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# *Females' Perceptions of Offensive Advertising: The Importance of Values, Expectations, and Control*

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*The advertising industry has consistently been a target of criticism over the years. One criticism especially prevalent among activists and audience members alike involves advertising's ability to offend. By incorporating female consumer perspectives from in-depth interviews, this study presents a grounded theory conceptualization of advertising offensiveness that includes conditions and consequences surrounding the construct. This conceptualization provides needed insight into a phenomenon that is often experienced by the advertising industry but is seldom planned. Employing qualitative methodology to understand how women are offended will assist both advertising professionals develop more effective communication strategies and advertising researchers measure the offensiveness construct.*

The media have recently experienced a significant increase in criticism over questionable content. One facet of the media that is no stranger to such criticism is advertising. Since the 1960s, consumer studies have indicated the public's views toward advertising are copiously negative (e.g., Bauer and Greyser 1968; Mittal 1994). Similar to other media content, advertising has a tendency to inadvertently offend many, especially female consumers, which can damage brand loyalty and the client-agency relationship. Unlike other media, however, advertising is more pervasive in people's lives, increasing the likelihood that consumers outside a target market will be exposed to messages that are not intended for their viewing. Since it is increasingly simple for these consumers to pass along negative word-of-mouth through web logs ("Blogs") and other new media technologies, companies should become more aware of how various audiences are offended. Understanding offensiveness from the perspectives of women is particularly important considering female heads-of-household often act as media content gatekeepers and possess strong purchase influence and behavior, regardless of their target audience status. Since individuals often create their own realities, truths, and meanings based upon interactions with others as well as their own ideas, value systems, and cultural backgrounds (Blumer 1969), it is necessary to acquire an audience-centric compre-

hension of offensive advertising to truly understand and manipulate the construct.

While research has contributed significantly in quantitative description and measurement, qualitative examination of the construct is both needed and desirable (O'Donohoe 1995; Boddewyn 1991). Hence, the principal objective of this article is to develop a conceptualization of advertising offensiveness based on the perspectives and lived-experiences of consumers, specifically females. Previous research on offensive advertising has largely depended on survey techniques or experimental design to investigate this nebulous construct (e.g., Barnes and Dotson 1990; Mittal 1994; Waller 1999; Dahl, Frankenberger, and Manchanda 2003). These existing studies have consistently identified women as most susceptible to offense but have done little to explain how they are offended. The goal herein is to go beyond the existing numerical data to gain knowledge of how and why women are offended rather than simply identify what advertising elements are potentially offensive. Taken as a whole, this study will help advertising stakeholders understand and more effectively communicate with female audiences, as well as support academics wishing to measure and examine the offensiveness construct.

## **Literature Review**

Previous studies examining offensive advertising have centered on descriptions of the product being advertised, the advertising execution used, the me-

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dium within which an advertisement is displayed, and the audiences that are least/most likely offended. Although individual studies examine these dimensions in relative isolation, considered as a whole the literature suggests these variables are largely interactive (Figure 1). For instance, the use of nudity by itself may be offensive to some, but if nudity is used to promote a product associated with sex to certain audiences in a medium that includes sexual content, the likelihood of offense is lessened. This example alludes to the importance of understanding consumers and tailoring messages to target audiences accordingly. As Rotfeld (2001) noted, many advertising campaigns have been deemed "bad" or offensive because marketers and agency personnel did not effectively adopt the audience perspective when creating messages. Although this reference to the marketing concept is worth mentioning, existing studies limit coverage of offensive advertising to product, execution, medium, and audience make-up. The following review highlights some of the more seminal pieces from this research stream.

### ***Advertised Product***

Several authors have broadly examined the offensive nature of various "sensitive" products (e.g., Wilson and West 1981; Fahy, Smart, Pride, and Ferrell 1995; Davidson 2003). As explained by Wilson and West (1981), these products, "for reasons of delicacy, decency, morality, or even fear tend to elicit reactions of distaste, disgust, offense, or outrage when mentioned or when openly presented" (p. 92). Advertising consumer goods such as pharmaceutical drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes has been attacked in the past for these reasons and is consequently subject to varying levels of legislative regulations. However, advertisements for other, non-regulated items such as tampons, condoms, and even cereals and soft drinks have also been found to offend various audiences. Such a wide array of goods suggests a product alone is rarely the sole reason behind experienced offense. Existing literature reflects this probability by beginning to highlight the interaction between products and advertising executions.

### ***Execution***

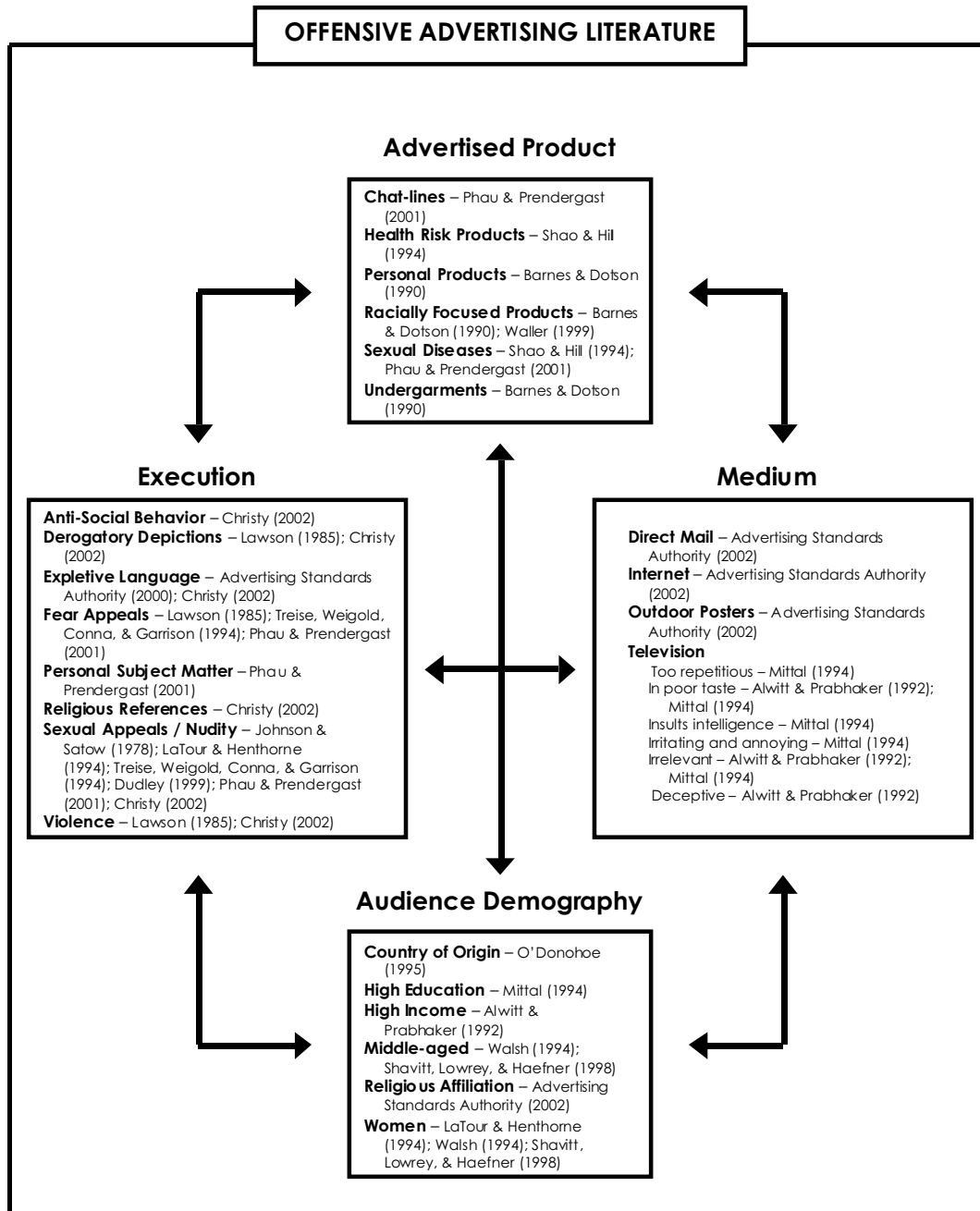
Barnes and Dotson (1990) illustrate how research has combined the elements of product and execution in their examination of offensive advertising. In one of the only attempts to empirically define offensiveness, Barnes and Dotson (1990) suggested offensive advertising is a multidimensional construct, consisting of an interac-

