

MASTER'S THESIS

Talking about offensive advertising in focus group contexts: a discursive approach to attitudes, gender, and communication

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**Talking about Offensive Advertising in Focus Group Contexts:
A Discursive Approach to Attitudes, Gender, and Communication**

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses six focus group discussions of same- and mixed-sex contexts about people's attitudes towards sexual appeals in advertising. By taking an eclectic approach which combines the use of three analytical theories – Interactional Sociolinguistics, Politeness Theory, and Social Identity Theory (SIT), this study explores how men and women in different focus group contexts selectively mobilize various discursive and social psychological resources in the accomplishment of their attitudes. Five major findings were identified and discussed in this study: (1) Linguistic politeness is a matter of choice freely adopted by speakers to achieve social actions. (2) Discourse construction style is not exclusive to one gender or another, but contingent upon rhetorical contexts, and is a matter of personal choice which caters to participants' immediate discourse needs. (3) SIT is a highly flexible concept in which speakers are free to opt for the most appropriate accessible category available to them through their coherent intergroup differentiations (Hogg, 2006). (4) The importance of context as a regulatory force governing participants' recreation and presentation of selves is demonstrated. (5) The cliché of 'sex sells' may have to be re-assessed in more depth in the future, particularly in the light of cultural norms specific to Hong Kong people. Based on the above findings, this study suggests that future research should continue to pursue an interdisciplinary direction in order to gain a thorough understanding of how language constructs and organizes social practices.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Figures	ix
List of Excerpts	x
List of Transcription Symbols and Abbreviation	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction	
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Research Questions	6
1.3 Objectives & Significance	7
1.4 Preview	8
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework	
2.1 Social Constructionism	10
2.2 Social Constructionism and Discourse	11
2.3 Epistemological Stance of This Study	15
Chapter 3: Analytical Approaches	
3.1 Interactional Sociolinguistics	17
3.2 Politeness Theory	22
3.3 Social Identity Theory	26

Chapter 4: Literature Review

4.1 Attitudes to Advertising	32
4.2 Sociolinguistic Dynamics	38
4.2.1 Men's Talk	43
4.2.2 Women's Talk	45
4.2.3 Mixed-Sex Talk	47
4.3 Politeness and Gender	50
4.4 Discursive Constructions of Identities	58

Chapter 5: Research Methodology

5.1 The Focus Group Interview	66
5.2 Sampling of Participants	71
5.3 Sampling of Ads	72
5.4 Focus Group Data Collection	74
5.5 Approaches to Data Analysis	75

Chapter 6: Integrating Social Constructionism and the Focus

Group Interview

6.1 Potential Conflicts	77
6.2 'Natural' vs. 'Contrived' Data – a Sustainable Distinction?	78
6.3 'Naturalness' of Data in the Current Study	79

Chapter 7: Data Analysis

7.1 Sexual Connotations	83
Construction of Potentially Homosexual Discourse	85
Intragroup Conflict and Differentiation	86

Euphemisms and Negotiation of Register	92
‘Testing the Ground’ Before Further Elaboration of Opinion	97
Emotional and Personalized Engagement with Ads	103
Negative Characterization of Outgroups	105
Group Polarization	107
Attitudinal Ambivalence	109
Softening of Criticisms	111
Display of Heterosexual Masculinity	113
7.2 Nudity	115
Negative Attitudes to Female Nudity	118
Tactful Expression of Disagreements	121
A Rhetorical Pattern of Equilibrium in Attitude Formation	124
Mitigated Positive Attitudes to Nudity	127
Bald-On-Record Politeness Strategy	129
Double Strategy: Positive Self- and Negative Other-Presentations	133
The Use of Questions in Negotiation of Meanings	137
Cognitive Dissonance	140
The Opposite-sex Effect	142
Predominant focus on visuals	143
Functional Approach to Ad Comprehension	145
Anchoring and Projection of a Knowledgeable Self	147
Avoidance of Feeling Mentions and Construction of Hegemonic	
Masculinity	149
Construction of Hegemonic Heterosexuality	151
Ingroup Favouritism and Group Coherence	154

7.3 Sexism	156
The Use of Chinese Idioms	158
The Use of SFPs	164
Construction of Leadership	168
Collaborative Discourse Constructions	171
An Orderly Turn-Taking Pattern	179
A Rhetorical Pattern of Equilibrium in Attitude Constructions	180
Chapter 8: Discussion	
8.1 Sex-Preferential Politeness Strategies	188
8.2 Patterns of Intergroup Behaviours	194
8.2.1 Accentuation Effects in All-Female Groups	194
8.2.2 Coalition Formations in All-Male Groups	196
8.2.3 Heterosexuality as a Defining Category in Mixed-Sex Groups	199
8.3 Patterns of Sociolinguistic Dynamics	202
8.4 Attitudes towards Sexual Appeals in Advertising	206
8.5 Recurrent Themes	213
8.5.1 Heterosexuality	213
8.5.2 The Rhetorical Pattern of Equilibrium	216
Chapter 9: Conclusion	219
The Appendices	226
Appendix A: Sample Advertisements and Specifications of the Three Categories of Sexual Appeals	226

Appendix B: Supplementary Excerpts	233
List of References	236
Curriculum Vitae	282