, evaluation and memory and an altruistic orientation towards in-group members (Turner 1987).

In summary, self-categorization or social identification tends to lead to the perceived similarity of members, mutual attraction between members or social cohesion, mutual esteem, emotional empathy, altruism and cooperation, and attitudinal and behavioral uniformity (Turner 1982). Therefore, according to social identity theory, a salient social identity should result in outcomes consistent with and favorable toward the activated social identity. Therefore, it is proposed that:

p$_3$: Ads that activate a social identity (e.g., gender) are more likely to result in favorable judgments than ads that do not activate a social identity.[1]

In the proposed model, the outcome is favorable ad and brand judgments, and is represented in the last box in the model. Favorable ad and brand judgments could include such outcomes as brand inclusion in a consideration set, likelihood of purchase, attitude toward the ad and attitude toward the brand.

Support for this proposed relationship can also be found in ad processing literature. Semantic elaboration is thought to make message-related information more accessible and enhance its use as a basis for judgments (Malaviya, Kisielius and Sternthal 1996; Yi 1990). Malaviya, Kisielius and Sternthal's study indicated that an image-focused picture invoking relational or semantic processing would enhance the possibility that the brand would be included in a consumer's consideration set.

Triggering a gender identity in an ad by depicting members of the gender group along with brands whose use is part of the groups' norms should encourage semantic analysis of that ad. The activation of a gender identity includes the identification of the prototype. This prototype would include both the members of the social category and group norms. The group norms would dictate that using the depicted brand was a normal or expected part of group members' behavior. One's gender identity is believed to be a very central (well learned and rehearsed) part of one's self-schema. Identities such as gender, for example, are thought to be very accessible, salient in more situations, and therefore more likely to influence behavior (Deaux 1992). This should facilitate the schema activations inherent in semantic elaboration and therefore increase the likelihood that the brand would be included in a consideration set.

In addition to initiating cognitive processes, semantic-stimulating ad content can be used to prime for affect. For example, if semantic information is highly accessible, judgments could be based on affect referral from the invoked category (Malaviya, Kisielius and Sternthal 1996).

The automatic activation of an attitude appears to be tied to its accessibility (Fazio 1993; Fazio and Dunton 1997; Fazio, Powell and Williams 1989; Smith, Fazio and Cejka 1996). Highly accessible attitudes toward an attitude object are expected to make the attitude activation more automatic and predictive of subsequent behavior. It is expected to increase the individual's affect toward the stimulus, produce more attitudinally consistent behavior, encourage the individual to select the stimulus from among a set of alternatives and to behave toward that stimulus in a favorable way (Fazio, Powell and Williams 1989; Janiszewski 1990).

Social identities such as gender, age, and race are thought to be highly accessible (Deaux 1992). This high accessibility should make the attitudes toward these social groups highly accessible as well. Since one of the outcomes of such a social identity is an in-group bias represented by favorable evaluation and attitude toward the in-group (Tajfel and Turner 1986), it is likely that the activated attitudes would be positive. It is possible that the favorable attitude toward the activated group would be carried over to the advertisement that activated the

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1   It is possible that identification with one's gender group could result in a less than favorable judgment or negative impact. For example, a negative portrayal of femininity could activate a gender group identity but result in a negative brand judgment. However, advertisers are likely to prevent this by pretesting ads for a favorable response before placing the ad. Some might also argue that, for example, a woman might not view the gender identity manipulation positively, perhaps viewing the presentation as too traditional for a feminist. In this case, a female gender identity may not be activated, but rather, a subset of that gender identity.

identification with the social group. A recent study found that when a social identity was salient, participants in the study were more apt to describe the group using the same positive traits as the salient identity (Haslam et al. 1999). Therefore, ads pairing members of the gender group with brands that are associated with that group should activate a group member's identification with that gender group, trigger a favorable attitude towards that group, and perhaps spur a favorable attitude toward the ad.

CONTRIBUTIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This conceptual paper has provided an alternative view of gender as a self-concept that is based upon defining oneself as a member of a gender group. Identifying with such a group has been shown to create an in-group bias favoring the norms and prototypes of the group, leading to attitudinal and behavioral conformity. This paper proposes that these favorable outcomes may be carried over to associated ad and brand judgments. This paper has also aligned social identity theory with the integrated tradition of understanding gender. It draws from the individualistic tradition by capitalizing on the differences between men and women in ad processing. It brings in the interactional tradition by showing how a social identity is socially constructed and aligns with Bem's Gender Schema Theory.

This paper proposes gender as a potential ad content factor that would enhance ad processing, thereby increasing the influence the ad has on future judgments. Whereas previous studies indicated that an ad pairing a product with a relevant picture increased processing, this conceptual integration leads the way in investigating the value of activating a particular schema, one's gender identity. Brands depicted in ads designed to activate a gender identity are expected to show a greater likelihood of being included in a consideration set than brands in ads that do not activate such an identity, and they are expected to be evaluated more favorably. Such findings would indicate that activating a social identity such as gender could more connections with related concepts. This paper uses social identity theory to offer an understanding of how activating a gender group identity in an ad can influence the outcome of viewing that ad and shows how a social identity perspective fits well within the integrated tradition of understanding gender.

From a practical perspective, advertisers may find social identity theory useful in developing advertising strategies. By employing the use of social identity activation in their ads, they may find their advertising dollar has been well spent, even if consumers are not highly involved with the ad. Consumers often approach spending decisions in an uninvolved or passive manner (Janiszewski 1988; Sengupta, Goodstein and Boninger 1997). Even under these conditions, ads designed to activate a consumer's gender identity may generate more favorable results than ads that only depict brands in their natural setting. Additionally, even if advertisers cannot entirely control the context in which their ad is placed, they may find that providing an appropriate context within the ad can enhance the benefits of the ad. It seems likely that ads designed to activate a social identity such as gender will increase the likelihood that the ad will have an influence.

The merging of social identity with ad processing may prove very useful among other social categories as our population ages (making identification with an age group salient), our minority populations become larger (making identification with an ethnic group salient), and advertisements become more prolific as marketers find innovative media to use in promoting their cause. This conceptual piece provides an explanation for the potential of activating a social identity such as gender in an ad.

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