tion between an advertised product and the execution of the advertisement itself. Their findings revealed that advertisements for "personal" products such as condoms, douches, and tampons are considered by audiences to be most offensive. However, advertisements for less taboo items such as the United Negro College Fund also caused offense, again suggesting offensiveness is not limited to products that may be considered taboo. The second dimension of offensive advertising proposed by the researchers, advertising execution, was unfortunately not discussed in great detail.

Examination of a study conducted by Waller (1999) sheds additional light on execution elements and products that are perceived offensive by audiences. Results of this study indicated that only racist tones in advertisements were substantially offensive to individuals. This finding corresponds to Waller's (1999) other major result that identified advertisements for racial extremist groups as most offensive (other products included in the study were not found offensive) and to Barnes and Dotson's (1990) finding that advertisements for the United Negro College Fund are considered offensive. Phau and Prendergast (2001), using nearly the same approach as Waller (1999) in their evaluation of offensive advertising in Singapore, identified chat-line services and sexual disease prevention (HIV/AIDS, etc.) as the most offensive products and the use of sex, personal subject matter, and fear appeals as the most offensive executional styles. Whether the nature of advertised "products," the message strategy used, or a combination of the two was the dominant reason behind offense is unknown.

It is often difficult for advertisers to create messages that do not offend at least a few individuals, including some members of a product's target market. In addition to the creative elements already mentioned, the use of violent images (Anders 1999), anti-abortion messages (Lomicky and Salestrom 1998), and humor (Case 1992) have all contributed to varying levels of criticism and consumer complaints. These complaints are centered on either a particular visual component of an advertisement or the included copy. One visual component that has received considerable attention from researchers involves the use of sex and nudity. Although results from the subsequent stream of literature are largely equivocal, the fact remains that some individuals are offended by sexual images. However, similar to advertised products, sex and nudity per se do not cause much offense (Dudley 1999; Johnson and Satow 1978; Wilson and Moore 1979); rather, offense generally only occurs when these elements interact with the product, medium, and/or the audience make-up.

**Figure 1**  
**Literature-based Elements of Offensive Advertising**



**Medium**

The majority of the literature that examines the media dimension centers attention on television advertising and execution. Scant research exists that investigates offensiveness of print media or other,

more non-traditional communication channels. Overall, this research has found that television commercials are intrusive, too repetitious, and often in poor taste (Alwitt and Prabhaker 1992; Mittal 1994). Previous studies have mainly centered on television advertising and have shown that broadcast media often

contribute to the likelihood of certain advertisements offending someone in the audience.

In one of the most comprehensive studies done on the attitudes surrounding television advertising, Mittal (1994) examined commercials and the products and executions used in these advertisements. This study was the first since Bauer and Greyser (1968) to research three dimensions of advertising together in a single examination. Findings revealed that individuals have a predominately negative view of television advertising, expressing dislike for the amount of repetition used, the poor taste of many commercials, and the ability of advertisements to insult one's intelligence (Mittal 1994). Importantly, Mittal (1994) found that 46% of respondents believed that half or more television commercials are offensive and in bad taste. Specifically, many individuals (61% and 72%, respectively) perceived commercials as portraying values that are incongruent with their own and including too much sex (Mittal 1994). These high percentages conflict with studies such as Bello, Pitts, and Etzel (1983) that found controversial sexual content to be perceived by audiences as more interesting than other commercials. However, these conflicting results are likely a result of the product being used in a particular study. The Bello, Pitts, and Etzel (1983) research specifically used Calvin Klein jeans, while the Mittal (1994) study asked respondents to evaluate television commercials generally. Therefore, it is probable the effect television by itself has on an individual's experienced offense is more powerful than either the execution or the product used. Such likelihood is given additional credence when one considers that TV advertisements in general are more irritating and annoying than radio, newspaper, and magazine advertising (Mittal 1994). This difference across media is probably due to the ubiquitous nature of television advertising in general. Two factors may be at play. First, network television advertising is generally used to increase the reach of a particular advertisement. Although increasing audience size may help a company raise the level of brand awareness, it also has the potential to reach those outside a particular target market that may become offended by a personally irrelevant message. Second, because such a broad audience is achieved through television advertising, many advertisements may rely on stereotypical images that are understood by the majority or on mindless devices that "speak" to the lowest intellectual denominator. Hence, those in the minority and/or those with higher than average education may become offended by television advertising.

## *Audience Demography*

The final advertising offense component covered in the literature involves an audience member's demographic profile. Several researchers, such as Peterson and Kerin (1977) and LaTour and Henthorne (1993), have included demographic analyses regarding differences in levels of offense. Walsh (1994), reporting on research conducted by Maritz Marketing Research, explained that women are most likely to be offended when sexual imagery is used in advertisements and that women in their mid-thirties to late fifties most often avoid products that have tasteless advertising. This age range has consistently been identified in previous studies as a strong influence on an individual's experience with advertising offense. For instance, Shavitt, Lowrey, and Haefner (1998) found that 57% of individuals, 35 to 54, are often or sometimes offended by advertisements; only about 40% of 18-to-34-year-olds are offended. Logically, such findings make sense. First, this age group often has younger children, possibly causing them to be concerned that the young ones may see "inappropriate" content in advertisements. Second, this age group is often targeted in advertisements and pays attention to these messages because members have more disposable income than younger and older groups. Therefore, this higher relevance and attention level affords these prime-aged individuals more opportunities to become offended.

Previous research has identified older women, individuals with higher incomes, and individuals with advanced education as the demographic groups that are most often offended by advertising images. However, as Alwitt and Prabhaker (1994) point out, viewer demographics alone are generally not effective indicators of disliking certain kinds of advertising. As illustrated by the literature review here, numerous factors interact to generate offensive advertising. It makes logical sense that factors beyond an individual's (or a target market's) demographic profile cause him or her to become offended. Aspects such as product attributes, advertising execution, and medium are proposed here to also contribute to an individual's experience with feelings of offense. Taken as a whole, the body of literature covering offensive advertising affords the present study with a starting point from which to proceed.

