

AN EXAMINATION OF THIRD-PERSON EFFECT IN THE CONTEXT OF  
CONTOVERSIAL PRODUCT ADVERTISING

by

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## ABSTRACT

This research seeks to determine if there is a third-person effect in the realm of controversial product advertising. A questionnaire was designed based on previous research and distributed to a convenience sample of college students at the University of Central Florida. Participants were asked to rate their perceived levels of personal offense to product categories as well as the expected levels of other groups of people. The results show that there is indeed a significant third-person effect recognized for all product categories except for racial extremist groups. A first-person effect was shown to be present for the category of racial extremist groups. This research also suggests that a concealed third-person effect may have been present in previous studies of this nature that obtained high levels of offense attributed to the self. Discussions of the findings, implications for marketers and advertisers, limitations to the study, as well as suggestions for future research are also posited.

This thesis is dedicated to Barbara Jensen, my mother, for all the help and support she has given me throughout my lifetime—it is greatly appreciated and none of this could have been accomplished without your influence on my life. Also, without the support and encouragement from my father, I cannot imagine being where I am today. You both have helped and inspired me more than you will ever know and I am eternally grateful for everything you have done and provided for me. In addition, I want to devote this work to my grandmother and grandfather whose memories will live in my heart forever. My family has made the largest impact on who I am today, and my utmost love, gratitude, and appreciation goes out to all of you. Thank you, again.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

With the ongoing attempt to cut through the clutter that has become today's onslaught of advertising messages, advertising agencies have been faced with the ever-daunting task of creating new and innovative ways of getting their message noticed (Fam & Waller, 2003). The apparent result is the increasing amount of offensive advertisements emerging in the media (Dahl, Frankenberger, & Manchanda, 2003). There are many questions surrounding the topic of offensive advertising. Is it the *product* that makes an ad offensive? Is it the *execution* of the ad? Could it be a combination of the two? Offensive advertising has been a widely researched topic (Barnes & Dotson, 1990; James & Kover, 1992; Waller & Polonsky, 1996; Waller, 1999; Phau & Prendergast, 2001); yet, there have not been answers provided to all questions lingering about this subject. Despite the lack of definite answers, there have been numerous ad campaigns deemed offensive, resulting in negative publicity, boycotts of the products, and possible profit loss. The practical applications of this research relate to advertising campaigns that are forced to push the border of "edgy" in order to get noticed. This situation is becoming ever more dangerous for both the company and the advertising agency (Dahl, et al., 2003). It may be assumed by a company that its advertising agency is fully aware of how far it can go before crossing the line. As it will be shown, this assumption is not always correct. Stepping over the line and creating ads that offend may cost an agency its clients, tarnish its reputation, and even have it sued for millions. Waller and Polonsky (1996) note that:

In some cases handling a controversial client can affect an agency's general business, in both the short and the long term, as the agency's other clients leave the agency in an effort not to be associated with the offending client, or the agency has trouble gaining new clients in the future because of its 'tainted' image" (p. 21).

Two areas of research that have received considerable attention are controversial product advertising and the “third-person effect.” Previous research has focused on controversial products, services, and ideas and whether they would be considered offensive if advertised (Waller, 1999). Moreover, the growing amount of research conducted on the third-person effect has identified that people feel as though they are less affected by media’s influence than are other people (Davidson, 1983; Innes & Zeitz, 1988; Tiedge, Silverblatt, Havice, & Rosenfeld, 1991; Duck & Mullin, 1995; Duck, Terry, & Hogg, 1995; Salwen & Dupagne, 1999; White & Dillon, 2000; Banning, 2001; Meirick, 2004). To this point, there has not been a direct link made between offensive advertising and the third-person effect. This research seeks to find whether respondents will report that they believe others will be more offended by controversial product advertisements than they declare themselves to be. It is important to note that offense—or perceived offense—is the variable being measured in the current study, rather than the more general variable of media influence used in previous studies (Salwen & Dupagne, 1999; Banning, 2001).

Companies such as Calvin Klein and Benetton have purposefully used shocking images in their advertisements to attract attention. The result? Calvin Klein was threatened by the FBI and Justice Department that he would be brought up on criminal charges if he did not end the CK Jeans campaign that seemed just a bit too much like a pedophile porn shoot (Garfield, 1995; Lockwood, 1995; Mark, Lippert, Anderson, Myers, Comiteau, & Nudd, 2003). Benetton’s use of convicted killers and dying AIDS patients in ads ultimately led to an advertising ban against its company in Germany (Hartwig, 2001).

Amidst the well-known in-house advertising gaffes of Calvin Klein and Benetton (Mark et al., 2003), many other companies have been forced to deal with the treacherous “public opinion” finding their ads offensive. One definition of public opinion is “the voice of the people” (www.worldreference.com, retrieved 12/11/04). This study expects that it is not the actual voice of the people as a whole that are offended by advertisements; it is the voice of a few who believe that *everyone else* will be offended. Under this assumption, it can be conceived that because many forms of advertisements (i.e., television, billboard, print) cannot completely control the market segment by which they are consumed, the result is that people believe the “wrong” segments are being exposed to them. These “wrong” segments can vary depending on the individual. For example, if Tom believes that children under the age of 12 have very impressionable minds that should not be exposed to controversial messages, he may see a billboard portraying a gambling advertisement and report it as offensive. If Sally believes that the elderly are more susceptible to negative media messages, she may find a television ad for funeral services offensive strictly because her grandmother in a nursing home watches television and may see it. These effects are believed to happen regardless of the fact that Tom visits Las Vegas and gambles his bonus each Christmas while Sally just picked out a coffin from the same company that was advertising on television. It is the belief that others will be negatively affected when exposed to these advertising messages may lead people to deem them offensive (i.e., the third-person effect).

Tecate beer’s billboard ad campaign is an example of an advertisement found to be offensive by the so-called public opinion. Tecate beer eventually chose to end a billboard campaign featuring a leaning bottle of Tecate beer with a tagline of “Finally, A

Cold Latina” (“Tecate beer,” 2004, p. NA). The advertisement was meant to convey the message that the beer was now being sold in a bottle. The company received complaints from groups such as the 20-member Congressional Hispanic Caucus. Victor Melendez, director of marketing for Labatt, stated “This billboard was created to be tongue-in-cheek and humorous, for a mature adult audience” (p. NA). This example can be considered an exception to the third-person effect in offensive advertising hypothesis because the same group of people that the advertisement was targeted toward found it offensive. On the other hand, do the opinions of the group of 20 individuals comprising the Congressional Hispanic Caucus accurately represent the public opinion of Hispanics as a whole? In this case, it is still possible that the group was overestimating the amount of negative effects experienced by those who view the ad. It is not to say that the tagline used in this ad was acceptable; however, because a small group of people generalized a high amount of offense to be experienced by other Hispanics, the idea of a third-person effect still applies.

While advancements in direct marketing are suggested as a possible solution (“Tecate Beer,” 2004), it is also understood that going too far may result in consumers being offended just because they are the target of the ad. Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment apparently went “too far” with its advertising techniques when it sent “voice-mail messages to mobile phones to advertise the Hollywood film *Minority Report*” (“ASA judges mobile,” 2003, p. 8). The voice-mail depicted the voice of Tom Cruise passionately screaming lines from the movie and breathing heavily. Eighteen individuals receiving the message complained to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) declaring the advertisement offensive. The ASA sustained the complaints and

suggested that the advertiser “consult the Committee of Advertising Practice Copy Advice team before sending further ads to mobile phones” (p. 8). It is undetermined the number of voice-mails that were sent out to mobile phones in this unconventional ad campaign. It is not the opinion of this researcher that 18 complaints is a laughable number; however, whether this ad truly should have been pulled due to the amount of complaints should be compared to how many people received the ad. If 1,000 people received the voice-mails, yet only 18 complained, then wouldn't the campaign be considered a success? On the other hand, if 20 people received the messages and 18 complained, then it was an obvious failure. The point is that innovative advertising techniques and direct marketing may be a beneficial niche for advertisers to pursue as long as the line of privacy is not crossed. Whether the people who did *not* complain about this advertisement were planning on seeing the movie, thought it was clever, became pleasantly aware of the movie, or simply liked to hear Tom Cruise breathing heavily on their voice-mail is unclear. It is also unclear as to whether the individuals who complained about this ad had negative thoughts about the movie, were not fans of the cinema, or just did not like Tom Cruise screaming at them through voice-mail.

It is not only the companies that stand to be hurt by advertising blunders; advertising agencies run risks of bad publicity and profit loss as well. Agencies cannot always count on the company they advertise for to pull them back before they cross a line. Saatchi & Saatchi is an agency that has experienced its share of bad publicity stemming from poor advertising endeavors. A 1999 print ad for Toyota Corolla was protested by Rev. Jesse Jackson and followers due to a tag line that read, “Unlike the boyfriend, Toyota gets up in the morning” (Mark et al., 2003, p. 38). Saatchi & Saatchi

again made news in 2001 when a campaign for the Toyota RAV4 SUV was reprimanded due to racist images of an African American smiling and boasting a shrunken gold RAV4 in place of a tooth. The agency claimed to merely be playing on the “decorative form of ‘tooth art’” (p. 38). Regardless of the bad publicity from the Toyota campaigns, Saatchi & Saatchi topped themselves when they created an advertisement for the company Just For Feet that ran during Super Bowl XXXIII.

