

Signals and Cues: LGBT Inclusive Advertising and Consumer Attraction

George B. Cunningham and E. Nicole Melton

George B. Cunningham, PhD, is a Professor and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in the College of Education and Human Development at Texas A&M University. He holds the Marilyn Kent Byrne Chair for Student Success and is the director of the Laboratory for Diversity in Sport. His research focuses on diversity and group processes.

E. Nicole Melton, PhD, is an assistant professor of sport management in the Department of Health, Exercise, & Sport Sciences at Texas Tech University. Her research interests include diversity and inclusion in sport organizations and how attitudes and behaviors can influence social change in sport.

Advertising

Abstract

Drawing from signaling theory and creative capital theory, the purpose of this study was to examine the influence of advertising inclusive of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals on consumers' intentions to join a fitness club. The authors also considered the moderating effects of consumer gender and social dominance orientation. Participants ($N = 203$) took part in an experiment where they reviewed fitness club advertisements and then responded to a questionnaire. Persons who viewed LGBT-inclusive advertisements were more likely to believe the club was diverse and inclusive (based on racial diversity, sex diversity, and sexual orientation and gender identity diversity) than were those who viewed non-inclusive advertisements. Logistic regression showed that club diversity, gender, and social dominance orientation interacted to predict intentions to join the club: for women, low levels of SDO were associated with greater intentions to join a diverse fitness club, while high levels of SDO were not associated with join intentions. For men, neither low levels nor high levels of SDO were associated with intentions to join a diverse fitness club. Marketing implications are discussed.

Introduction

The benefits of diversity to the workplace are many. On the one hand, there is the potential for improved workplace dynamics and organizational outcomes, advantages realized because of the varied perspectives and improved decision-making accompanying diversity (e.g., DeSensi, 1995; Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999). Illustrative of these effects, sport organizations following inclusive diversity management strategies are likely to attract and retain talented employees (Fink, Pastore, & Riemer, 2001) and draw a diverse fan base (Fink, Pastore, & Riemer, 2003). The latter is also associated with revenue generation (Cunningham & Singer, 2011). There is also evidence that, when coupled with inclusive workplace practices, employee diversity is associated with a creative work environment (Cunningham, 2011a) and objective measures of performance (Cunningham, 2009, 2011b). On the other hand, there are also external benefits of diversity, as an organization's perceived external image is enhanced from having a diverse workplace, or at least appearing as such (Cunningham & Melton, 2011; Robinson &

Dechant, 1997). That is, external stakeholders, including potential consumers, are likely to express favorable evaluations of a company when they perceive it is diverse and inclusive.

Given these advantages, organizations have increasingly sought to convey an image of diversity and inclusion as a way of attracting employees and customers. Increasingly, organizations seek to achieve this end through the use of external communications, such as recruitment materials and advertisements (Highhouse & Hoffman, 2001). For instance, a sport organization might include photos of people from various racial and ethnic backgrounds on their website, regardless of whether this truly represents their workplace. The presumed line of thought behind such practices is that job seekers, particularly those from under-represented groups, will express greater attraction to the organization when they see a diverse group of employees represented in the organizational communications. Empirical examination of these linkages has largely supported this reasoning (Avery, 2003; Avery, Hernandex, & Hebl, 2004; Walker, Field, Bernerth, &

Becton, 2012). For instance, Walker et al. (2012) conducted two experimental studies and observed that African Americans spent more time on company websites and better recalled the information when the sites contained diversity cues (e.g., a collection of racially heterogeneous persons pictured) than when they did not. The authors also found that organizational attractiveness mediated these effects.

In assessing this literature, two key points emerge. First, scholars have paid considerable attention to understanding the reactions of potential job seekers, but a similar focus on consumers is lacking. As a result, several questions remain. For instance, how do people who use sport organizations' services interpret diversity cues, and what impact do the cues have on their attraction to those entities? Given the service nature of the sport industry (Chelladurai, 2009), these are important, yet largely unexplored, questions. Second, the vast majority of the research in this area focuses on race, both in terms of the content of the diversity cues and the respondents' characteristics examined. Given the prevalence of racial prejudice and discrimination in the workplace, such an emphasis is understandable, but this also means that other diversity cues, such as those focusing on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) inclusiveness, have been overlooked. Such an omission is particularly relevant in the sport and physical activity setting given the history of negative attitudes toward LGBT individuals in this context (for excellent reviews, see Griffin, 1998, 2012).