## **Method**

Considering the purpose of this study, in-depth, one-on-one interviewing was deemed the most germane and constructive method. Bogdan and Taylor

(1975) described interviewing of this sort as "repeated face-to-face encounters between the researcher and informants directed toward understanding informants' perspectives on their lives, experiences, or situations as expressed in their own words" (p. 77). Such a method afforded the opportunity for clarification through respondent probing while allowing individuals to communicate their distinct feelings using their own language; this feature was vital to the attainment of perceptions that are truly based in the audience's psyche. Consequently, questioning was only used to catalyze thoughts in respondents and control of the discourse largely rested in the respondents' possession. Discussion topics focused on the following areas: (1) an individual's cultural background and values; (2) offense experienced in life; (3) experience with advertising and mass communication; and (4) offense experienced through advertising exposure. "Questions" were constructed to allow respondents to develop their own perspectives without impositions from the researcher. For example, respondents were never asked specifically what they find offensive or how they define offensiveness. Rather, individuals were asked to describe instances in their life, especially reactions and feelings that have been encountered, that deal with the topics of the study. During interviews, which lasted from one to two hours, discussion was audio recorded and notes were taken by the researcher (to acknowledge non-verbal behavior, etc.). Notes regarding each session were also made immediately following each interview and recordings were reviewed aurally. Interviews were then transcribed verbatim to allow for data analysis and resulting transcriptions were verified against recordings.

After participants discussed their own experiences and perceptions surrounding offensive advertising, they were shown a series of seven print and two broadcast advertisements. Regardless of executional style, all these advertisements originated outside of the United States, and were hence likely to be advertisements never seen by participants prior to an interview session (Table 1). Exposure to these advertisements was solely used to facilitate discussion and assist those who had difficulties recalling experiences with offense during initial questioning; advertisements were not included in the study to determine their specific effect on individuals. Advertisements were presented sequentially to respondents on a laptop computer. Since the purpose of exposing individuals to these advertisements was merely to aid recall and catalyze discussion, stimuli were not presented within any specific media vehicle.

Data analysis was a continual process that involved

generation and refinement of an advertising offensiveness model. Examination of the dataset was similar to Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory approach and Patton's (1980) recommended analysis techniques. These processes involved multiple levels of data coding and classification. The first step followed was microanalysis of each transcript. According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), this process entails a "detailed line-by-line analysis [used] to generate initial categories (with their properties and dimensions) and to suggest relationships among categories" (p. 57). Patton (1980) refers to this process as the development of a classification system. To assist in organization of the data, a spreadsheet was constructed that included initial categories related to individuals' values, life offense, and advertising offense. Additionally, a spreadsheet that included individual responses to the advertising stimuli was developed. Subsequent open and axial coding was then conducted to refine the categories that emerged. Both convergence and deviation within and across concepts were recorded. Overall, this coding process started broadly and continually narrowed down the data as comparisons with various categories were made. This process led to the development of conclusions and insights based specifically on the data of participant perspectives.

To assure that findings were consistent with respondents' perspectives and lived-experiences, a focus group consisting of interviewees was conducted after initial analysis. Many qualitative researchers including Patton (1980) and Seidman (1991) have recommended such a procedure of verification. A model of advertising offensiveness was presented to focus group members and researcher interpretations were discussed. Although slight changes in the model were made as a result of suggestions offered by members, participants agreed that the conceptualization of the construct reflected their perspectives and that the findings of the study "make sense." Therefore, there was little reason to believe that final interpretations were invalid due to disagreement between the researcher and interview participants.

## *Respondents*

Two common qualitative research techniques were followed in the development of the study's sample. First, individuals who were most likely offended by advertising in the past were sought. This purposeful selection increased the likelihood that advertising offensiveness would surface during interviewing while the introduction of bias-prone researcher perspectives would be lessened. As indicated in previous studies,

**Table 1**  
**Advertising Stimuli**

<i>Brand</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Reason for Inclusion</i>
AIDS Hilfe	Televised PSA for safe sex featuring three nude models, two males and one female, engaged in sexual acts. The acts are interrupted by flashes of violent acts that mimic the sex acts.	Won Best of Show at Lisbon Erotic Advertising Festival (LEAF) awards; includes several elements identified as offensive in past research.
Ikea	Televised advertisement featuring two middle-aged, average looking people at home engaging in sexual role playing. Their two teenage children come home early, catching the parents in the act. Embarrassment and laughter ensue.	Won LEAF award for best advertisement in the Home Services category. Includes elements identified as offensive in past research.
Gossard Glossies Lingerie	Outdoor poster advertisement featuring a woman on her back, arms outstretched and lying in thick grass, wearing a translucent black bra and panties with copy that reads, " <i>Who said a woman couldn't get pleasure from something soft?</i> "	Generated the most complaints received by the U.K. Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) in 1996.
Irn-Bru Beer	Outdoor poster advertisement featuring a photo of a cow's head, mouth agape, with copy reading, " <i>When I'm a burger I want to be washed down with Irn-Bru.</i> "	Generated the most complaints received by the U.K. ASA in 1998.
Gun Control Network	PSA outdoor poster advertisement featuring a large bullet with a small indenture in it representing a grave. The copy reads, " <i>A .22 handgun makes the same size hole as a magnum.</i> "	Generated the most complaints received by the U.K. ASA in 1997.
British Safety Council	Leaflet featuring a photo of the Pope with the copy reading, " <i>The Eleventh Commandment: 'Thou shalt always wear a condom.'</i> "	Generated the most complaints received by the U.K. ASA in 1995. The advertisers were asked to remove the advertisement.
Club 18-30	Outdoor poster and trade press advertisement that features a photo of a man's torso with boxer shorts on and a bulge in the crotch area. The copy reads, " <i>Girls. Can we interest you in a package holiday?</i> "	Generated the second most complaints received by the U.K. ASA in 1995. The advertisers were asked to remove the advertisement and seek advice on writing copy.
Opium Perfume	Outdoor poster advertisement that features a pale naked woman on her back, knees raised, covering one of her breasts and her back arched.	Generated the most complaints received by the U.K. ASA in 2000. The advertisers were forced to remove the advertisement.
Bol.com online book store	Outdoor poster and magazine advertisement that features a naked couple straddling each other, each reading a book that is in their hand. The headline reads, " <i>Love books?</i> "	Generated the most complaints received by the U.K. ASA in 1999.

women in their mid-thirties to mid-fifties are the most commonly offended group, and were consequently selected for the sample herein (Table 2 includes a list of participants and their respective demographic profiles). Participants were all residents of the East Tennessee area. However, only four of the 16 women interviewed originated from this region. Therefore,

although Tennessee has distinctive qualities, the majority of respondents did not live in this state during their formative years and hence did not adopt these qualities as expressed in their values and worldviews. Existing research is equivocal in its identification of factors related to race and offensiveness. Since the sample size was small, effort was made to maintain a

certain level of internal consistency within the data by only including Caucasians. Although limiting the sample to whites who live in Eastern Tennessee had the potential to skew results, attempts were made to achieve an exhaustive set of perspectives within this group by seeking various viewpoints. As such, this sample lacks statistical generalizability, but nonetheless offers deeper understanding of the offensiveness construct than exists presently.

The second technique employed relates to the acquisition of an extensive collection of respondent perspectives. To achieve such a collection, several authors (e.g., Bogdan and Taylor [1975]; Glaser and Strauss [1967]) suggest conducting interviews until redundancy in responses occurs. Following Bogdan and Taylor's (1975) recommendations, participants were varied as needed based on qualities such as personal values, educational background, marital and parental status, sexual orientation, and geographic origination. To facilitate an exhaustive set of view-points, access to participants was acquired through the use of a snowballing procedure. Initial participants were identified through referrals from colleagues and were unknown to the researcher. At the conclusion of each interview, a participant was asked to identify an acquaintance that was dissimilar in some manner. For instance, since early respondents primarily held liberal values, more conservative individuals were sought. Furthermore, as the sample took form and additional perspectives surfaced, measures were taken to vary participants based upon age, education level, number and age of children, religious affiliation, and sexual orientation. Participants were acquired until respondent perspectives became redundant, which resulted in a sample of 16 female consumers. Adopting this approach allowed for variability in responses and perspectives, which made possible the acquisition of a dimensionally rich conceptualization of advertising offensiveness.