Saatchi & Saatchi received the \$6 million contract from Just for Feet after a long search (McMains & Lefton, 1998). The idea ultimately used for the Super Bowl spot featured a fleeing barefoot Kenyan runner being hunted by soldiers in a Humvee. The hunters “captured and drugged their victim to force him into a pair of shoes from Just For Feet” (Cuneo, 2000, p.24). The final product of the spot titled “Kenya” caused intense dissatisfaction and outrage among viewers. When Just For Feet refused to pay the \$3 million media bill, Saatchi & Saatchi sued. Just For Feet then brought up the agency on a malpractice countersuit for a whopping \$10 million (Hanft, 2003). The basis for the countersuit was that the company’s image had been tainted by the bad advice and execution of the ad by the agency (McCarthy, 1999). Just for Feet waited two years before returning to the airwaves to advertise once again (Van Der Pool, 2001). It is uncertain what ultimately caused the decision to close all 88 Just for Feet stores; however, an offensive advertisement during a Super Bowl coupled with a two-year advertising void most likely played a role in the decision. What should be taken away from the lawsuit and advertising blunder on the part of Just For Feet is that it is not only the company that need worry about ads being deemed offensive, but the agency must also be cautious in today’s age of endless lawsuits. Sometimes it is the way an advertisement

is executed that contributes to the condemnation. Other times it may be purely a matter of being offended by the product portrayed in the ad. Controversial product advertising provides the best venue for examination of potential offense to advertisements and will be used for this study.

For this research, controversial products, services, and ideas will be used in order to gather expected levels of offense that would be experienced if these categories were advertised. This study will serve as a partial replication of previous research (Waller, 1999) in which levels of offense to these same categories were collected and reported. In addition to asking respondents to rate their expected levels of offense, questions of how offended they believe various groups of “others” would be are also requested. This data will serve as an indication of whether respondents in previous studies, such as Waller (1999), were actually giving accurate levels of self-perceived offense, or were essentially reporting higher levels of offense because they believe *others* would be offended. If participants in this study rate that the groups of others would be more offended than they would (third-person effect), then it can be suggested that it is the fear of other people being offended by advertising that prompts people to complain to regulatory agencies about offensive advertisements. If this were the case, it can also be expected that better use of innovative advertising techniques could serve to eliminate the concern that other people will be exposed to a specific ad. Furthermore, this may lead to a downfall in complaints due to the confidence that only the targeted market segments are being exposed to the advertisement.

Advertisers, market researchers, and other practitioners will benefit from the results of this study. Advertisers will be brought up to date on whether particular

controversial products found as offensive in past studies are still thought about in this manner. They can then be well informed as to the possible consequences of accepting an account for a controversial product; potentially saving money, time, and avoiding negative brand stigma. Third-person effect has been a focus of both market research and psychology for years now. If a third-person effect is shown to be occurring in this area of advertising, it will open up ideas for additional aspects of the field to be examined under this light. To sum up, this study will provide up-to-date insight as to which products and/or advertisements may be considered controversial and determine if there is a third-person effect demonstrated in regards to certain controversial products and offensive advertising.

A review of the literature on how offensive advertising became a problem, studies regarding controversial products, as well as research on the third-person effect will be presented in chapter 2. This study is divided into two surveys, which will be fully explained in chapter 3. The first presents respondents with an opportunity to realize that they will be rating for both themselves and other people before they begin attributing levels of offense. The second survey will be distributed in two separate sections by which respondents will rate levels of offense for the self before receiving the second part asking for levels for the groups of others. By not allowing the participants to realize that they can attribute higher levels of offense to others rather than themselves, it is expected that the results will differ greatly from the first survey. Results to both surveys will be presented separately and then compared to each other in chapter 4. Discussion of the findings as well as implications for advertisers, marketers, and practitioners will be



suggested in chapter 5. Also in this chapter, recommendations for future research will be presented.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

It is important to begin by investigating how the increasingly hefty amount of advertising messages that society has to face each day have affected the public's attitudes toward advertising in general. One study has mentioned that "demographics, attitudes to television programs, people's beliefs, and perceived functions of television advertising are all about equally significant" factors in determining attitudes toward advertising (Alwitt & Prabhaker, 1992, p. 39). To this day it has not been discovered which factors account for the total variance that constitutes individuals' attitudes toward advertising. What is known is that advertising has had varying impacts and generated a wide range of reactions among society. Aaker and Bruzzone (1981) sought to determine the scope of these reactions in regard to prime-time television commercials.

To the extent that prime-time television advertising becomes excessively intrusive and irritating to a viewer, the viewer's perception process could be adversely affected, the effectiveness of the advertising could suffer, and public support for government regulation could be enhanced (Aaker & Bruzzone, 1981, p. 15).

This study used 524 prime-time television commercials and gathered responses to each of them from approximately 500 participants. The sample was obtained via a nationwide mail survey sent to 1,000 households, receiving a response rate of about 50%.

Actual ads were not used in this study due to the inherent costs and tribulations associated with showing roughly 500 participants video feed of 524 advertisements. Rather, a questionnaire delivered via mail contained photos and scripts of the advertisements to be evaluated. Among many others, a list of adjectives such as informative, amusing, dull, and irritating was used to collect rater perceptions toward each advertisement. The adjective of "offensive" was not included in the list; however,

the primary goal of this study was to determine overall viewer perceptions of over 500 ads—not specifically to ads for controversial products.

The results were that 72% of the responses to the advertisements were rated as positive, while 28% were rated as negative. This may be a surprising result due to the general distain of advertising found in other studies (Alwitt & Prabhaker, 1994). However, it can assumed that anyone who is willing to sit down and read through scripts of over 500 advertisements may already have a preexisting positive outlook on advertising. The researchers mention a factor of “dislike” that comes into play with advertisements of certain products. More specifically, participants were found to dislike advertisements of products resented by viewers such as “feminine-hygiene products, female undergarments, and stomach and hemorrhoid products” (Aaker & Bruzzone, 1981, p. 23).

Additional research of attitudes toward advertising has also supported the assertion that it may not enjoy a wealth of positive reactions from the public. Alwitt and Prabhaker (1994) set out to determine if demographic criteria would be a valid predictor of the extent of like/dislike for television advertising. The researchers found that demographic characteristics alone are not an adequate indicator of how much or little someone will dislike television advertising. They did, however, find that one age group tends to dislike television advertising more than the others: “older people” (there were no specific age ranges provided for this group). A reason presented for this finding is that older people do not seem to be targeted as much as younger people do in television advertising. The researchers suggest that by ignoring certain segments of a population

and not targeting them with advertising messages, the viewers consistently disregarded may form a predisposition of disliking television advertising.

One of the hypotheses posited in this study was that older viewers who dislike the executional elements of television advertising are more likely to dislike the advertising altogether. Executional elements of an ad refer not to the product in the ad or the company behind the product, but solely the way the advertisement has been put together. Although it was found that older people dislike television advertising more than the other groups, the hypothesis claiming that it was due to executional elements of the ads was not supported. This lends support to the idea that it may simply be the *product* within the advertisement that causes an individual or group of people to dislike it. Another interesting note from this study was that “viewers tend to dislike television advertising when they believe television advertising is offensive, not informative, shown too frequently, or they are negative about its content” (Alwitt & Prabhaker, 1994, p. 23). The major finding of this study is that the age group of older people was found to be more offended than the other age groups. This is an important finding to the current study because it shows that even though demographics alone may not be an adequate indicator of levels of offense to advertising, there is at least the age group of older people that will be expected to experience a greater deal of offense.

Being aware of demographic criteria involved in predicting potential groups of people who may be offended by advertising is certainly beneficial; however, the question has not yet been answered of *when* advertising began to offend people. Some studies suggest that that the marketing of “unmentionable” and “socially sensitive” products has been the cause of offense (Wilson & West, 1981; Shao & Hill, 1994). Other explanations

have suggested that the overall attitudes toward advertising in general may play a role in public reactions to specific ads (James & Kover, 1992). The assumption following this ideology is that negative attitudes toward advertising in general would result in greater distaste for specific advertisements. This belief has not been supported. In actuality, James and Kover (1992) found support for the opposite. Their study discovered that it was the participants who found advertising irritating spent *more* time looking at specific ads. It has been noted that this could have been due to the experimental conditions and that the participants who were irritated by advertising may have spent more time because they were looking for flaws. Nevertheless, spending a generous amount of time paying particular attention to an advertisement is never discouraged by the company who paid for that ad. So if neither demographics nor general attitudes toward advertising have been the foundation for offensive advertising, where did it come from?