As such, the purpose of this study was to examine the influence of LGBT-focused diversity cues on consumers' perceptions of and behavioral intentions toward a fitness club. We focus on fitness clubs because they are primarily service providers and represent a type of participant sport organization—one of the largest segments in the sport industry (Chelladurai, 2009). In drawing from signaling theory (Connelly, Certo, Ireland, & Reutzel, 2011; Spence, 1973), we argue that people will interpret LGBT-inclusive advertising as reflecting broader diversity within the fitness club. We also suggest that such perceptions will hold a positive association with intentions to join a fitness club, and that this relationship is potentially moderated by the consumer's gender and social dominance orientation. In the following section, we outline our theoretical framework and present specific hypotheses.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, we primarily draw from signaling theory (Connelly et al., 2011; Spence, 1973) to develop our hypotheses. According to this framework, information asymmetry exists between parties, such as organizations and consumers, and as a result, one or both par-

ties are likely to engage in actions designed to signal particular qualities to the other. The purpose of conveying such signals is to reduce the uncertainty existing between the two parties and, ultimately, the prestige and standing one party has with the other. As Connelly et al. (2011) note, receivers must be able to observe the signal, value the information attached to the signal, and perceive that the sender is authentic in sending the message. To illustrate these dynamics, Spence (1973) relayed how high-quality job applicants distinguish themselves from others through the high-cost signal of rigorous education. While education certainly has human capital benefits, Spence (1973) de-emphasized this potential benefit and instead argued that high-priced education communicates otherwise unobservable characteristics that distinguish her or him from others in the applicant pool. As Connelly et al. (2011) illustrate, these dynamics are frequently seen in the athlete recruitment process among colleges and universities, where a coach or team will spend lavishly on the recruitment process of the coach's travel (e.g., coaches traveling in helicopters or private jets) as a way of signaling the resources available for the program.

Researchers have increasingly drawn from signaling theory to examine a variety of management issues (Connelly et al., 2011). For instance, Cable, Aiman-Smith, Mulvey, and Edwards (2000) found that job applicants drew inferences about a company's organizational culture based on the signals that company sent through various external communications, such as recruitment brochures and its website (see also Rynes, 1991). Others (Preuss & Alfs, 2011) have demonstrated that China used the 2008 Olympics to signal positive messages related to business and tourism in the country. Within the marketing literature, Kirmani and colleagues have shown that consumers interpret a variety of signals, such as warranty information (Boulding & Kirmani, 1993) and advertising expense (Kirmani & Wright, 1989) as indicators of product quality.

The theory has also been used to examine diversity issues. As one example, Miller and Triana (2009) examined the association between the board racial diversity of Fortune 500 firms and external evaluations of the firm's reputation. The authors found that as board diversity increased, so too did others' ratings of that firm. As another illustration, Walker and colleagues (2012) conducted two experimental studies and observed that job seekers perceived organizations with racial diversity cues on their website to value diversity more than did their counterparts with fewer cues on their websites. Finally, Tuten (2006) suggests consumers are keenly aware of companies' use of LGBT-friendly signals (e.g., using gay themes in advertising or supporting gay causes). LGBT consumers use

these signals to develop positive brand attitudes (Tuten, 2005) and are willing to pay a premium price for goods and services LGBT-friendly companies produce. Furthermore, contrary to fears among some, the use of LGBT-inclusive signals does not serve to drive away heterosexuals (Tuten, 2005).

These examples suggest (a) organizations frequently send signals to external parties as a way of communicating desired information, and (b) receivers will often use these cues to make inferences about the workplace, including those related to diversity. This information is likely to be particularly persuasive when consumers have limited information about the product (Kirmani & Rao, 2000). Within the context of the current study, fitness clubs are likely to strategically signal important cues via external communications (e.g., marketing brochures, website) as a way of conveying important information to consumers. For instance, research suggests potential fitness club members make inferences about the club's focus on appearance or wellness based on signals in the club's brochures (Cunningham & Woods, 2012). As Walker et al. (2012) illustrated, receivers are also receptive to diversity-related signals.

LGBT Inclusiveness and Organizational Diversity

Thus far, our review of the literature suggests organizations signal diversity cues to persons outside the organization who they seek to influence, and in return receivers frequently interpret these cues as a reflection on the organization. While some signals have equivalent interpretations (e.g., a fitness club's signal related to a fitness and wellness focus is interpreted as such and little more), it is possible that other signals have additional meanings attached to them. This is particularly the case with LGBT inclusiveness, as people are likely to interpret an organization's sexual orientation diversity as representing a larger emphasis on diversity and inclusion. Florida (2002, 2003, 2012) has argued as much in his presentation of creative capital theory. Set within the context of regional economic development, he argues:

We see a strong and vibrant gay community as a solid *leading indicator* of a place that is open to many different people. If gays feel comfortable in a place, then immigrants and ethnic minorities probably will, too, not to mention eggheads, eccentrics, and all the other non-white-bread types who are sources of new ideas. (Florida, 2012, p. 238, emphasis original)

While creative capital is not directly related to organizational diversity or signals, the basic concepts are still applicable, particularly within sport. Sport is a context where, though improvements have been made, heterosexism and sexual prejudice are prevalent (for

excellent reviews, see Griffin, 1998, 2012; see also Elling, De Knop, & Knoppers, 2003). Thus, a fitness club signaling LGBT-inclusiveness is particularly rare, and potential consumers are likely to take notice. And, in drawing from creative capital theory, they might also interpret these cues as meaning that the club is inclusive of sexual minorities as well as other groups, such as women and racial minorities. Given this linkage, we hypothesized:

Hypothesis 1: Potential consumers who receive signals of LGBT inclusiveness will perceive the fitness club as being more diverse (i.e., sexual orientation and gender identity diversity, gender diversity, and racial diversity) than those who do not receive such signals.