## Results and Discussion

Looking at the results holistically suggests that women in the 34-to-55-year-old-age-range view offensive advertising as an aggressive force that negatively influences themselves and others for whom they care on several fronts. As seen in Figure 2, the ultimate conceptualization of advertising offensiveness may be divided into two components. The first component involves those aspects of the model that concern an individual's interaction with certain advertisements and advertising in general. Specifically, three antecedents to experienced offense comprise this initial section of the model, including

individual values, expectations, and (forced) exposure to advertising. As will be demonstrated, an individual's values contribute to one's expectations of what advertising should entail, depending upon the interaction between product type, advertising executions and messages, and media channels. The second component primarily involves three consequential phases of perceived influence that offensive advertising poses to an individual, including influence on self- and others'-identity, the behavior of others, and the social order. Additionally, this successive component involves feelings of concern, protection, and responsibility, as well as defense strategies utilized to cope with advertising offensiveness. Together, these two sections interact systematically by one feeding off another through feedback loops, causing an individual's expectations toward advertising exposure to continually modulate. Based on this interactive model, advertising offensiveness from the perspective of female consumers may be defined as the "forced" exposure to unexpected advertising that has the power to negatively influence females' identities, behaviors, and/or the social order as she perceives it. Such a description represents an overall individual-experience-based conceptualization of offensive advertising, detailed below.

### *Component One: Individual Values*

Although several possible characteristics of an individual such as personality and mood may contribute to experiences with advertising offensiveness, results highlighted values as the strongest personal factor associated with the phenomenon. Respondents often recounted their interactions with advertisements in the context of their guiding principles, which consistently contributed to perceptions and expectations of advertising.

Participants' values can be divided into two factions. The first group of values revolves around the concepts of integrity and justice. Women higher in education and "untraditional" in their gender roles clustered around these concepts when discussing the values by which they live.

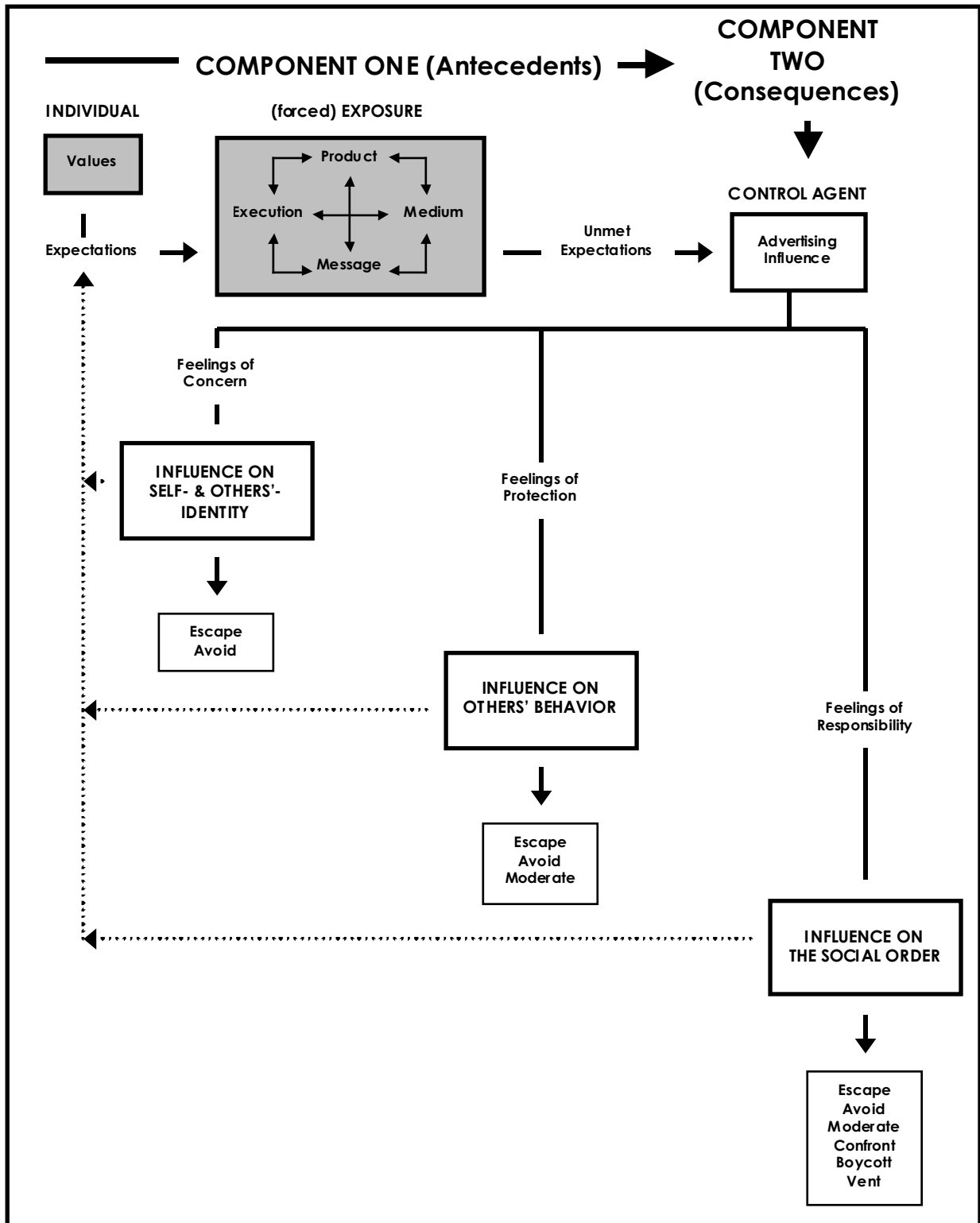
- [I value] being honest about who I am, being intellectually honest.
- Equality is [my] number one value. ...Human equality.

The other dominant group within the respondent sample includes women who are less educated and more conservative in their outlook of the world. These women hold central those principles associated with structure, including family and Christian values.