Another explanation stems from the idea that advertising messages have muddied the channel by which advertisers send their messages. That advertisers are thereby forced to “cut through the clutter” in order to get their message to the target audience is the resulting ideology posited to explain the foundation of offensive advertising (Fam & Waller, 2003). This trend has gone on to be labeled “shock advertising” (Dahl, Frankenberger, & Manchanda, 2003,)

Dahl et al. (2003) conducted two experiments that examine the effectiveness of shock advertising by use of a public service message. The key message point involved in shock advertising is the deliberate violation of social norms. The first study presented involves three print advertisements for the public service message of safe sex and the prevention of HIV/AIDS. Print advertisements were created using the contexts of shock,

fear, and information. The shock advertisement depicted a headline of “Don’t be a F—ing Idiot” portraying a fuzzy picture of a nude couple embracing intimately (Dahl et al., 2003, p. 271). The advertisement representing fear “showed a driver’s license with the expiry [sic] date circled in red and the headline ‘If you get the AIDS virus now, you and your license could expire at the same time’” (p. 272). The final advertisement, representing the information context, showed the acronym of AIDS with the full label of “Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome,” as well as “First Identified May 11, 1982 in New York City” underneath it (p. 272). All ads depicted the tagline of “Use a Condom” in oversized letters at the bottom of the ad (p. 272). Pretests confirmed that each advertisement represented a significantly higher measure of the qualities they were categorized under than did the other two ads.

The shock advertisement was shown to draw more attention, recollection, and identification among participants than did the fear or informative ads. The study confirmed that “norm violation is the key to heightened awareness of shocking advertising content” (Dahl et al., 2003, p. 275). The researchers ascertain that shocking advertisements may be superior to nonshocking advertisements in their “ability to attract attention and facilitate memory for the advertisement” (p. 276). Advertising messages that are meant to intentionally shock have been shown in this study to be a beneficial and effective way of getting messages “through the clutter” (Fam & Waller, 2003, p. 237).

The ethical concerns involved with creating advertising messages that are intended to shock people should be a major concern for advertising practitioners (LaTour, Snipes, & Bliss, 1996). Fear appeals have also been associated as a potential way to cut through the clutter without the apprehension of offending people. LaTour et al. (1996)

sought to determine the effectiveness of fear appeal ads using a product that possessed possible ethical concerns. Participants in their experiment viewed either a “mild” or “strong” fear appeal advertisement for a “stun-gun” device targeted toward women to prevent rape or assault (p. 62). Results showed that consumer attitudes and purchase intention were both positively effected under the “strong” fear appeal condition. Suggestions for practitioners were to think of these findings as a blanket criticism when told to stay away from fear appeal messages in general. The researchers have determined that fear appeal messages are at least to some extent effective, yet should be considered effective on a “case by case” basis (p. 65). It is not to say that fear appeals will never shock or offend anyone, but it should be agreed upon prior to taking this route as to whether the ends justify the means. This study puts to rest the criticism that fear appeals should never be used because they are likely to offend people. However, if shock advertisements and fear appeals are indeed the root of the offensive advertising dilemma, it must further be identified as to the *conditions* by which people become offended.

### Offensive Advertising

The first order of business with a somewhat ambiguous concept such as offensive advertising is to determine what constitutes offensiveness among civilization. Many studies have diagnosed specific products or product categories as those that are expected to cause offense (Wilson & West, 1981; Waller & Polonsky, 1996; Waller, 1999; Fam & Waller, 2003). One of the widely adopted names associated with these specific products or categories has been “unmentionables.” Wilson and West (1981) describe unmentionables as “products, services, or concepts that 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). Examples of products that fall under this category are personal hygiene products, burial arrangements, medical treatment or supplies, and armaments (p. 92). In this study, the authors set out to examine and suggest “rules” that apply to marketing products associated with the stigma of being unmentionable. The basic concept of need must be present with any product, service, or idea to be marketed. Wilson and West (1981) suggest that the concept of need in this marketing mix is two-dimensional. It “could either be a need for the product, service, or idea or a need to remove it from use” (p. 95). To avoid negative repercussions, the authors propose that the “market segments where unmentionability is least pronounced must be identified” (p. 96). This statement ties well to propositions made by other researchers in this field as to the implications and potential benefits that can be realized by improved direct marketing and advertising techniques. If viewers outside of the target audience of an unmentionable product are being confronted with the message, it is more likely they will respond negatively to it. It is also posited that there are two different types of unmentionables—desirable and undesirable. The authors offer strategic marketing differences to be adhered when attempting to market each type of unmentionable. Wilson and West (1981) provide a solid base from which future studies can easily navigate. Initial studies are many times treated as a stepping-stone from which subsequent research can formulate and advance. This study focused exclusively on marketing rather than advertising, although the conceptual framework and precautions presented can easily be applied to both fields.



The realization that certain products may inherently carry a controversial or negative connotation when advertised caught on as a topic of interest among social scientists, advertisers, and market researchers. Rehman and Brooks (1987) conducted a study to determine attitudes toward television advertisements for products that were expected to be controversial. They used a sample that consisted of 372 urban college students, ages 18-25, who regularly watched television. In order to gather measurements of attitudes toward advertisements for these types of products, an episode of a prime-time sitcom was recorded and manipulated. Three feminine hygiene product advertisements were already present during the commercial breaks for this sitcom, while two more were inserted by the researchers. Findings in regard to feminine hygiene products being advertised on television showed that 65% of the participants endorsed the acceptability for these ads on TV. The study also found that it was women more than men that found the product category of feminine hygiene products to be offensive. Women also found the advertisements embarrassing when in the company of the opposite sex. When analyzing the age variable, participant's ages 21 and younger found advertisements for feminine hygiene products to be informative, yet embarrassing, "when viewed in mixed company" (p. 81). Implications for practitioners are to advertise feminine hygiene products during television shows with a high female viewership base. Soap operas were suggested to satisfy this criterion.

The results of the Rehman and Brooks (1987) study were somewhat surprising. The finding that 65% of the sample felt advertisements for feminine hygiene products were *acceptable* to advertise on television seemed inconsistent, especially considering that this study was conducted in 1987 and women had reported being both offended and

embarrassed by the ads. The major difference in methodology that this study chose to utilize was the use of actual ads rather than asking for perceived levels of offense.

Television is a medium utilized by a vast majority of the population. Offensive advertising messages consumed due to television have been described as consisting of two dimensions of offensiveness (Barnes & Dotson, 1990). The first dimension characterizes advertisements as offensive because society does not see the products portrayed in the ads as acceptable topics of open discussion. The second dimension goes beyond the scope of the product being socially taboo and attributes the offense as a result of the execution of the advertisement. This is an important distinction because it holds crucial implications for advertisers. When considering an appropriate approach to developing an ad for a noncontroversial product, the likelihood that the ad will offend lies completely in the hands of the creative team (Barnes & Dotson, 1990). If it is the nature of the product that is causing an advertising firm apprehension about taking an account, then there may not be much that the creative team can do—execution-wise—in order to avoid generating offense.

Barnes and Dotson (1990) utilized a sample of 4,168 respondents to complete an evaluation of various television commercials. Twenty-one commercials were shown based on products or services that had been previously found to rank high on “offensive or irritating scales” (p. 63). Participants rated each advertisement on a Likert type scale ranging from 1-7 (1 = not offensive, 7 = very offensive). Researchers determined that a mean score of 3.0 or higher represented that the advertisement was offensive. The advertisements that were deemed offensive are as follows: Trojan Condoms ( $M = 4.84$ ), Summer’s Eve Feminine Wash ( $M = 4.79$ ), O.B. Tampons ( $M = 4.57$ ), Light Days Panty

Liners ( $M = 4.27$ ), Depends Undergarments ( $M = 4.13$ ), Preparation H ( $M = 4.01$ ), United Negro College Fund ( $M = 3.34$ ), Jockey Underwear ( $M = 3.26$ ), and Obsession Cologne for Men ( $M = 3.17$ ). These are very interesting findings that are somewhat contradictory to results from more recent studies. This study used actual ads whereas many more recent studies rely solely on gaining offense levels for controversial products. Though this has been a common practice among current research, it has been noted that the use of actual ads may be a better predictor of actual offense levels (Waller, 1999). One intrinsic problem with the suggestion of a dual-dimensionality of offensive advertising is that it may be very hard, if not impossible, to not offend an individual by use of non-offensive execution because they are by nature already offended by the *product*. Results of this study may suggest that advertising and marketing practitioners should work to create standards by which they determine which accounts should be taken and which should be avoided.

The decision to take on a controversial account due to the product or service to be advertised is not an easy one. Regardless of the amount of time and money spent on investigation as to which products and services are known to be controversial, it is up to the advertising agency to evaluate any situational or environmental factors that may cause even a noncontroversial product to warrant caution. Waller and Polonsky (1996) note:

Any client can become controversial because of the nature of the industry, an activity undertaken by the company or even as a result of some change in the marketing environment. Agencies should therefore be aware of this possibility and set a plan of action for when it may occur. (p. 25)

This strategy could be considered comparable to issue management strategies set forth by crisis public relations practitioners. Strategies such as these are meant to prepare for any future event that carries potential for negative repercussions. The authors of this

study do not intend to discourage the acceptance of a controversial client by an advertising agency. The practical implications of this study are none more than to be careful when dealing with such clients. Controversial products are being marketed all over the world and are by no means going to be discarded from advertising altogether (Taylor & Raymond, 2000).