Consumer Reactions to Club Diversity

As we have previously highlighted, sport has traditionally been a context where sexual minorities and others who differ from the traditional majority are subjugated. However, we submit that such practices are misguided and contrary to consumer preferences. Consider the following. For decades, authors have argued there is a social obligation for workplace diversity (Cunningham & Fink, 2006; Cunningham & Melton, 2011; DeSensi, 1995; Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999), suggesting external stakeholders *expect* sport organizations to be diverse and inclusive. There is also evidence these stakeholder groups (a) remain mindful of an organization's diversity and inclusion and (b) reward or penalize that organization accordingly. For instance, Wright, Ferris, Hiller, and Kroll (1995) observed that organizations awarded for their diversity practices saw an increase in their stock valuation while those who had been penalized for discriminatory practices saw significant decreases in their stock prices. More recently, Wang and Schwarz (2010) observed a similar pattern for LGBT-inclusive policies: organizations scoring higher on the Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index had stock prices that outperformed their counterparts. Volpone and Avery (2010) adopted a different vantage point and suggested that, because US organizations are required by law to have employment protections for many groups (e.g., women, racial and ethnic minorities, religious minorities), not providing similar protections for LGBT persons sends a mixed message to various stakeholder groups, including consumers. They note, "Ultimately, these mixed diversity cues can be interpreted as conflicting information" (p. 91), negatively affecting external constituents and their attitudes toward the organization.

There is also evidence from the sport context suggesting people prefer diverse and inclusive environments. For instance, Anderson (2009) has argued that

inclusive masculinity is now prevalent in many men's team sport settings, and as a result, gay and bisexual men are now more welcomed in such environments. His more recent work has also shown that the presence of gay men on these teams serves to enhance internal dynamics on the team (Anderson, 2011). Campbell et al. (2011) conducted an experimental study and found that women had more favorable attitudes toward sexual minority athletes than they did toward heterosexuals. Finally, Cunningham and Melton (2011), in articulating the benefits sport organizations could realize from having LGBT-inclusive workplaces, suggested inclusive organizations would likely realize financial gains because of the goodwill and loyalty generated from their consumers (see also Melton & Cunningham, 2012, for empirical evidence of this among job seekers).

In building from these arguments, we suspected that people would prefer inclusive fitness clubs, and as such, would be more likely to join these clubs (if given the chance) than they would the less-inclusive alternatives. Thus, we hypothesized:

Hypothesis 2: Perceived club diversity will be positively associated with intentions to join the club.

Moderating Effects of Social Dominance and Gender

While we expect people to generally prefer to be affiliated with more diverse entities, this might not be the case for all persons. Therein lies the importance of moderators, or factors that influence the relationships between two other variables. Moderators aid in theory development (Colquitt & Zapata-Phelan, 2007) by helping to specify why relationships might be present in some situations but not in others. In this study, we investigate two potential moderating variables: social dominance and gender.

Social dominance theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) represents an integrative framework focusing on social hierarchies, power, and privilege and how these elements work to create and reinforce discrimination and subjugation within different contexts. A key element of this theory is the psychological characteristic known as social dominance orientation (SDO), which Sidanius and Pratto (1999) defined as "the degree to which individuals desire and support group-based hierarchy and the domination of 'inferior' groups by 'superior' groups" (p. 48). This mindset is also associated with people's support for social inequalities (Danso, Sedlovskaya, & Suanda, 2007) and prejudicial attitudes toward members of under-represented groups (Sidanius, Pratto, & Bobo, 1996; Whitley & Egisdottir, 2001). Alternatively, people who rate low on SDO are supportive of equal rights for women, LGBT equality, and social justice initiatives and policies (Federico &

Sidanius, 2002; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Whitley & Lee, 2000).

Social dominance theory can also inform the current discussion of club diversity. If high SDO individuals are likely to express prejudice and support social inequalities, it is equally unlikely they will be attracted to fitness clubs where diversity is valued. Consistent with this rationale, we hypothesized:

Hypothesis 3: Social dominance orientation will moderate the relationship between perceived club diversity and intentions to join the club, such that people with low SDO will express more intentions to join diverse clubs than will people with high SDO.

Consumer gender might also influence people's reactions to diverse fitness clubs. There is evidence of gender differences in attitudes toward diversity, with men generally expressing less positive attitudes than women. For instance, in their meta-analysis, Harrison, Kravitz, Mayer, Leslie, and Lev-Arey (2006) observed men were less supportive of initiatives aimed at increasing diversity in the workplace than were women. Similar patterns emerge when examining people's attitudes toward sexual minorities (for a review, see Herek, 2009). For example, in a national sample of US adults, Herek (2002) observed that men were more likely than women to believe homosexuality was reflective of a mental illness, and they were also less likely to express support for sexual minorities' civil rights and liberties.