**Table 2**  
**Participant Profiles**

<i>Interview Number</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Marital Status</i>	<i>Children Ages</i>	<i>Education Level</i>	<i>Job Class</i>	<i>Misc.</i>
1	40s	White	Married	TWO—late teens & early 20s	PhD—Speech Communication	Professional / Academic	Very recent PhD recipient
2	45	White	Married	TWO—19 & 17; raised ONE stepson—28	College graduate	Professional	Southern Moderate Liberal
3	40s	White	Married	N/A	Some graduate school	Student	Feminist
4	30s	White	Married	N/A	Professional school	Professional	Liberal
5	43	White	Married	TWO—early 20s in college; TWO stepchildren	Some college	Administrative & nontraditional student	Veteran (AF-7.5 yrs)
6	39	White	Married	TWO—1.5 year-old twins	PhD—Classics	Professional / Academic	Bisexual
7	47	White	Divorced	THREE—2 teens & 1 early 20s	High School graduate	Professional	Southern Conservative
8	35	White	Single	N/A	PhD—History	Professional / Academic	Feminist
9	35	White	Single	N/A	College graduate	Professional / Administrative	Conservative & Veteran (AF-4 yrs)
10	48	White	Married	N/A	Law Degree & ABD	Student	
11	55	White	Married	THREE—20s & early 30s	High School graduate	Homemaker	Devout Southern Baptist
12	50	White	Widowed	TWO—teens	Law Degree	Professional & Educator	
13	50s	White	Married	FOUR—20s & early 30s	College graduate	Part-time professional	Devout Catholic
14	40s	White	Married	THREE—2 teens & 12 year old	College graduate	Homemaker	
15	37	White	Single	TWO—teens	Professional school	Healthcare Provider	
16	34	White	Married	TWO—toddlers	Master's Degree	Part-time nurse	Army brat

Figure 2  
Advertising Offensiveness Conceptualization



- When you're a mother every decision you make is how you want your child to end up. So the type of person I wanted them to be led us to put forth a better front for them in every goal, or every lesson I taught them.

Although these two sets of principles show marked differences, they are woven together by a common thread—control. In varying degrees, every interviewee indicated that she strives for a sense of control over environmental factors. Having structure in their lives facilitates this control and helps them avoid negative consequences.

- But when you get out into the world and you see how other people live and the consequences or non-consequences of it, then you just sort of learn [structure]. And also that time, my year, year and a half after I got out of the service and I just sort of went wild, you know, I thought, "Oh, I've worked so hard for four years, I'm just going to slack off for awhile." Well, it really did me no good at all.

Such a common bond begins to underscore a potential contributing factor in these women's interpretations of advertising generally and offensive advertising specifically. Based on discussions with participants, one's life and surroundings are of vital importance to women 34 to 55 years of age. According to the interviews, advertising often threatens this control because it is perceived as a pervasive and potentially influential force.

### **Component One: (Forced) Exposure and Unmet Expectations**

As illustrated in Figure 2, expectations of what advertising should entail is largely determined by one's value set. Women consistently spoke of personal values when discussing their perceptions of advertising. As such, participants' values dictate certain expectations of advertising. For instance, if an individual identifies with values associated with structure, she expects advertising to strictly provide information that will assist one in controlling the consumer landscape. Exposure to advertising that does not live up to this expectation has the potential to offend. Although values are largely stable, expectations may eventually shift as a result of continued exposure to "unexpected" advertising messages. In effect, such repeated exposure has the tendency to desensitize some women to the point that their experienced offense is lessened.

One of the most prevalent expectations of respondents involves the idea that advertising should supply

product information. This outlook is perhaps a consequence of the importance participants place on life-control factors. Potentially, advertising can arm consumers with information that they may use to gain control within the brand- and product-heavy marketplace.

- [The function of advertising is] just to bring something to people's attention even if they're not gonna' rush out and buy whatever it is. Like just to make 'em aware of it.

As the respondent above explained, advertising provides information that may be used at an individual's disposal, primarily during a purchase scenario, thereby enabling individuals with knowledge, albeit cursory. Most other respondents agreed that the main role of advertising is to disseminate information.

Although participants expect mainly information from advertising, they also anticipate that this information is somehow tainted. Such a finding corresponds with previous studies such as that by Mittal (1994) as well as a research review by O'Donohoe (1995). Paradoxically, this "dis-information" has the ability to take consumer power away from individuals through deceit and dishonesty. Unfortunately, respondents seemed so used to untruthful advertising that they regarded advertisements as nearly always dishonest (they expected it) and therefore somewhat tolerable.

- Well, I expect that they're primarily selling an image. But I expect, you know, certain kinds of information and I expect that they're also lying a lot [*chuckling*]. ...Well, deceptive, I should say. Creatively deceptive.

Although a central value of many participants is honesty/integrity, in the case of advertising evaluations this value is moderated by one's expectations. In other words, even though a stimulus such as advertising may possess qualities counter to an individual's personal standards, if one expects these qualities, offense is unlikely to occur.

In addition to providing "creatively deceptive" information, respondents also expect advertising to take into account all potential viewers of an advertisement. In this sense, advertising is expected to consider the possibility that any age group may be exposed to a particular advertisement. Individuals with family and Christian values expect advertising and all media to operate within the parameters of family and faith.

- If you're trying to sell something, your ad should portray an image that everybody can look at.
- Middle school, high school kids shouldn't be seeing it. ...Just reminds me of Sodom and

Gomorra. ...It's just not something that should be shown in the airwaves, broadcast airwaves, without people having the choice to see it or not.

Participants expect advertising, which resides within the public domain, to only include subject matter that they believe is appropriate for children. However, this expectation is not limited to such a child-centered point-of-view.

- I just didn't like having that advertising being foisted on me by Victoria's Secret. Now, if I choose to go buy a pornography magazine, you know, I'm going in and paying money deliberately to buy that type of literature. And I felt like they were trying to slide this in kind of.

In the above case, the inappropriateness of certain subjects was more centered on her own wishes than that of children. This excerpt begins to highlight the significance of "forced" exposure. The pervasiveness that so often accompanies advertising often results in women becoming unintentionally exposed to something over which they have little control or choice. This "forced" exposure then combines with a particular set of expectations, which then has the potential to result in experienced offense.

As illustrated in Figure 2, participants' values and expectations feed into the "forced" exposure element of the offensiveness model. Exposure may be "forced" when an individual is exposed to an advertisement that was not intended for her viewing. As such, according to the model a woman may become offended because she is not in the target market for a particular advertisement. Once an individual is exposed to an advertisement that may be offensive, the literature-based components of product, execution, and medium combine during an individual's interpretation of an advertisement. Additionally, participants also evaluate advertising's offensiveness with the communicated message in mind. Only a few quantitative studies, such as Reichert, Heckler, and Jackson (2001) and Dahl, Frankenberger, and Manchanda (2003), have begun to stress the importance of an advertisement's underlying message in viewers' evaluations.

When asked to view nine potentially offensive advertisements, the female respondents experienced the most offense when dominant themes of sexuality were portrayed. Such a finding is similar to results generated by Peterson and Kerin (1977) and LaTour and Henthorne (1993). Although sexual tones were often found to be offensive, the reasons behind such offense varied according to the values of an individual. For those possessing values of justice, a sexually

charged advertisement was offensive because it was perceived as unfair to women. For instance, the advertisement that was considered offensive most often was one that featured sexual innuendo and a photo of a man's crotch. Some participants felt that the advertisement "infantilized" women by referring to the audience as "Girls" in the headline. Participants who emphasized structure, on the other hand, believed the advertisement excessively focused on the act of sex, which conflicted with their Christian values. Interestingly, this second group of women did not allude to the possibility that the headline may be demeaning to women. Similarly, this group of women thought a perfume advertisement pornographic, while justice-oriented respondents felt the advertisement portrayed women as vulnerable. Such an exclusive division between the two primary values of respondents was consistent across the advertisements.

Analysis of advertising stimuli responses also demonstrated the interactive nature of product, execution, medium, and message that was proposed in the literature review. One advertisement in particular showed how a product, lingerie, interacts with the advertisement's medium, executional style, and message when an individual evaluates an advertisement's offensiveness.

- That wouldn't bother me if that was like in a magazine. I mean, you see stuff like that in women's magazines all the time. I understand the message, the underwear is supposed to be soft and comfortable. And I think that's what a woman basically wants in underwear.
- But, you know, that's everywhere. So, it's so common, I mean, it's actually not very interesting.