The study that prompted this researcher to investigate the idea of a possible third-person effect in the field of offensive advertising came from an Australian researcher named David S. Waller. Waller (1999) set out to determine the attitudes of Australian college students toward controversial products and offensive advertising. He used a survey that was administered to business students enrolled at a large, regionally-based multi-campus university in Australia. The sample consisted of 125 students with an average age of 21.62. The questionnaire consisted of a list of 15 controversial products and asked respondents to rate each product category on five-point Likert scale. The scale ranged from “1 = not at all offensive” to “5 = extremely offensive” (p. 290). The questionnaire did not gather responses to any actual advertisements for these product categories. Participants were instructed to “indicate their level of offence [sic]” according to the five-point scale. The product categories used in this study were 1) Alcohol, 2) Cigarettes, 3) Condoms, 4) Female contraceptives, 5) Female hygiene products, 6) Female underwear, 7) Funeral services, 8) Gambling, 9) Male underwear, 10) Pharmaceuticals, 11) Political parties, 12) Racially extremist groups, 13) Religious denominations, 14) Sexual diseases (AIDS, STD prevention), and 15) Weight loss programmes [sic] (pp. 290-291).

The results showed that seven of the fifteen product categories received a mean level of over 2. This was a surprising result because it is hard to believe that a sample consisting solely of college students would rate themselves as being offended at all to these categories. The seven categories were racially extremist groups, religious denominations, female hygiene products, cigarettes, political parties, gambling, and funeral services. There were not many statistically significant differences regarding gender and offense levels.

The study also involved a second section of the questionnaire that provided reasons for the level of offense experienced by the participants. The directions for this section of the survey were (p. 292):

Below is a list of reasons why advertisements for various products/services/ideas have been known to offend people. To what extent are the following the reasons why the advertisements offend you; where 1 means you find them not offensive at all and 5 means you find it extremely offensive?

The following reasons were offered 1) Racist, 2) Anti-social behavior, 3) Sexist, 4) Subject too personal, 5) Indecent language, and 6) Nudity.

For one of the findings, the obvious proved true. To the category of racially extremist groups, the option of “racist” (3.69) was shown to be the reason for offense (p. 292). The study does not go into depth as to whether each product category was provided with its own set of reasons for offense or if these were presented as a general question regarding all offensive advertising. Other data regarding this section of the study simply mentions the mean scores in which each of the remaining five reasons received, yet does not mention any particular product categories that they pertain to. Some limitations with this listing were that 1) if a respondent were to answer 1 for “not at all offended” they are still asked to provide a reason for offense and 2) the reasoning list did not include any

option that incorporated a reason correlated to the third-person effect. Essentially, there should have been a reasoning offered in which a participant could respond that their level of offense was due to the fact that other people may be offended by it.

The current study seeks to build upon this research in order to determine if there may be an underlying third-person effect that is causing the high levels of self-reported offense. It is posited that it could be the thought of other people being offended that results in behavioral consequences such as the filing of a complaint with a company or regulatory agency, boycott of products, or a negative stigma attached to the product.

### Third-Person Effect

Before a detailed examination of previous third-person effects literature is presented, a brief summary of the theory is in order. In general, the third-person effect states that people will expect others to be more affected by media than they are. A consensus has not been reached as to whether this comes from an overestimation of the media on others, an underestimation on the self, or possibly both (Perloff, 2002). Besides this perception of greater effects on others than on the self, there is another part to this hypothesis referred to as the behavioral component. Essentially, this makes the argument that due to the overestimation of media influence on others, people will take action to restrict messages they feel potentially harmful to others. It is this idea that suggests a possible linkage to controversial product advertising. If people believe the advertisements of certain products will be offensive to others or affect them in a negative way, they may go out of their way to attempt to censor or restrict these messages. The reason that this hypothesis has been titled third-person effect is because people believe the media will

affect “them” (a group of third-persons) more than it will affect “me” (first-person) or “you” (second-person) (Davidson, 1983, p.3).

Davidson (1983) led the pursuit of this human communication phenomenon he titled as the third-person effect hypothesis. The definition provided for this hypothesis was that “people will tend to overestimate the influence that mass communications have on the attitudes and behaviors of others” (p. 3). Four experiments were undertaken that tested the hypothesis of a third-person effect. Current events at the time of study were used in order to gather responses as to the effect they had on both the self and on areas of general society (i.e., influence on self versus influence on New Yorkers in general). The results of each experiment supported the notion of a third-person effect—participants believed other people were more affected than they were due to the persuasive events posited. To be more specific, one of the events used was a measurement of the perceived effect upon the self and others in relation to a campaign theme used by a Democratic candidate for governor that year.

Davidson (1983) goes on to examine the role that third-person effect research could play in the phenomenon of censorship in the media. He notes that it is hard to find a censor who will acknowledge that he or she is negatively affected by the material being censored. For the most part, it is neither them nor their immediate friends in which the censored message is causing harm to. The general public is the group that requires the protection they are providing. It is the members of the general public who possess the “impressionable minds” that will be adversely affected by the banned information.

Innes and Zeitz (1988) contend that although none of Davidson’s evidence was overly convincing, the idea of a third-person effect can “help to account for the continued

concern that individuals have about what the media may be doing to society” (p. 458).

The researchers go on to mention the concept of false consensus effect whereby “a person is likely to believe that a majority of others believe, or would act, in a manner similar to that person” (p. 458). This would inherently contradict a notion of third-person effect, yet it is plausible that these competing ideas can coexist with the situation being the independent variable. In other words, varying external factors of a given situation can serve to determine whether an individual will report a third-person effect or a false consensus effect.

Interviews using a convenience sample of 171 shoppers in major shopping centers constituted the data collection practices in this study. Respondents were presented with three different media issues: political campaigns, violence in the media, and a campaign designed to stop driving under the influence of alcohol. In accordance with these issues, participants were asked their perceived effect on “people in general,” “people from a different background,” and on themselves (Innes & Zeitz, 1988, p. 459). If the respondent answered “yes” that any of these groups would be affected, they were then asked to rate the degree of affect on a three-point scale. The results supported the idea of a third person effect ( $p < .001$ ) for all media issues. For the issues of violence in the media, a socially undesirable factor, as well as for political campaigns, respondents believed that other people would be more affected than they would. For the issue of a campaign for putting a stop to driving while consuming alcohol, a desirable societal factor, respondents believed that *they* would be more affected than other people. This phenomenon of a reverse third-person effect has gone on to be called the first-person effect—believing you would be more affected than others to a media-related issue. It is not surprising that this effect



occurred with an issue correlated with a socially desirable outcome. While people generally believe that they would be *less* affected by negative media messages, they also tend to believe they would be *more* affected when the message is one that conveys a desired outcome.

Additional studies support the notion of a first-person effect when individuals are given the opportunity to rate levels of affect related to the self and others in the context of positive media messages. Duck, Terry, and Hogg (1995) developed a study that collected measurements of perceived impact of 11 different AIDS public service advertisements encouraging safe sex by both the self and others. Two very well-crafted and thought-out hypotheses were posited for this research endeavor. Duck et al. (1995) predicted that if participants believed the advertisement was of low-quality, they would report being invulnerable (i.e., not affected) to it, whereas if participants believed the advertisement was of high-quality, they would report a higher level of vulnerability. Also, participants who possessed strong beliefs that AIDS advertisements *should* be disseminated to the public, rated themselves as vulnerable to the ads. Moreover, if a respondent *did not* possess beliefs relating to a high desirability for AIDS advertisements, they viewed themselves as relatively less vulnerable to being influenced.

The convenience sample used for this study comprised 140 first-year psychology students at a large urban university in Australia. Participants watched each commercial in one of six different orders designed by the researchers. They were then instructed to rate each commercial on a series of nine-point bipolar scales. The results indicated a correlation ( $r = .78, p < .01$ ) between ratings of ad quality and perceived differences of influences between the self and others. “Respondents perceived themselves to be more

influenced than others by the highest quality ads, to be equally influenced by the average- or medium-quality ads, and to be less influenced than others by the lowest quality ads” (Duck et al., 1995, p. 314). This finding supports the initial hypothesis of a third-person effect dependent on perceived quality of the message. Additional results indicated support for the hypothesis of desirability of influence having an effect on perceived self-influence. Participants who held strong beliefs that AIDS advertising is a good thing to be influenced by viewed themselves as being more influenced than other people in general ( $p < .05$ ). Analyses of the results gathered in this study suggest further evidence towards a self-serving bias among society in general. When individuals see being influenced by an advertising message as a positive thing, a first-person effect is realized and they believe the self would be more affected than others. When the media effects are perceived as negative, individuals believe that others would be more affected than they themselves would.

Most of the research done on third-person effect includes at the least a suggestion as to the rationale behind why it is consistently observed. Many studies provide explanations such as a self-serving bias, general self-enhancement, and ego-driven behavior to name a few. Basically, it has been hypothesized that people may feel as though admitting to being influenced by media will make them appear gullible. Therefore, following these explanations, people underestimate media’s influence on the self to make themselves feel superior to others (Perloff, 2002). One of the rather interesting explanations is that the media may in fact be, in a sense, causing the third-person effect to occur. White and Dillon (2000) discuss how many times people are confronted with being told how others have been affected by persuasive messages.