These differences emerge for a host of reasons, including self-interest preservation. Men are the social majority and power holders in many social institutions, including sport and physical activity (Fink, 2008). Given that diversity efforts might serve to potentially alter those structures (DeSensi, 1995; Doherty & Challedurai, 1999), men might resist policies and activities associated with diversity, as they might be contrary to their individual and collective self-interests. Indeed, researchers have illustrated differences between women and men in a variety of diversity topics, including attitudes toward gendered language (Parks & Roberton, 2002, 2004), sexual harassment beliefs (Benavides-Espinoza & Cunningham, 2010), and sexual prejudice (Cunningham, Sartore, & McCullough, 2010; Gill, Morrow, Collins, Lucey, & Schultz, 2006), to name a few.

In drawing from this literature, we also expect women and men to differ in their attitudes toward fitness club diversity. If men express less positive attitudes toward diversity than do women, they might also be less eager to join a fitness club they perceive to be diverse. On the other hand, a homogeneous fitness club might have more appeal to men than it does to women. Thus, we hypothesized:

Hypothesis 4: Consumer gender will moderate the relationship between perceived club diversity and intentions to join the club, such that women will express greater intentions to join diverse clubs than will men.

Finally, it is possible that SDO, gender, and perceived club diversity will all interact to predict intentions to join the club. In their review of the literature, Pratto Sidanius, and Levin (2006) observed that, all else equal, women report lower levels of SDO than do men. Of course, context and social constructions of gender relations can influence these relationships; that said, the authors do offer robust evidence to support their conclusions (but see also, Batlha, Reynolds, & Newbigin, 2011). These findings, when coupled with the aforementioned literature, suggest a three-way interaction is possible. For instance, women who are low in SDO might be most attracted to diverse fitness clubs and least attracted to homogeneous clubs. On other hand, high SDO men might prefer clubs with low perceived diversity relative to other alternatives. In line with this reasoning, we hypothesized:

Hypothesis 5: Consumer gender and SDO will moderate the relationship between perceived club diversity and intentions to join the club, such that intentions to join the club will be highest among low SDO women who perceive high club diversity.

We tested the hypotheses by way of an experiment. As discussed in more details in the following sections, we developed an advertisement for a soon-to-be-opening fitness club and manipulated the inclusiveness through language and symbols. We asked the participants to review the advertisement for one minute and then respond to a questionnaire measuring the study variables. In the following sections, we provide an overview of the participants, study design, and results of the experiment.

Method

Participants

Undergraduate students ($N = 203$) enrolled at a large, public university in the United States took part in the study. While the use of student samples has been criticized, there are several reasons why their inclusion is warranted here. First, past researchers have effectively used student samples when conducting experimental tests of signaling theory (e.g., Boulding & Kirmani, 1993; Melton & Cunningham, 2012). Second, according to industry projections, younger consumers are the primary group holding health club memberships (www.activemarketinggroup.com); from this perspective, a sample of college-aged women and men serves as the ideal sample for considering how advertising influences potential fitness club consumers.

The sample included 69 women (33.5%) and 135 men (66.5%). The racial breakdown was as follows: 23 African Americans (11.3%), 6 Asians (3.0%), 23 Hispanics (11.4%), 142 Whites (70.0%), 6 persons who listed “other” (3.9%), and 1 person who did not provide her or his race. The mean age was 19.50 ($SD = 2.66$). We used a scale from 1 (*completely heterosexual*) to 7 (*completely homosexual*) to measure sexual orientation (Kinsey, 1948), with the sample mean of 1.31 ($SD = 1.17$). Finally, participants indicated they were physically active, as evidenced by the high mean score ($M = 5.40$, $SD = 1.55$) on the item measuring how frequently they exercised (1 = *never*, 7 = *a lot*).

Materials and Procedures

Participants voluntarily took part in a 2 (inclusiveness) x 2 (model gender) between subjects experiment in which they reviewed a flyer for a new fitness club and then responded to a questionnaire. The flyers were randomly distributed, such that each participant reviewed one of four flyers and then responded to a questionnaire.

The flyer was the same used in previous research (Cunningham & Woods, 2012). All flyers contained information about a new fitness club, Synergy Fitness, opening in the coming month. In addition to including the club name, the flyer included the opening date, price of a monthly membership, the picture of a person exercising, and a list of club amenities. This information was included on both the inclusive and non-inclusive flyers. The experimental manipulation took place with additional information included on the inclusive flyer. Here, we included the following statement, along with a rainbow flag (a symbol commonly linked with LGBT inclusion), at the bottom of the flyer: “Synergy Fitness is an open and inclusive fitness club. We have a welcoming environment for persons of all sexual orientations and gender identities.” As noted above, we also varied the gender of the model and did so in the event that consumer-model gender similarity influenced consumer attitudes; subsequent analyses indicated this was not the case, so we did not include model gender in the analyses. Participants were asked to review the flyer for one minute and then respond to a questionnaire in which they provided their demographic information and responded to items measuring the study variables.

The item measuring perceived club diversity had the following stem: “Based on the advertisement, Synergy Fitness appears to be inclusive of people based on their....” Participants then rated the diversity based on “sexual orientation,” “race,” “sex,” and “gender identity.” The scale had acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .89$).