This lingerie advertisement included similar levels of undress as the other advertising stimuli, as well as sexual innuendo; however, respondents felt that this image was relevant to the product and common amongst magazine advertisements, further illustrating the importance of expectations in experienced offense.

Perhaps the most interesting and enlightening responses were generated from a Public Service Announcement touting condom use. Although this advertisement was the most sexually explicit and violent advertisement presented, it did not produce the highest number of negative reactions. In fact, nine of the participants found the advertisement effective rather than offensive. Those not offended felt that this message was important enough to allow for the use of a congruent executional style focused on sexual imagery and flashes of violence.

- Well, it got my attention. Actually, I think that was fairly effective. I have some respect for that ad because I know the issue. I understand the issue. I think that's a valid public service thing. I think it's important.

### ***Component Two: Influence on Self- & Others'-Identity***

Once an individual is exposed to unexpected advertising, she experiences various consequences included in the second component of the offensiveness model. These consequences involve three levels of influence that offensive advertising imposes upon participants. This influence may be viewed as a type of control agent that disrupts an individual's self and/or environment. Respondents consistently spoke of their desires to maintain order in their lives. The intrusive and unexpected qualities of offensive advertising have the potential to upset the structure that participants have constructed within their environments. This dismantling manifests itself through influence on identity, behavior, and social order and represents to individuals injustice imposed upon self and others.

The first type of influence results in feelings of in- and outward concern and includes the three categories of (1) being manipulated, (2) being minimized, and (3) being told what to do or think. All of these themes center on the respondent perspective that advertising represents an agent of control that has influence on self- and others'-identity. As such, it is important to note that this level of influence does not involve overt behavior. Participants generally regard advertising's material influence limited on themselves. Offense in this case was not due to advertising making oneself or others necessarily act upon persuasive suggestions (e.g., through being manipulated or coerced), but rather advertising's ability to alter one's views of self. Concomitantly, respondents offended by this type of influence were more bothered by the acts of manipulation, minimization, and coercion *per se*, than the thought that they would be incited to action and make an unconscious purchase.

The "being manipulated" category manifests itself primarily in three ways. First, advertising offensiveness was described in terms of influencing one's own identity. In this case, respondents were offended by the fact that their image of themselves was affected by various advertising methods of persuasion. As such, these women did not want to be manipulated but at times found it difficult to resist. Hence, they become part of the "thing" that they hate, but rather than blame themselves, participants direct their offense toward an outside source—advertising.

- But most of it I would consider to be propaganda. They're just selling me shit, trying to tell me what I want, you know. Make me want things I didn't know I wanted, to keep the whole thing rolling, machine moving all the time.

As this example illustrates, some participants recognize advertising's ability to influence the purchases they make beyond what they really need. In this manner, advertising creates a desire in individuals that drives one's self-definition. Those who recognize this power of advertising become offended.

The second manifestation that emerged involved offense generated from advertising's manipulative influence over others. Participants following this line of logic regularly made comments such as the following:

- But I think there are ads where they try to convince you [that] you need something when it's pretty clear to me that it's not really something I need.
- And that's something you can't really control. But, I'm thinking, if I'm aware of it enough and other people are aware of it, then somebody doing it is aware of it.

These respondents commonly feel that although their own identities are not in danger of being manipulated, other individuals are influenced in this manner by advertising. Offense is thus generated from the idea that advertising creates these identities and individuals perpetuate this creation by knowingly accepting advertising's manipulative influence.

The final type of "being manipulated" concerns the notion that advertising affects self- and others'-identity by insulting one's intelligence. Participants explained how advertising often questions their ability to recognize manipulative efforts.

- They insult your intelligence. They really think that you're going to be stupid enough to go and buy this pair of jeans because it's going to make you feel sexy. [I'm] more offended because they think I'm so gullible that it insults a person's intelligence I think.

These women evidently identify themselves as advertising savvy, yet advertisements often communicate their messages as though consumers are overly gullible. Unlike the manipulation scenarios discussed prior, participants in this case are offended by advertising because they feel it uses obvious tactics that do not respect one's self-identity as an intelligent being.

A similar identity-influence category to "being manipulated" concerns what respondents referred to as

being minimized. This type of influence on self- and others'-identity is characterized by advertising's ability to devalue an individual. Unlike manipulation, this characteristic is regarded by most as an unintentional consequence of advertising portrayals. For this category, in- and outward concern is a strong moderating variable. Those who are offended by factors surrounding the minimization category all expressed concern for self and others in their discussions.

Several women felt that advertisements often portray women as inferior objects, minimizing their identity as valuable members of society.

- There are times I find it belittling to women, in particular. I think the times when men have been objectified, more often than not, it's in mocking of the woman's role. And that offends me.

Interestingly, this instance of minimization did not offend participants who identify with the traditional, woman-as-housewife role. Since women with strong family-values identify themselves as having a traditional housewife role, traditional portrayals of women do not offend them because the portrayals affirm rather than devalue their roles. Offense from being minimized generally only occurs for participants who identify themselves as non-traditional, and hence believe they are more valuable in society than that being portrayed in advertising. For those who were offended, advertising has the power to perpetuate minimization in society, which in the general sense has the ability to make a woman feel less valuable than the opposite sex and subsequently influence her self-identity.

Participants also cited several instances when advertising made a false assumption of women. In these scenarios, respondents felt that an advertisement was making a sweeping generalization based on stereotypical assumptions of gender behavior.

- And the tag line for the commercial was something like, "30 million women watch Nascar." It sort of offended me because that would be giving the world the impression that we only watch Nascar because of the men's butts. When, in fact, women watch Nascar because of the competition. So that kind of offended me.

This example typifies a particular type of minimization that is a result of reducing an individual's self-identity by assigning her to a broad group and making assumptions based on beliefs surrounding the group rather than the individual. Offense experienced by such generalization may be a result of the individualistic culture within which participants live. As defined by Myers (1993), individualism involves "the

concept of giving priority to one's own goals over group goals and defining one's identity in terms of personal attributes rather than group identifications" (p. 188). In the above passage, the respondent became offended when her individually oriented self-identity as a lover of competitive racing was minimized to that of an infatuated school girl simply because she is female. As such, she feels that advertising attempts to negatively influence her identity through the minimization of her non-traditional interests.

Another popularly discussed instance of being minimized centered on the type of body images that are commonly used. Women interviewed often mentioned their dismay over advertising's preoccupation with the use of idealized, youthful images.

- In general I get offended by ads that play off women's insecurities about their bodies. That's a big one for me. That's just gonna' tick me off right away.

Viewing idealized body types makes respondents feel devalued because they do not perceive themselves as possessing "the perfect body." Hence, participants believe that advertising influences a woman's self-identity by making her feel as though she is less desirable in society unless she lives up to the ideals portrayed in advertising.

The final type of influence on identity that emerged from the data concerns the notion of being told what to do or think. This influence involves advertising acting as a controller of individuals' identities by assuming an authoritative position in respondents' lives.

- You don't need to tell me what I want. You know? Or what I should be. What I should do, what my goals are. I think a lot of time the advertiser's telling you that you're not good enough without this.

This category was often discussed in the context of fear appeals, or persuasion through the process of "guiding" someone to do something by taking away a socially unacceptable ailment, such as acne or body-odor. Mention of such fear tactics was common amongst interviewees who experienced offense from this approach because they regarded it as a method of being coerced in a paternalistic fashion.