During election years, it is a common occurrence to hear about political polls revealing how the public has responded to events such as political advertisements being released, nominations of vice presidents, or even the party's National Convention. Also, anytime media outlets report stories about the effectiveness of advertising campaigns such as ones for public services like anti-drunk driving, promotion of safe sex, or anti-smoking, they are sending the idea to individual viewers about how the general public has reacted to these persuasive messages. The individual may be a part of this reaction or may not. If, for example, CNN reports that George W. Bush got a 30% boost in his approval ratings after the Republican National Convention, anyone who did *not* get persuaded to vote for Bush after the convention has now disassociated themselves from the "general public." If this were to happen enough, it could result in individuals assuming that they are unlike the rest of the public in that they are less persuadable. This consistent flow of information that consumers of media receive is suggested as a possible reason for a third-person effect.

The experiment in the White and Dillon (2000) study examines the different lights under which the phenomena of third-person effect and first-person effect will occur. The researchers hypothesized that a pro-social message that promotes a desirable topic will result in a first-person effect. To test this, they used one public service announcement (PSA) in the form of a 30-second television commercial. The PSA was produced by the Advertising Council and attempted to persuade viewers to become organ donors. The experiment included 95 participants, ages 18-25. After the participants were shown the commercial, they were randomly assigned to one of three groups comprising two treatment groups and one control group. The control group responded to Likert type

questions about their perceptions of the advertisement as well as expected perceptions of others. Both treatment groups received “induced perceptions” as to how other people reacted to the ad. The first group was told that a “population of others” was successfully persuaded by the PSA, while the second group was told that others had not at all been persuaded (p. 795). Results showed support for a first-person effect when confronted with a desirable message such as a PSA. People thought that both the self and others would be persuaded, but they felt they themselves would be *more* persuaded. The study suggests the desire to place the self in a positive light as a potential explanation for the results. Robust findings of a third-person effect have been found in studies that present respondents with a message that they may interpret as undesirable to be persuaded by (Innes & Zeitz, 1988; David, Liu, & Myser, 2004). The findings of the White and Dillon (2000) study—that a first-person effect will be present with desirable messages—help explain further the situational factors contributing to the different conditions under which a third-person effect or first-person effect will occur.

To sum up what has been presented so far: A) shock advertisements are increasing due to the sheer amount of advertising messages in which advertisers have to penetrate to reach their target audience. B) There are products/services/ideas that are inherently considered controversial to advertise. C) There have been numerous advertisements deemed offensive by complaints to the companies or other regulatory bodies D) The third-person effect says that people will overestimate the affect of media messages on other people. E) Whether an advertising message is perceived as socially desirable or undesirable is a predictor of the effect (first or third-person) that will occur.

The first basic formula that this research presents is:

$$\begin{array}{ccccc} \text{A} & + & \text{B} & = & \text{C} \\ \text{(Increasing shock ads)} & & \text{(Controversial products)} & & \text{(Complaints of offense)} \end{array}$$

The second formula hypothesized in this research is:

$$\begin{array}{ccccc} \text{D} & + & \text{E} & = & \text{C} \\ \text{(Third-person effect)} & & \text{(Conditions for third-person effect)} & & \text{(Complaints of offense)} \end{array}$$

Simply put, it is expected that complaints of offense to advertisements are not due solely to the increasing amount of shock advertisements and the advertising of controversial products as has been suggested. It is believed that the central reason for complaints of offense is a result of people being concerned about the effect the ads could have on others. Before examining this further, it is important to recognize who the “others” are, and how the third-person effect may interact with varying levels of “others.”

### Social Distance and the Third-Person Effect

In accordance with the findings on the different effects that will occur due to the social desirability of the message, studies have also found that perceived social distance between the self and others may play a role in determining the amount of third-person effect that takes place. David, Liu, and Myser (2004) designed a study involving three different experiments to test issues such as social desirability of the message, ordering effects, and social distance as predictors of third-person effect and reverse third-person effect (i.e., first-person effect). The study used variations of alcohol advertisements in order to gather results for a third-person effect and first-person effect among ads promoting both socially desirable and undesirable outcomes. The hypotheses followed the basis laid out by previous empirical research of this nature in which socially desirable

advertisements would elicit a first-person effect, while socially undesirable advertisements would result in a third-person effect. A research question addressed was whether or not the order of evaluation between the self and others will affect the outcome or robustness of the effect at hand. Alcohol messages were selected for this study primarily because of the availability of both socially desirable and undesirable advertisements as well as the relation of the ads to the sample selected. The sample consisted solely of undergraduate students who are a target population for both the desirable and undesirable types of alcohol advertisements. An example of an undesirable (to society in general) alcohol ad is one that promotes local bars and happy hours. An example of a desirable alcohol ad is one that promotes drinking responsibly. The researchers developed the advertisements based on previous literature related to alcohol advertising practices.

The hypothesis that a socially undesirable message would result in a third-person effect was supported, while the prediction of a first-person effect among socially undesirable messages was only partially supported. There were no significant findings that order of questions in which respondents rated the self and others had any effect. A very interesting finding was that as perceived social distance from the self increased, so did the third-person effect. For example, perceived differences between the self and friends would be less extensive than would differences between the self and “typical others” (David et al., 2004, p. 220).

The presence of a first-person effect in socially desirable situations can certainly be a benefit realized by the groups mentioned. If members of society truly desire to appear in a positive light and be recognized as someone who is greatly affected by

prosocial and desirable persuasive messages, they may essentially become a walking extension of the advertising campaign. Word of mouth advertising as well as possible volunteer work can serve as a boost to the individual's ego as well as assist marketers in getting their message to the public.

On the other hand, messages that are not prosocial and actually appear to condone immoral consequences will elicit the third-person effect. Salwen & Dupagne (1999) designed a study that sought to gather perceptual measurements of immoral consequences and influence imposed on society by the media. To do this, they used a nationwide telephone survey of 721 respondents. Participants in the sample were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: television violence (N = 236), televised trials (N = 244), or negative political advertising (N = 241). Data were collected in regard to media influence and the perceived immoral consequences that would be experienced from each of these conditions. One hypothesis put forth was that there would be a greater perception of media effects cast upon other people than on the self—essentially predicting a third-person effect among the three conditions used in the study. The results supported a robust third-person perception among all issues included in the study ( $p < .001$ ). Along with the prediction of a third-person effect, the researchers also predicted “third-person perception will be a positive predictor of support for message restrictions” (p. 529). The findings supported this hypothesis. This is an interesting finding because if this were true in all cases, it would be imagined that advertising would by now encounter extremely harsh restrictions. Because a third-person effect has been successfully exposed in many studies of advertising messages, one would assume that a correlation between this phenomenon and increased government restriction would have resulted in a social uproar demanding

more regulation. While this hypothesis was supported in this study, the amount of variance accounted for by third-person effect in relation to support for government regulations and restrictions has not been clearly identified. The researchers note that the variable of “education was consistently a negative predictor of support for restrictions” (p. 540). Salwen and Dupagne (1999) find it encouraging that analysis of this finding suggests that as level of education increases, the amount of appreciation for core values in this society such as First Amendment Rights also increases. Put forth by this study were tremendous contributions to the body of research on third-person effect as well implications explaining variables present in the realm of media censorship.

It has consistently been found that circumstantial factors inherent in a specific situation will bring forth either the first or third-person effect. The degree of that effect also depends on certain factors. Perceived social distance between the self and the group(s) of others in which the participant is responding for has been shown to correlate with the robustness of the effect (Cohen, Mutz, Price, & Gunther, 1988; Duck & Mullin, 1995). The third-person effect has been studied in the context of libel trials (Cohen et al., 1988). The focus of the experiment was to determine if the third-person effect results in an increased juror perception that defamatory publications have hurt the reputation of a plaintiff. Social distance was applied to this study in the sense that the perceived social distance that participants felt between themselves and the groups of others would have an effect on the extent of the third-person effect recognized. Participants were expected to believe that defamatory statements made against an individual would not have a large effect on themselves; however, the statements to a much greater extent would affect other people. The extent of this effect would intensify as the social distance between the self



and the others increased. That is, a participant will feel as though members of their immediate community will be *more* affected than they are, but will be *less* affected than the entire country. Participants in the study consisted of 132 Stanford undergraduates. The results supported the notion that jurors may experience a third-person effect in libel trials. In other words, jurors feel that other people would be affected more by the defamatory statements against a plaintiff than they would. The idea of a social distance variable predicting the robustness of the third-person effect was also supported. As the definitions of the groups became more expansive, the third-person effect between the self and these groups increased. From smallest social distance to largest, the groups used were “other Stanford students, other Californians, and public opinion at large” (p. 170). The researchers make a very interesting point noting that the perception of a plaintiff’s reputation being damaged in the eyes of others can in effect serve to damage the reputation in the eyes of the beholder. By believing that other people think less of a person may essentially cause *you* to think less of them.

In accordance with Cohen et al. (1988), results from additional empirical research support that when the groups of others are classified as more vague than specific, the third-person effect increases (Duck and Mullin, 1995). The relationship of third-person effect and the social distance corollary is not cut and dried. Support has proven to be inconsistent or only partially corroborated among additional research undertaken by social scientists (Eveland, Nathanson, Detenber, & McLeod, 1999). Though perceived social distance has not proved itself as being a consistent predictor to the extent of effect realized by the third-person perception, the fact that it has been supported among a significant amount of research is evidence enough that it should be studied further.