We measured social dominance orientation with an 8-item scale. This scale was adapted from the original

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics

Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Inclusiveness	---								
2. Sex	-.01	---							
3. Age	-.03	-.17*	---						
4. Race	-.05	.01	.03	---					
5. Exercise behavior	.09	.04	-.17*	.06	---				
6. Sexual orientation	-.11	-.12	.21*	.04	.08	---			
7. Social dominance orientation	-.04	.12	-.12	-.27*	.05	.02	---		
8. Club diversity	.40*	-.03	-.09	-.15*	-.05	-.13	-.01	---	
9. Join intentions	-.04	-.14*	.02	.08	.02	.12	-.10	.02	---
<i>M</i> (%)	.52	.67	19.50	.30	5.40	1.31	3.02	4.36	.38
<i>SD</i>	---	---	2.66	---	1.55	1.17	1.04	1.81	---

Notes: Inclusiveness coded as 0 = not inclusive, 1 = inclusive. Sex coded as 0 = male, 1 = female. Race coded as 0 = White, 1 = racial minority. Join intentions coded as 0 = no, 1 = yes. * $p < .05$.

measure Sidanius and Pratto (1999) developed and has been used by others (e.g., Louis, Duck, Terry, Schuller, & LaLonde, 2007). Sample items include “I think group equality should be our ideal” and “I think we should strive to make incomes as equal as possible” (reverse scored). The scale was reliable ($\alpha = .79$).

Finally, we measured intentions to join the club with a single item from Cunningham & Woods (2011): “If given a chance, would you join Synergy Fitness?” Response options included “no” and “yes.”

Results

Means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations are offered in Table 1, and we also provide means, standard deviations, and percentages based on participant gender and the inclusiveness of the advertisement in Table 2. SDO was not related to age, gender, or sexual orientation, but it was related to race, with Whites holding higher scores than racial minorities. Further, join intentions did not hold a significant association with the gender of the model in the advertisement ($r = .07$), participant age ($r = .02$), participant race ($r = .08$), participant sexual orientation ($r = .12$), or participant exercise behavior ($r = .02$); thus, we did not include these variables in any subsequent analyses. Finally, the low score on the Kinsey scale suggests few participants identified as LGBT; this is consistent with past research using samples of college students in the Southwest US (e.g., Melton & Cunningham, 2012).

Hypothesis 1 predicted that participants who received signals of LGBT inclusiveness would perceive the fitness club as being more diverse (i.e., sexual orientation diversity, gender identity, sex diversity, and

racial diversity) than those who do not receive such signals. Results of an analysis of variance testing this prediction were significant: $F(1, 199) = 37.51, p < .001, d = .85$. Participants who saw an advertisement with inclusive language perceived the club to be more diverse ($M = 5.06, SD = 1.52$) than did those who saw the advertisement without such language ($M = 3.63, SD = 1.80$); thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported. Additional analyses revealed that the mean score for the latter group was significantly below the midpoint of the scale (4), $t(95) = -2.05, p < .05$.

Hypotheses 2-5 predicted that perceived club diversity would be positively associated with intentions to join the club (H2) and that this relationship might be moderated by the participant’s SDO (H3), gender (H4), or a combination thereof (H5). As the dependent variable is dichotomous in nature, we tested these hypotheses through a moderated logistic regression, following Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken’s (2003) guidelines. Specifically, we first standardized the SDO and club diversity variables and then included them and participant gender in the first step of the analysis. We included the three two-way interaction terms in the second step, and the three-way interaction term in the third step. Results are presented in Table 3.

As seen in Model 1 of the analyses, perceived club diversity was not associated with intentions to join ($B = .04, SE = .15, Wald = .07, p = .79$); thus, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Hypotheses 3 and 4 were also not supported. As seen in Model 2, the club diversity X SDO ($B = -.07, SE = .14, Wald = .23, p = .63$) and club diversity X gender

Table 3
Results of Moderated Logistic Regression

Step	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Club diversity (CD)	.04 (.15)	.21 (.27)	.24 (.28)
Social dominance orientation (SDO)	-.23 (.15)	-.32 (.24)	-.49 (.27)
Gender (G)	-.56 (.31)	-.56 (.31)	-.57 (.32)
CD SDO		-.07 (.14)	-.51 (.24) *
CD G		-.24 (.33)	-.30 (.34)
SDO G		.12 (.31)	.31 (.34)
CD SDO G			.83 (.32) **
Nagelkerke R^2	.04	.05	.10 **

Notes: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

zation's image among potential consumers; yet, the effectiveness of such activities and their impact on potential consumers has remained largely unexplored. Thus, the purpose of this research was to examine the influence of LGBT-inclusive advertising messages on consumers' attitudes toward a fitness club. Our findings indicate consumers' perceptions of club diversity increased when the fitness club's advertisement included LGBT-inclusive language. These results are noteworthy for a couple of reasons. First, recall that the advertisement did not discuss race or sex, yet the consumers in the LGBT-inclusive condition indicated the fitness club was inclusive of various minority groups. Thus, the findings support Spence's (1973) argument that while organizational cues may communicate obvious aspects related to a firm (e.g., LGBT inclusivity), they can also signify unobservable characteristics (e.g., racial and gender inclusivity). Second, the results support Florida's (2012) idea that acceptance of LGBT populations indicates a place is welcoming for many different types of people. According to Florida, a community's acceptance of LGBT populations is a marker for a diverse environment, such that it communicates to the outside world that the culture embraces differences based a variety of characteristics. Furthermore, this culture should appeal to a wide range of consumers and allow the sport organization to gain a competitive advantage over firms that promote a culture of acceptance.