- The ad purposely highlights an existing vulnerability or suggests a vulnerability that I can do something about. But, see, now I have something else to be afraid of. A lot of the pharmaceutical advertisements, lawyers. I mean, everything, cosmetics it's like "You're

ugly if you don't have this"; "This is bad"; "You should avoid this at all costs." I would prefer to think that something is advertised in an enticing way.

Being told what to do or think was very much a self-oriented type of influence for respondents. Offense originates from the perception that one's identity is being threatened through the use of fear appeals. As such, participants voiced concern over advertising advising them as individuals the proper way to think or act, often in a very prescriptive manner. Similar to the other categories of identity-influence, this type of offense involves inward concern for one's idea of self; participants see advertising's dictatorial influence as an attempt to control their own identity based upon what they are told to purchase.

As illustrated in Figure 2, feelings of concern act as moderating variables of offense experienced from advertising's influence on identity. Participants regularly discussed their experiences with influences on self in a manner that alluded to their concern over such concepts as equality and fairness. Many participants exhibited moderate offense over certain instances of identity-influence. Over the years, these individuals became focused on other life-events to the extent that they no longer experience the same level of conviction, or concern, for issues that at one time offended them.

Once an individual experiences offense related to identity-influence, she either adopts coping, or defense, strategies or alters her expectations of advertising. The results indicated that when women's identities are threatened by advertising's influence, they either disregard the negative advertisements in an effort to maintain their sense of self or alter their expectations of advertising altogether.

- I just want to turn the channel. I don't want to, I don't want to watch it. I don't want to listen to it.
- It's easy for me to get away from ads. I can turn off the radio. I can turn off the television. I don't have to read the paper. I don't have to look at the ad. My eyelids aren't taped open.

This escapist strategy is commonplace because advertising represents an entity that is not easily approached; therefore, participants do not think of a more confrontational reaction as a viable solution.

### ***Component Two: Influence on Others' Behavior***

The second type of offense-generating influence involves that which affects others' behavior. In conversa-

tions with respondents, individuals never regarded themselves as high risks to advertising's ability to coerce. However, many women did express offense over advertising's control of others who are vulnerable and/or susceptible to behavioral influence. Women offended by this level of influence were threatened by outside forces, such as advertising, that have the ability to cause behavior that runs counter to their beliefs of the proper way to behave. As such, respondents explained how they felt inclined to protect the innocent against such influence while suggesting that advertising represents a threat to their own control of vulnerable others, particularly children, in their environments. Respondents felt that sex in advertising may cause curious kids to ask embarrassing or unsuitable questions.

- I don't think I'd want my children to see it, let me put it to you that way. 'Cause there are always kind of sexual undertones to that. I mean, they're three, and nineteen months, I don't think they need to see that on TV or in an ad, or anything like that. ...And maybe I'm just scared of what kind of questions they would ask me. But I think maybe I'm not ready for that as a parent.

Beyond sex in advertising, a few other respondents expressed offense over advertisements that take advantage of kids' desires in order to influence them to badger their parents. Such an instance again involves a loss of control.

Women also regularly described instances of offense over advertising influencing the behavior of susceptible audience members. Unlike vulnerability, this influence generates offense over the belief that some individuals are easily swayed to carry out primitive behavior. Primarily, this behavior involves sexual and violent activities.

- I believe companies want to persuade you in order to make profits. ...I see it as a way of exploiting certain, you know, tendencies the population has to like and buy pornography.

Many respondents were troubled by the notion that people lack self-control over their elemental drives and that advertising has the ability to model uncivilized behavior. Participants offended by this type of influence seem to believe that people, regardless of age, are too susceptible to acting primitively that they cannot resist advertising's behavioral effects.

- ...Violence on TV bothers me because how it affects children. And I have seen some statistics on that that show it does impact kids and

how they react around others. So I would have to think that it does impact men, too.

Based on the evidence, offense related to others' susceptibility is born out of the impression that humans' basic instincts of sex and violence are easily stimulated. This perspective is adopted by many participants, yet is not believed to be the case when they discuss themselves. This one-sided attribution may be a bi-product of respondents' desire for order and control over their lives; succumbing to one's primal needs would disrupt this structure. As such, participants again adopt a protective stance, attempting to protect others from advertising's influence.

Like the other influences included in Figure 2, offense experienced from influence on others' behavior may result in either altered expectations of advertising or adoption of various coping strategies. Similar to the first influence category discussed, escape from and avoidance of offensive advertising are common defensive actions taken by respondents when faced with advertising that targets others' vulnerability and/or susceptibility. However, since the present category centers on others' behavior rather than one's self, participants undertake additional strategies related to moderating exposure. Hence, many women described how they, in an effort to protect the vulnerable and susceptible, monitor what is shown in advertisements and in a sense act as media gatekeepers. This censorship relates back to the "forced" exposure aspect of offensive advertising. According to respondents the pervasiveness of advertising requires them to keep a close eye on children's exposure, which increases the likelihood that women will be exposed to messages intended for other target markets.

### *Component Two: Influence on the Social Order*

The categories of influence discussed thus far involve micro-level effects. Though participants often discussed their offense from influences that affect their immediate environment, they also voiced their views surrounding more macro-level consequences of offensive advertising, which involve effects on the social order. At this level of influence, advertising is regarded as a force that has the potential to shape society negatively, which threatens the order of respondents' environments with which they are comfortable. As responsible citizens, participants feel a sense of duty to combat this threat by adopting such strategies as confronting and boycotting offensive advertisers.

Interviewees commonly expressed their dismay over the current state of American society. This dismay

was often communicated in the context of advertising's influence on the social order. Perhaps the most shared experience with offense in this regard concerns the belief that advertising contributes to altered standards or negative cultural norms. Many respondents felt that society is in a state of decline and advertising merely facilitates this deterioration.

- It's going away from a value system that preserves the society, really. We've lost the family unit. We've lost respect for one another. Lost respect for authority. ...Well, frankly, I would say that [advertising is] in a position to influence and be a role model for society.

Interviewees longed for the "good old days" and were offended by the prospect of their society becoming so unpleasant that it would one day be unlivable. This generational view holds that advertising has made society so vastly different from the past that a sort of "nostalgic offense" is experienced.

Respondents offended by influences on social standards all expressed feelings of responsibility to varying degrees. Participants drew offense from the idea that advertising helps create a society that has opposing values to their own. Because of this broad-based influence, respondents explained that they have a responsibility to the society at large to nurture certain standards within those around them. Specifically, participants believe that they have a duty to the world, as they enjoy it, to promote their own standards and attempt to thwart advertising's influence on society.

Participants also experienced offense from advertising legitimizing inappropriate behavior. Women offended over legitimization feel that advertising upsets the social order by communicating to society at large that certain activities are acceptable. These "wrongful" activities of social disruption are perceived to be far-reaching.

- It offends me because I think that these people are doing mindless things for their own gratification or money or whatever. And they're not considering the implications on society that impact us all.

Perhaps the most commonly discussed instance of legitimized behavior concerns promiscuous sex. Numerous participants explained their offense over advertising that seems to promote irresponsible sexual activity. Similar to the legitimization of violence, such promotion represents to those interviewed a force that has the long-term ability to negatively influence the social order, apparently initiating society's regression back to more primitive times.