Meirick (2004) conducted research that used political advertising from the 2000 election as the basis for determining a third-person effect as well as the extent to which it is observed related to social distance. Results of the study showed that the strongest third-person effect came from the condition in which members of one political party rated the amount of effect a message from a competing party had on supporters of that candidate (i.e., Republicans felt that an ad supporting Al Gore would be extremely effective on Democrats and not very effective on themselves or other Republicans). Findings again supported the assertion that “topic-relevant reference groups in third-person effect research” are of sound empirical value to use (p. 234).

#### A Call for Research

Empirical research encompassing the areas of both offensive advertising and third-person effect has obviously received a good amount of attention by both practitioners and social scientists. As it appears, there has not been substantial previous research done that explores variations of established controversial products from offensive advertising research in relation to the concept of a third-person effect. Alcohol and cigarette ads are two product categories that have been analyzed for third-person effects (Banning, 2001). In this study, alcohol and cigarette advertisements (products with a negative stigma) were compared to ads for neutral products (no negative stigma) to see if the negatively stigmatized products would realize a larger third-person effect. The study used 96 college students as participants and used 25 advertisements (8 cigarette, 8 alcohol, 9 neutral) to gather responses. Third-person effects were present for ads from all three categories. Moreover, a more robust third-person effect was exhibited to the

negatively stigmatized product advertisements than to the neutral product advertisements. Banning (2001) goes on to state, “the research supports previous suggestions and opens the door for more specific research in regard to why messages with a negative stigma create a third-person effect” (p. 144). The goal of this study is to respond to Banning’s (2001) call for research.

This study will base itself primarily from research done on Australian terrain (Waller, 1999) in attempts to determine if a third-person effect may have produced higher-than-expected results toward specific product categories that have been deemed controversial. It is the view of the researcher that previous studies, primarily based on Australian samples, may have found levels of personal offense to be higher than they actually are. It stems from this idea that participants in the studies who have been asked to rate how offended they would be to an advertisement of a controversial product were essentially thinking in a collectivistic manner. Therefore, if they were being asked to rate their level of personal offense to a product in which they believed would offend someone else, they would essentially rate *their* level of offense higher even though they, themselves would not be offended. It is from this idea that there has been a concealed third-person effect taking place in previous studies of this nature.

### Hypotheses

#### *Survey one*

H<sub>1</sub>: Participants will believe that other groups of people would be more offended by advertisements for controversial products than they would.

This is a general form of third-person effect hypothesis used in many previous studies (Banning, 2001; Meirick, 2004; Salwen & Dupagne, 1999). The only variation in this study is that offense to controversial products is being used as a specific form of media effect measurement.

H<sub>2</sub>: Levels of personal offense in this study will be lower than levels of personal offense found by Waller (1999) to the same categories.

Because in this study participants are able to attribute offense levels to other groups of people rather than to themselves, it is supposed that the levels of personal offense found in this study will be less than the amount found in Waller's (1999) study.

#### *Survey two*

H<sub>3</sub>: Participants will rate their self-perceived levels of offense as higher than in survey one.

In survey two, participants are unaware that they will be rating expected levels of offense for other people until they turn in their own personal levels in the first part of the survey. It is expected that participants will think in a collectivist manner and rate the self as more offended simply because they believe other people may be offended.

H<sub>4a</sub>: Participants will exhibit a third-person effect and rate others as more offended than the self using data from survey two.

H<sub>4b</sub>: The difference in means, though, will be less than in survey one.

This hypothesis is based partially on a subsequent response to H<sub>3</sub>. Once respondents have already rated for themselves, they will be confronted with a second part to the survey in which they report levels for the groups of others. Provided that they have

already rated highly due to the collectivistic thinking pattern, it is furthermore anticipated that they will rate the groups of others as even higher than themselves. According to third-person effect literature (Davidson, 1983), people believe media more negatively affects others. This predicts that because they have already rated the self as high, they will rate others as slightly higher. This will result in a third-person effect being recognized, but to less of an extent than in survey number one.

H<sub>5</sub>: Self-reported levels of offense will be closer to the results gathered in Waller (1999) than were the results from survey one.

The first portion of the second survey is intended as a direct replication (except using only 7 of the 15 categories) of the Waller (1999) study. Respondents are given similar directions and are only providing self-perceived levels of offense. Because this part of the second survey is gathering personal levels of offense in the same manner as Waller (1999), it is expected that the self-reported results would be closer to his results in comparison with those from survey one.

### *Surveys one and two*

H<sub>6</sub>: For the category of racial extremist groups, there will be a first-person effect observed.

There is one category involved in this study that is not believed to show evidence of a third-person effect; racial extremist groups. It is believed that when asked to rate the levels of offense to this category, there will be a first-person effect. This means that participants will rate themselves as more offended than other people to this category because it is such a sensitive and politically incorrect category to advertise. It is

hypothesized that because participants realize how offended they believe they *should* be to this category, they will rate their personal levels of offense as higher than other people.

H<sub>7</sub>: The likelihood of filing a complaint about an offensive advertisement will increase as the size of the third-person effect increases.

According to findings from Salwen and Dupagne (1999), robustness of the third-person effect as a positive indicator of support for message regulation, this hypothesis predicts that as the amount of overestimation of others' levels of offense increases, so will the likelihood that the individual would file a complaint. It is not suspected that many college students would file a complaint; however, it is expected that among those that would, the extent of third-person effect will be of larger size than those who would be less likely to file a complaint.

There has not been sufficient research done in the field of offensive advertising to predict relationships between some variables. Therefore, in addition to the above hypotheses, five research questions are posited.

RQ<sub>1</sub>: Is there a correlation between personal offense and attention to advertising?

RQ<sub>2</sub>: Is there a correlation between perceived levels of offense from other people and attention to advertising?

RQ<sub>3</sub>: Is there a correlation between attention to advertising and likelihood to file a complaint?

RQ<sub>4</sub>: Will offense levels of the self or of others be accurate predictors of likelihood to file a complaint?

RQ<sub>5</sub>: Will there be a social distance component involved in the robustness of the third-person effect?



## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Survey One

A convenience sample of college students at the University of Central Florida (N = 208) was used for the first survey of this study. The data were gathered during the Fall 2004 semester by use of five communication classes at the university. The rationale for using college students as a sample was due to the fact that a similar sample was used in the Waller (1999) study. Using a sample of similar demographics was ideal because this research is aimed at exposing a concealed third-person effect that resulted in higher levels of offense in this previous study. In accordance with past research regarding controversial products and offensive advertising, a survey was constructed to measure perceived levels of offense if specific products were advertised.

The survey was distributed to four intact classes of students in public speaking courses as well as one large lecture class of students in a communication law course. In all classes, students were fully informed that participation was voluntary. Students were awarded extra credit for participating in the survey; however, they were also informed that there was an alternative method of obtaining the extra credit points if they did not wish to participate. No students under the age of 18 were allowed to participate and were offered the alternative method of extra credit. The surveys were distributed at the beginning of class and took about ten minutes to complete. As the surveys were turned in, the informed consent forms were removed from the answer section of the survey and no longer associated with the answers provided. A copy of the informed consent form used can be found in Appendix A. After all surveys were collected, a normal class period resumed.



### *The questionnaire*

Waller (1999) used a list of 15 products, services, and ideas to gather levels of personal offense (if these categories were to be advertised) using a Likert scale of 1-5 (1 = "not at all" offensive and 5 = "extremely" offensive). The list used in Waller's study was based on past literature of five studies done on this subject matter (Waller, 1999). In his study, Waller found seven of these categories to receive a mean score of over 2. The eight categories that received a mean score of below 2 were felt to generate little to no offense among participants and were therefore not used in the current study. The seven categories adopted for this research were: 1) Cigarettes, 2) feminine hygiene products, 3) funeral services, 4) gambling, 5) political parties, 6) racially extremist groups, and 7) religious denominations.

In order to determine if a third-person effect was present in the realm of offensive advertising, the questionnaire (Appendix B) asked participants to rate their personal levels of offense to the products as well as how offended they believed other groups of people would be. These groups of other people included children under 12, other college students, the elderly, and all other people. Though the actual survey used in the Waller (1999) study could not be obtained, the survey in this study was constructed as best as possible according to the description of the study in the methodology section of the article (p. 290). The directions provided at the beginning of Waller's (1999) survey were as follows (p. 291):

Below is a list of products/services/ideas whose advertisements have been known to offend people. To what extent do advertisements for the following products offend you. Where 1 means you find them not offensive at all and 5 means you find it extremely offensive [sic].

After careful consideration, it was decided that the research at hand would do best

to reword these directions as to not lead respondents into already believing that other people have been offended. Wording such as this in a third-person effect study may result in an even larger overestimation of others' offense levels than would be expected. The directions used for the current study are as follows:

Please indicate how offended you believe that the following groups of people would be if the products/services mentioned were to be advertised. Please indicate the levels of offense on the five-point scales (1 = "not at all offensive" and 5 = "extremely offensive"). For each option please only circle one number.