We were also interested in examining the association between perceptions of the fitness club as diverse and subsequent intentions to join. While we did not observe direct effects for LGBT inclusiveness, gender, or SDO, we did observe a three-way interaction. Specifically, for women, low levels of SDO were associated with greater intentions to join a diverse fitness club while high levels of SDO had no effect. Furthermore, regardless of level of SDO, perceptions of club diversity were not associat-

ed with intentions to join among male consumers. These findings present a case against the notion that sport organizations should distance themselves from LGBT populations. Primarily due to the fear they may alienate or offend traditional sport consumers, sport marketers have been slow to target LGBT populations and heterosexual allies (Trail & James, 2011). However, this was not the case in the current study. Our findings suggest the use of LGBT-inclusive messages did not have a negative impact among any group, and served to positively influence certain consumers (i.e., women with low levels of SDO) intention to join the fitness club. In fact, the LGBT-inclusive policy did not influence men or consumers with high levels of SDO—two groups who generally hold more negative attitudes toward sexual minorities (Herek, 2009; Whitley & Lee, 2000). In addition, our results add to the emerging research that suggests sport consumers are expressing more positive attitudes toward gay and lesbian athletes (Parker & Fink, 2012), and sport is becoming a more welcoming and inclusive place for LGBT communities (Anderson, 2011).

Implications

Findings from this study have the potential to inform practice. First, sport marketers and managers need to develop LGBT-inclusive policies for their organization. Having such policies in place is not only socially responsible, but can also improve organizational processes and outcomes (Cunningham, 2011a, 2011b). Second, if sport organizations have these policies and wish to attract a more diverse customer base, they should consider including LGBT-focused diversity cues in their marketing communications. Doing so will likely convey to potential consumers that the organization values people from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives. Moreover, sport organizations that promote

inclusive messages are better able to generate goodwill among consumers who are concerned with diversity-related issues, which can translate into enhanced customer loyalty and increase revenue generation (Cunningham & Melton, 2011). Furthermore, the results of this study, coupled with other scholars' recent work (Cunningham, 2012; Parker & Fink, 2012), sharply contrast conventional wisdom that traditional sport consumers will be turned off by LGBT-inclusive messages (see also Tuten, 2005). This is good news for sport marketers, as it allows them to target a relatively untapped LGBT consumer—a group that tends to display tremendous loyalty to organizations that support the LGBT community (Trail & James, 2011).

Limitations and Future Recommendations

As with all research, the current study contains some limitations that should be considered. First, the results of this study are based on responses from a college-aged convenience sample. While survey data from the Active Marketing Group (www.active-marketing-group.com) indicates health club membership is largely composed of younger consumers, the sample still potentially limits the external validity of the findings. For this reason, additional research, preferably with heterogeneous samples, is needed. Second, we elected to use a hypothetical fitness club in the experiment to minimize concerns related to internal validity, but this decision may reduce the generalizability of the results. Finally, while intentions are largely unidimensional in nature, the use of a single item to assess this construct could represent a limitation.

Based on the findings in this study, there are several directions for future research. First, given the hypothetical nature of the study, field research is required to determine whether such policies truly influence consumer attitudes. Second, further investigation should be undertaken to understand why LGBT-inclusive policies affect attitudes and identify both individual and organization of factors that may influence consumer behaviors. Finally, it is becoming more common for sport organizations (e.g. ESPN EQUAL) and professional athletes to advocate for LGBT equality. For instance, during the 2012 elections season Chris Kluwe, punter for the Minnesota Vikings, became an outspoken advocate for same-sex marriage. Though these athletes are highlighted in the media for their efforts, limited research examines the influence they may have on (a) public opinion or (b) consumer behavior. Accordingly, future research should explore whether using athlete endorsers who publically advocate for LGBT equality influences consumers' perceptions of a sport organization, and if this has a significant effect on consumer behavior. Given the

benefits diversity can bring, such an understanding would be very helpful for sport organizations that wish to diversify their consumer base.