- Well, it's saying, "Okay, it's not so much promiscuous sex that's wrong. It's if you don't use the condom then you're wrong." I mean, it's kind of attacking the wrong thing. It's saying, "Okay, promiscuous sex is fine as long as you use a condom," and that's just, that segment of society that would live by, I don't know if evil is the right word. Just, you know, sins of the flesh of all levels.

Such a point of view is common among those women who hold close Christian values discussed previously. However, other, less religious participants also feel that advertising legitimizes "loose" sexual activity.

- For them I would see this more as a promiscuity thing. Or legitimize. If you saw it up on a billboard, "Oh, that's okay. I should go ahead and do that."

Based on results it seems that the legitimization of inappropriate sex offends regardless of religious ties. This far-reaching offense is a result of participants' sense of responsibility to maintain social order, whether it is related to Christian values or otherwise.

The final type of social order influence that participants discussed concerns materialism, or the inflated importance of material goods. Several respondents discussed their offense over advertising's contribution to society's preoccupation with wealth and consumption of "things." Interestingly, most individuals who mentioned this result of advertising identified themselves as liberals who embrace the values of honesty and equality.

- ... Be a good suburban family and buy this car. Be, you know, sexy, and buy this. ... You are your possessions. I think it has contributed to the superficiality of American culture.

Materialistic tendencies have the potential to disrupt social order by instilling in members of society the idea that happiness is achieved only through consumption of desired goods. Hence, rather than follow the virtues of human equality, honesty, and integrity, individuals are guided by virtues of greed and conspicuous consumption. Respondents believed that since advertising itself is founded upon greedy motives, this innate propensity is difficult for consumers not to adopt themselves. As a result, participants believe that advertising influences society by creating a culture of material-driven consumers, which is regarded as the antithesis to the kind of world in which respondents wish to live. Similar to altered standards and legitimization of inappropriate behavior, participants expressed feelings of responsibility in fighting

against advertising's materialistic influence, mainly by teaching children non-materialistic values.

Defense strategies discussed previously, including escaping, avoidance, and moderation, were utilized by participants to deal with offense generated from advertising's influence on the social order. Nonetheless, respondents adopted additional strategies that reflect feelings of responsibility associated with this category. One such strategy involves confronting an advertiser that exhibits disregard for the social order. One individual in particular described a time when she wrote to a company explaining her offense over their heightened sexual advertising tactics. She explained that she wrote the company asking them to cease sending her promotional material and told them she would no longer purchase their product. Only a few individuals adopted such boycotting. Like other responses to offense from the influence on social order, this strategy was adopted as a way of exhibiting one's responsibility to maintain order in society. Participants adopting this defense strategy feel that such action as refusing to purchase a product will in a small way demonstrate their resistance to advertising's influence on the social order. In a way, these individuals are attempting to hinder the disruption of the social order by acting as "responsible" consumers. A final coping strategy used involves venting to others. Some utilized this strategy occasionally by talking to others who hold common values. However, most respondents, even when prompted, did not mention this strategy as something that they engage in often.

It should be noted that the three individual levels of advertising influence discussed above are neither sequential nor exclusive to a single offensive experience. Therefore, a viewer of a particular advertisement may draw offense in more than one way. An individual who experiences advertising offensiveness will either develop coping strategies to deal with the offense or modify her expectations of advertising. If expectations are adjusted, it is unlikely that values will also change. Therefore, although an individual has certain values associated with fairness, family, etc., if expectations are met when viewing an advertisement, offense will likely not occur. The less prominent feelings of concern, protection, and responsibility, the less likely an individual will continue to be offended by a particular advertisement. As such, those with fewer feelings will merely alter their expectations of advertising rather than develop coping strategies. This point is especially significant because it illustrates the fact that offense is not something most people seek out. In effect, individuals approach offensive advertising, like other stimulants in everyday

life, as an adverse force that needs to be removed. Since offended individuals often believe they have little control over a stimulus so pervasive as advertising, they generally either take measures to avoid it or accept it as an unfortunate reality.

### Implications

Incorporating audience perceptions into female-directed advertising is obviously important. Such a marketing orientation is not new to the field. However, due to females' continued direct and indirect influence over purchase decisions, as well as their function as media gatekeepers, it is important to consider females' perceptions of advertising even when they are not an intended audience. As the results revealed, women adopt several coping strategies that entail complaining to others. Such negative word-of-mouth has the potential to effectively counteract advertising messages and lead to the detriment of a brand. Therefore, advertisers need to be mindful when targeting certain groups that are influenced by female audience members.

Results herein suggest several pieces of advice to advertising stakeholders. First, it is important for advertisers to understand and incorporate values into communication efforts. Women, age 34-55, have deeply ingrained values related to integrity, justice, and family. Advertising that targets females in this age group should reflect these principles by not only portraying honesty and equality in an advertisement itself, but also by treating audience members honestly and equally. Concurrently, if an advertiser's target audience is outside this group yet influenced by women as media gatekeepers, incorporating values that run counter to those important to 34-55-year-old women increases the likelihood that offense will result that could indirectly deteriorate a brand image. Second, one should avoid executions that communicate control over prime-aged female audience members. Unlike younger women, 34-55-year-olds exercise a significant amount of control in their lives. Having spent several years trying to obtain such control, any force that threatens structure will be received negatively. Therefore, rather than communicating these threats through fear appeals, etc., messages need to focus on how a brand or product will assist in helping one gain additional control in life. Advertisers should be aware that although the use of fear appeals may be effective among some consumer groups, it will likely raise a red flag among 34-55-year-old women, which will again possibly hurt a brand indirectly. Third, it is important to understand that this market segment has a very strong sense of self, is protective of the

weak, and is committed to being socially responsible. Hence, female-targeted communications need to promote women's self-identities while considering both the individuals and social environment that surround this segment. Collectively, the above points should be regarded not as a hindrance to clutter-breaking advertising, but rather as a guide to more effectively communicate with female consumers. "Safe," non-offensive advertising directed at all target audiences is not advocated here per se; rather, results begin to highlight strategies that advertisers may adopt in order to avoid unintentionally offending certain individuals and subsequently damaging a brand's equity.

The conceptualization of advertising offensiveness presented also offers several opportunities for future empirical testing. First, the significance of expectations may be further examined in an experimental setting. So doing would provide additional support (or disconfirmation) for the role that unmet expectations have in advertising offense. Second, the interaction of product, execution, medium, and message could be tested against measured levels of offense. Again, experimental designs would help establish the strength of these interactions as well as the dominant dimensions that contribute to the greatest amount of offense. Finally, research is needed to determine the advertising influences that contribute to the most offense. Creation of such a hierarchical scale would assist advertisers in determining those campaign approaches that would most likely result in consumer backlash. Additionally, such a scale would facilitate future measurement of the construct.

Eliminating offended audience members without eradicating all advertising is an impossible endeavor. However, advertising stakeholders can begin to control this phenomenon by understanding how certain consumers are offended in the first place. Because those creating advertising messages are often very different from those receiving messages, advertisers need to make a conscious effort to communicate to consumers rather than to each other. In the case of female audiences, this effort entails understanding the importance of values, expectations, and control. Interestingly, many agencies have adopted the approach to creative strategy that involves the act of surprise, which, according to results, runs the risk of offending female audiences. Although this approach may break through the clutter of competitors' advertisements, pushing the envelope too far can result in dire consequences. More fully understanding how far one can push through consideration of the parameters of offensiveness will help promotional communicators avoid the inadvertent offense that so many advertisers have experienced in the past.

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