The questionnaire then presented the first product category and asked for expected levels of offense from the following groups of people:

- 1) Yourself
- 2) Children under 12
- 3) Other college students
- 4) The elderly
- 5) All other people

### *Hypothesis 1*

The first hypothesis predicted a third-person effect to be present in the realm of controversial product advertising. This meant that there would be an overestimation of offense attributed to groups of other people, resulting in significantly higher levels of offense from others than from the self. The variables that were compared were the levels of offense attributed to the self as well as the individual levels assigned to each category of others. All levels attributed to the self among the categories used in the survey were combined into an additive scale in order to gain a mean level of offense for the self. An additive scale was formed including a combination of offense levels from each of the

groups of others among all product categories. This scale was divided by four (because there are four groups of others) to allow for appropriate comparison to the mean score of self-reported offense. Paired samples t-tests were run to compare the means of self-reported offense and perceived offense from others.  $H_1$  was supported if the mean offense level from the groups of others was higher than the self and if this difference was statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ).

### *Hypothesis 2*

This survey used 7 of the 15 product categories and the same Likert scales used in the Waller (1999) study. It was expected that because Waller (1999) did not allow for offense levels to be attributed to other groups of people, the respondents were actually thinking in a collectivist manner when rating their own personal levels of offense. Given that this survey allowed them to actually ascribe these levels to others, they would have given a lower (and possibly more accurate) level of personal offense. Mean levels of personal offense from each product category were compared to mean levels reported in Waller (1999). Because a data set could not be obtained from the previous study, this hypothesis was supported if the levels of personal offense in this study were consistently lower than in Waller (1999).

### Survey Two

The second survey included a similar amount of participants as the first and utilized the same five courses at the University of Central Florida during the Spring 2005 semester. The second survey comprised the same questions used in the first survey, yet

broke them down into two sections. The first section that was distributed asked respondents to rate their personal levels of offense to the seven product categories. After the entire class finished, surveys were collected and set aside. Participants were then given a second part in which they were asked to provide the expected offense levels of the four groups of others. Respondents were awarded extra credit, as in survey one, and a normal class session resumed after the questionnaires were completed.

### *Hypothesis 3*

This hypothesis stated that respondents from survey two would report higher levels of self-perceived offense than did the respondents from survey one. The variables measured were the mean scores of self-perceived offense from survey one and from survey two. Additive scales from each that included self-reported scores among the seven product categories were created in order to compare means. A paired samples t-test was conducted to determine if there were statistically significant difference between the means ( $p < .05$ ).  $H_3$  was supported if the mean levels of self-reported offense from survey two were significantly higher than mean levels of self-reported offense from survey one.

### *Hypothesis 4*

Hypothesis 4 stated that a third-person effect would be present in survey two, however, it would not be as large as in survey one. Because this was a two-part hypothesis, it was accordingly addressed as  $H_{4a}$  and  $H_{4b}$ . If both parts of this hypothesis were supported, it was expectedly due to the division of questions within the survey.

Seeing as though respondents could visibly distinguish that they could attribute levels of offense to others in survey one, yet were unaware of this in survey two, they were expected to think in a collectivist manner and rate themselves as being more offended. The variables that were compared were the levels of offense attributed to the self as well as the individual levels assigned to each category of others. All levels attributed to the self among the categories used in the survey were combined into an additive scale in order to gain a mean level of offense for the self. An additive scale was formed including a combination of offense levels from each of the groups of others among all product categories. This scale was divided by four (because there were four groups of others) to allow for appropriate comparison to the mean score of self-reported offense. Paired samples t-tests were run to compare the means of self-reported offense and perceived offense from others.  $H_{4a}$  was supported if the mean offense level from the groups of others was statistically higher than the self ( $p < .05$ ).  $H_{4b}$  was supported if the difference was less than what was observed in survey one. To test this, a new variable was created that added offense levels from the four groups of others among the six product categories (not including racially extremist groups), divided the sum by four, and subtracted the variable of self-reported offense. This generated a variable that portrayed the robustness of the third-person effect for each case in the data set. An independent samples t-test was then run, using survey number as the grouping variable, to see if there was a difference between surveys in how large of a third-person effect was recognized.

### *Hypothesis 5*

Hypothesis 5 stated that mean levels of personal offense from survey two to each product category would be closer to results from Waller (1999) than were personal offense levels gathered from survey one. Mean levels of personal offense from surveys one and two were each compared to results from Waller (1999). Because a data set could not be obtained from the previous study, H<sub>5</sub> was supported if the levels of personal offense from survey two were consistently closer to results from Waller (1999) than were personal offense levels from survey one.

### Surveys One and Two

### *Hypothesis 6*

In both surveys, it was expected that the category of racial extremist groups being advertised would show signs of a first-person effect. That is, participants would rate themselves as more offended than the groups of other people. This was expected based on previous findings that media messages with socially desirable outcomes elicited first-person effects (Innes & Zeitz, 1988; Duck et al., 1995; White & Dillon, 2000). If people reported that they were *more* affected when the message conveyed positive outcomes, it was hypothesized that they would report being *more* offended when the outcome was negative (i.e., being persuaded by a message from a racial extremist group). The variables measured were the mean levels of personal offense and offense from the groups of others to the category of racial extremist groups. To measure these, an additive scale was created that combined offense levels from the four groups of others. This scale was divided by 4 to allow for appropriate comparison to the self-reported levels of offense. A

paired samples t-test was run in order to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the means ( $p < .05$ ).  $H_6$  was supported if respondents rated themselves as significantly more offended than the various groups of others.

### *Hypothesis 7*

This hypothesis predicted that the more overestimation of offense that a participant projected onto groups of others would be a positive indicator as to the likelihood that the participant would file a complaint about an advertisement. The first variable analyzed was the amount of difference between self-reported levels of offense and offense attributed to groups of others. This was computed using additive scales already created that combined self-reported offense as well as expected offense from others among the seven categories. The second variable was the likelihood of filing a complaint. This variable was addressed in both surveys as such: “If an advertisement were to offend you, how likely would you be to file a complaint with the company or another organization?” Participants responded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “very likely” to “very unlikely.” Bivariate correlations were run using z scores for each variable.  $H_7$  was supported if there was a positive correlation between robustness of third-person effect and likelihood to file a complaint.

### *Research question 1*

The first research question asked whether there was a correlation between personal offense and attention to advertising. The variables were the levels of personal offense reported and the amount of attention that participants paid to advertising on four

different media (television, radio, newspaper, and magazine). An additive scale used for previous hypotheses that combined levels of personal offense across the seven categories were used to measure the first variable. Attention to advertising was measured in the survey by asking participants to express their “level of agreement with the following statements:”

- 1) When I watch television, I pay a lot of attention to advertisements.
- 2) When I listen to radio, I pay a lot of attention to advertisements.
- 3) When I read a newspaper, I pay a lot of attention to advertisements.
- 4) When I read a magazine, I pay a lot of attention to advertisements.

The levels of agreement were presented using a six-point Likert scale with the following options:

- 1) Strongly agree
- 2) Agree
- 3) Somewhat agree
- 4) Somewhat disagree
- 5) Disagree
- 6) Strongly disagree

A six-point scale was used so that there was not a “neutral” or “don’t know” option to select. The use of six options provided an adequate spectrum of options, yet forced participants to express a level of agreement or disagreement rather than allowing them to answer “neutral.” Bivariate correlations were run using z scores for each variable.



### *Research question 2*

The second research question asked whether there was a correlation between perceived levels of offense from other people and attention to advertising. The variables analyzed were the levels of perceived offense attributed to others and the amount of attention that participants paid to advertising on four different media. An additive scale used for previous hypotheses that combined levels of others' offense across the seven categories was used to measure the first variable. Attention to advertising was measured in the same fashion as in research question one. Bivariate correlations were run using z scores for each variable.

### *Research question 3*

The third research question asked whether there was a correlation between attention to advertising and likelihood to file a complaint? The variable of attention to advertising was again measured the same way as in the previous two research questions. The variable of likelihood to file a complaint was measured in the same fashion as described above in H<sub>7</sub>. Bivariate correlations were run using z scores for each variable.

### *Research question 4*

This question sought to determine if self reported levels of offense or perceived levels of others' offense were accurate predictors of likelihood to file a complaint. More specifically, it asked whether one was a better predictor than the other. Bivariate correlations were run using z scores for the variable of likelihood to file a complaint as described in the previous research questions.

*Research question 5*

The fifth research question asked whether there were differences in robustness of third-person effect according to how socially distant the group was to the self. The group closest to the self in this study was “other college students.” Though no pretesting for this variable was done, the other groups of children under 12, elderly, and all other people were thought of as much further away from the self than other college students. To test whether there were statistical differences between the self and the groups of others, paired samples t-tests were performed.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### Survey One

Data were collected for survey one during the Fall 2004 semester using a convenience sample of students from the University of Central Florida (N = 208). Women constituted the majority of the sample (65%) and roughly 70% of the sample was white (see table 1 for more demographics from survey one). The mean age of participants was about 20 (see tables 2a and 2b).

Questions regarding controversial product advertising were presented first in the survey. Most of the product categories received mean scores of around 2 on a 5-point Likert scale, while the category of racially extremist groups received mean scores of around 4 (for means and standard deviations see table 3). Among the seven categories and of the five possible Likert scale answers (1 = “not at all offensive” to 5 = “extremely offensive”), the answer that received the highest percentage was a perceived lack of offense from children under 12 to the advertising of political parties (65.2%). The next highest percentage was a self-reported lack of offense for feminine hygiene products (64.7% of participants rated themselves as a 1). Not surprisingly, the third highest percentage came from a self-reported extreme offense to racially extremist groups (59.1%). For a complete list of percentages of responses from survey one, see table 4.