References

- Anderson, E. (2009). *Inclusive masculinity: The changing nature of masculinities*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Anderson, E. (2011). Updating the outcome: Gay athletes, straight teams, and coming out in educationally based sport teams. *Gender & Society*, 25, 250-268.
- Avery, D. R. (2003). Reactions to diversity in recruitment advertising—Are differences Black and White? *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88, 672-679.
- Avery, D. R., Hernandez, M., & Hebl, M. R. (2004). Who's watching the race? Racial salience in recruitment advertising. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 34, 146-161.
- Batalha, L., Reynolds, K. J., & Newbiggin, C. A. (2011). All else being equal? Are men always higher in social dominance orientation than women? *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 41, 796-806.
- Benavides-Espinoza, C., & Cunningham, G. B. (2010). Bystanders' reactions to sexual harassment. *Sex Roles*, 63, 201-213.
- Boulding, W., & Kirmani, A. (1993). A consumer-side experimental examination of signaling theory: Do consumers perceive warranties as signals of quality? *Journal of Consumer Research*, 20, 111-123.
- Cable, D. M., Aiman-Smith, L., Mulvey, P. W., & Edwards, J. R. (2000). The sources and accuracy of job applicants' beliefs about organizational culture. *Academy of Management Journal*, 43, 1076-1085.
- Campbell, J., Cothren, D., Rogers, R., Kistler, L., Osowski, A., Greenauer, N., & End, C. (2011). Sports fans' impression of gay male athletes. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 58, 597-607.
- Chelladurai, P. (2009). *Managing organizations for sport and physical activity: A systems perspective* (3rd ed.). Scottsdale, AZ: Holcomb-Hathaway.
- Cohen, J., Cohen, P., West, S. G., & Aiken, L. S. (2003). *Applied multiple regression/correlation analysis for the behavioral sciences*. Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Colquitt, J. A., & Zapata-Phelan, C. P. (2007). Trends in theory building and theory testing: A five-decade study of the *Academy of Management Journal*. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50, 1281-1303.
- Connelly, B. L., Certo, S. T., Ireland, R. D., & Reutzel, C. R. (2011). Signaling theory: A review and assessment. *Journal of Management*, 37, 39-67.
- Cunningham, G. B. (2009). The moderating effect of diversity strategy on the relationship between racial diversity and organizational performance. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 36, 1445-1460.
- Cunningham, G. B. (2011a). Creative work environments in sport organizations: The influence of sexual orientation diversity and commitment to diversity. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 58, 1041-1057.
- Cunningham, G. B. (2011b). The LGBT advantage: Examining the relationship among sexual orientation diversity, diversity strategy, and performance. *Sport Management Review*, 14, 453-461.
- Cunningham, G. B., & Fink, J. S. (2006). Diversity issues in sport and leisure: Introduction to a special issue. *Journal of Sport Management*, 20, 455-465.
- Cunningham, G. B., & Melton, E. N. (2011). The benefits of sexual orientation diversity in sport organizations. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 58, 647-663.
- Cunningham, G. B., & Singer, J. N. (2011). The primacy of race: Department diversity and its influence on the attraction of a diverse fan base and revenues generated. *International Journal of Sport Management*, 12, 176-190.
- Cunningham, G. B., & Woods, J. (2011). For the health of it: Advertisement message and attraction to fitness clubs. *American Journal of Health Studies*, 26, 4-9.
- Cunningham, G. B., & Woods, J. (2012). The influence of advertisement focus, consumer gender, and model gender on attraction to a fitness club. *International Journal of Sport Management*, 13, 173-185.

- Cunningham, G. B., Sartore, M. L., & McCullough, B. P. (2010). The influence of applicant sexual orientation and rater sex on ascribed attributions and hiring recommendations of personal trainers. *Journal of Sport Management, 24*, 400-415.
- Danso, H. A., Sedlovskaya, A., & Suanda, S. H. (2007). Perceptions of immigrants: Modifying the attitudes of individuals higher in social dominance orientation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 33*, 1113-1123.
- DeSensi, J.T. (1995). Understanding multiculturalism and valuing diversity: A theoretical perspective. *Quest, 47*, 34-43.
- Doherty, A.J., & Chelladurai, P. (1999). Managing cultural diversity in sport organizations: A theoretical perspective. *Journal of Sport Management, 13*, 280-297.
- Elling, A., De Knop, P., & Knoppers, A. (2003). Gay/lesbian sport clubs and events: Places of homo-social bonding and cultural resistance? *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 38*, 441-456.
- Federico, C. M., & Sidanius, J. (2002). Racism, ideology, and affirmative action revisited: The antecedents and consequences of "principled objections" to affirmative action. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82*, 488-502.
- Fink, J.S., Pastore, D.L., & Riemer, H.A. (2001). Do differences make a difference? Managing diversity in Division IA intercollegiate athletics. *Journal of Sport Management, 15*, 10-50.
- Fink, J.S., Pastore, D.L., & Riemer, H.A. (2003). Managing employee diversity: Perceived practices and organizational outcomes in NCAA Division III athletic departments. *Sport Management Review, 6*, 147-168.
- Fink, J. S. (2008). Gender and sex diversity in sport organizations: Concluding comments. *Sex Roles, 58*, 146-147.
- Florida, R. (2002). The economic geography of talent. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 92*, 743-755.
- Florida, R. (2003). Cities and the creative class. *City & Community, 2*, 3-19.
- Florida, R. (2012). *The rise of the creative class, revisited*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Gill, D.L., Morrow, R.G., Collins, K.E., Lucey, A.B., & Schultz, A.M. (2006). Attitudes and sexual prejudice in sport and physical activity. *Journal of Sport Management, 20*, 554-564.
- Griffin, P. (1998). *Strong women, deep closets: Lesbians and homophobia in sport*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.
- Griffin, P. (2012). LGBT equality in sports: Celebrating our successes and facing our challenges. In G. B. Cunningham (Ed.), *Sexual orientation and gender identity in sport: Essays from activists, coaches, and scholars* (pp. 1-12). College Station, Texas: Center for Sport Management Research and Education.
- Highhouse, S., & Hoffman, J. R. (2001). Organizational attraction and job choice. In C. L. Cooper & I. T. Robertson (Eds.), *International Review of Industrial and Organizational Psychology* (vol. 16, 37-64). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Kirmani, A., & Rao, A. (2000). No pain, no gain: A critical review of the literature on signaling unobservable product quality. *Journal of Marketing, 64* (April), 66-79.
- Kirmani, A., & Wright, P. (1989). Money talks: Perceived advertising expense and expected product quality. *Journal of Consumer Research, 16*, 344-353.
- Louis, W. R., Duck, L. M., Terry, D., Schuller, R. A., & LaLonde, R. N. (2007). Why do citizens want to keep refugees out? Threats, fairness, and hostile norms in the treatment of asylum seekers. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 37*, 53-73.
- Melton, E. N., & Cunningham, G. B. (2012). The effect of LGBT-inclusive policies on organizational attraction. *International Journal of Sport Management, 13*, 444-462.
- Miller, T., & Triana, M. D. C. (2009). Demographic diversity in the boardroom: Mediators of the board-diversity-form performance relationship. *Journal of Management Studies, 46*, 755-786.
- Parker, H. M., & Fink, J. S. (2012). Arrest record or openly gay: The impact of athlete's personal lives on endorser effectiveness. *Sport Marketing Quarterly, 21*, 70-79.
- Parks, J.B., & Robertson, M.A. (2002). The gender gap in student attitudes toward sexist/nonsexist language: Implications for sport management education. *Journal of Sport Management, 16*, 190-208.
- Parks, J.B., & Robertson, M.A. (2004). Attitudes toward women mediate the gender effect on attitudes toward sexist language. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 28*, 233-239.
- Pratto, F., Sidanius, J., & Levin, S. (2006). Social dominance theory and the dynamics of intergroup relations: Taking stock and looking forward. *European Review of Social Psychology, 17*, 271-320.
- Pratto, F., Sidanius, J., Stallworth, L. M., & Malle, B.F. (1994). Social dominance orientation: A personality variable predicting social and political attitudes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 67*, 741-763.
- Preuss, H., & Alfs, C. (2011). Signaling through the 2008 Beijing Olympics—Using mega sport events to change the perception and image of the host. *European Sport Management Quarterly, 11*, 55-71.
- Robinson, G., & Dechant, K. (1997). Building a business case for diversity. *Academy of Management Executive, 11*(3), 21-31.
- Rynes, S. L. (1991). Recruitment, job choice, and post-hire consequences: A call for new research directions. In M. D. Dunnette & L. M. Hough (Eds.), *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology* (pp. 399-444). Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.
- Sidanius, J., & Pratto, F. (1999). *Social dominance: An intergroup theory of social hierarchy and oppression*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Sidanius, J., Pratto, F., & Bobo, L. (1996). Racism, conservatism, affirmative action, and intellectual sophistication: A matter of principled conservatism or group dominance? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 70*, 476-490.
- Spence, M. (1973). Job market signaling. *Quarterly Journal of Economics, 87*, 355-374.
- Trail, G. T., & James, J. D. (2011). *Sport consumer behavior*. Seattle, WA: Sport Consumer Research Consultants LLC.
- Tuten, T. L. (2005). The effect of gay-friendly and non-gay-friendly cues on brand attitudes: A comparison of heterosexual and gay/lesbian reactions. *Journal of Marketing Management, 21*, 441-461.
- Tuten, T. L. (2006). Exploring the importance of gay-friendliness and its socialization influences. *Journal of Marketing Communications, 12*, 79-94.
- Volpone, S. D., & Avery, D. R. (2010). I'm confused: How failing to value sexual minorities at work sends stakeholders mixed messages. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 3*, 90-92.
- Walker, H. J., Feild, H. S., Berneth, J. B., & Becton, J. B. (2012). Diversity cues on recruitment websites: Investigating the effects on job seekers' information processing. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 97*, 214-224.
- Wang, P., & Schwarz, J. L. (2010). Stock price reactions to GLBT nondiscrimination policies. *Human Resource Management, 49*, 195-216.
- Whitley, B. E., & Lee, S. E. (2000). The relationship of authoritarianism and related constructs to attitudes towards homosexuality. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 30*, 144-170.
- Whitley, B. E., Egisdottir, S. (2000). The gender belief system, authoritarianism, social dominance, and heterosexuals' attitudes toward lesbian and gay men. *Sex Roles, 42*, 947-967.
- Wright, P., Ferris, S. P., Hiller, J. S., & Kroll, M. (1995). Competitiveness through management of diversity: Effects on stock price valuation. *Academy of Management Journal, 38*, 272-287.