#### *Hypothesis 1*

The first hypothesis predicted a third-person effect among participants from the first survey. Using only cases from survey one, a scale was created that consolidated scores from the four groups of others (mean scores exhibited a range of 6-30). A paired

samples t-test was used to compare means of self-reported offense and the offense level attributed to all groups of others. The category of racially extremist groups was removed from the equation due to the prediction of a first-person effect to be addressed in hypothesis 6. A significant difference ( $p < .001$ ) was found between self-reported offense ( $M = 12.39$ ) and perceived offense of others ( $M = 14.36$ ). This difference in means shows initial support for  $H_1$  (table 4 shows the percentages for third-person effect variables across all product categories and possible Likert responses).

Further investigation used paired samples t-tests to look at each product category separately. Means for this analysis ranged between 1-5 (see table 5). Significant differences in means, demonstrating a third-person effect, were found with cigarettes ( $p < .05$ ), feminine hygiene products ( $p < .001$ ), funeral services ( $p < .001$ ), and gambling ( $p < .001$ ). No significance was found with the categories of political parties or religious denominations.  $H_1$  was supported.

### *Hypothesis 2*

For  $H_2$ , mean levels of self-reported offense in survey one were compared to offense scores found in Waller (1999). The personal offense levels in the current study were found to be consistently lower than those reported in Waller (1999) (see table 6). The only exception came from the category of racially extremist groups in which participants in the current study rated themselves ( $M = 4.11$ ) as more offended than did participants from the Waller (1999) study ( $M = 3.44$ ). Because lower levels of offense were demonstrated in this study among six of the seven categories adopted from Waller (1999),  $H_2$  was supported.

### *Hypothesis 3*

H<sub>3</sub> predicted that self-reported offense would be higher in survey two than in survey one due of the manipulation of question order. Independent samples t-tests were run using the variable of personal offense between both surveys. Separate tests were run to include and exclude the category of racially extremist groups. No significance was found in either of the tests. This finding suggests that manipulating the question order did not make a difference in self-reported offense, and thereby rejects H<sub>3</sub>.

Post hoc analysis compared the levels of offense attributed to others in order to see if the use of two different surveys made any difference at all in participants' responses. The only group that showed a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between means from survey one and two was the perceived offense of the elderly (for means and standard deviations, see table 7). It is unknown why the significant difference occurred in just this one group, but because it did, there is reason to believe that question order affected results in some minor fashion. However, because the difference occurred in only a group of others and not in the self-reported offense levels, H<sub>3</sub> was still rejected.

### Survey Two

Data were collected for survey two during the Spring 2005 semester using a convenience sample of students from the University of Central Florida (N = 271). Women again constituted the majority of the sample (59.3%) and roughly 63% of the sample was white (see table 8 for more demographics from survey two). The mean age of participants was about 20 (see tables 9a and 9b).

Questions regarding personal offense to controversial product advertising were presented as the first part of this survey. After the entire group finished, the second part was administered in which they rated the perceived offense of others to these same products. Most of the product categories received mean scores of around 2, while the category of racially extremist groups received mean scores of around 4 (for means and standard deviations see table 10). In an odd coincidence, the answer that received the highest percentage was again a lack of offense from children under 12 to political party advertising with exactly the same percentage as in survey one (65.2%). The second highest percentage was again a self-reported lack of offense for feminine hygiene products (61.5% of participants rated themselves as a 1, meaning “not at all offended”). Once again, the third highest percentage came from a self-reported extreme offense to racially extremist groups (57.5%). For a complete list of percentages of responses from survey two, see table 11.

#### *Hypothesis 4*

H<sub>4a</sub> predicted a third-person effect to be recognized among participants from the second survey. Using only cases from the second survey, a scale was created that consolidated scores from the four groups of others (mean scores exhibited a range of 6-30). A paired samples t-test was used to compare means of self-reported offense and the offense level attributed to all groups of others. The category of racially extremist groups was again removed from the equation due to the prediction of a first-person effect to be addressed in hypothesis 6. A significant difference ( $p < .001$ ) was found between self-reported offense ( $M = 12.96$ ) and perceived offense of others ( $M = 14.58$ ). This

difference in means shows support for  $H_{4a}$  (table 8 shows the percentages for third-person effect variables across all product categories and possible Likert responses).

Paired samples t-tests to compare self-reported offense to the offense of all four groups of others across each individual product category (excluding racially extremist groups) was performed next. Means for this analysis ranged between 1-5 (see table 12). Significant differences in means, demonstrating a third-person effect, were found with cigarettes ( $p < .01$ ), feminine hygiene products ( $p < .001$ ), funeral services ( $p < .001$ ), gambling ( $p < .01$ ), and political parties ( $p < .01$ ). No significance was found with the category of religious denominations. In accordance with these findings,  $H_{4a}$  was supported.

$H_{4b}$  predicted that the third-person effect would be larger in survey one than in survey two. When a variable signifying the robustness of the third-person effect was tested, there was not a significant difference found between the means. Due to this finding,  $H_{4b}$  was rejected.

### *Hypothesis 5*

For  $H_5$ , mean levels of self-reported offense in survey two were first compared to offense scores found in Waller (1999). The personal offense levels in the current study were found to be lower than those reported in Waller (1999) among five of the seven product categories (see table 6). The exceptions came from the categories of racially extremist groups and religious denominations in which participants in the current study rated themselves as more offended than did participants from the Waller (1999) study. Next, mean levels of personal offense were compared between surveys one and two to

see if one were closer than the other to the Waller (1999) results. Although offense levels from survey two appear higher than survey one and thereby closer to the Waller (1999) results, H<sub>3</sub> has already shown that there are no significant differences between the two surveys with personal offense levels. Due to this lack of significance and the unavailability of Waller's (1999) data set, H<sub>5</sub> found only minimal support.

### Surveys One and Two

The hypotheses and research questions to be addressed by data from both surveys include variables of offense to racial extremist groups, attention to advertising, and likelihood to file a complaint. Participants reported paying a fair amount of attention to advertising (table 13). Respondents expressed higher levels of agreement than disagreement with the statements pertaining to television (59.2% agreed to paying a lot of attention, 40.8% disagreed) and magazines (71.1% agreed, 28.9% disagreed). As for the variable of likelihood to file a complaint, thirty eight percent of participants said it would be unlikely, while 39% said it would be very unlikely for them to file a complaint (see table 14).

### *Hypothesis 6*

This hypothesis predicts that a first-person effect will take place due to the sensitivity and socially undesirable outcome of the racially extremist group category. Using cases from both surveys (N = 480), a paired samples t-test was run using the variables of self-reported offense to the advertising of racially extremist groups and a scale combining the offense attributed to the four groups of others. A significant



difference ( $p < .001$ ) was found between self-reported offense ( $M = 4.15$ ) and perceived offense of others ( $M = 3.88$ ). Because the self-reported offense was higher than the offense attributed to others, a first-person effect took place, and  $H_6$  was supported.

Post hoc analysis set out to determine if the first-person effect was stronger in one of the surveys. Independent samples t-tests using survey as the grouping variable showed no significant differences between the robustness of the first-person effect in surveys one and two. Paired samples t-tests were then run using cases from each survey separately. Survey one ( $p < .05$ ) and survey two ( $p < .001$ ) both showed significant first-person effects, so it can be assumed that question order did not make much of an impact on these results.

#### *Hypothesis 7*

This hypothesis predicted a positive correlation between robustness of a third-person effect and the likelihood to file a complaint. A bivariate correlation was run using z scores to calculate the amount of third-person effect for each case and likelihood to file a complaint. There was no significance found, and  $H_7$  was rejected.

#### *Research question 1*

This research question asked whether there was a correlation between personal offense levels and attention to advertising. The personal offense variable across all seven product categories was used along with a newly computed variable that combines the attention to advertising among the four media. Z scores of these variables were calculated

and used for the correlation. A bivariate correlation was run and no significant correlation was found between the two variables.

#### *Research question 2*

The second research question asked whether there was a correlation between perceived levels of offense from other people and attention to advertising. A scale of all others' perceived offense was used along with the previously created scale of attention to advertising. A bivariate correlation showed no significant correlation between these two variables.

#### *Research question 3*

RQ<sub>3</sub> asked whether there was a correlation between attention to advertising and likelihood to file a complaint. Z scores for the attention to advertising and likelihood to file a complaint variables were calculated and used for the analysis. A bivariate correlation showed significance ( $p < .01$ ), however the correlation of the variables was very weak ( $r = .12$ ). The positive correlation shows that as attention to advertising increases, the likelihood to file a complaint increases as well, but only modestly.

#### *Research question 4*

RQ<sub>4</sub> sought to determine if self-reported levels of offense or perceived levels of others' offense were accurate predictors of likelihood to file a complaint. A bivariate correlation was run using the scale of personal offense among all seven product categories and the variable of likelihood to file a complaint. A significant correlation

( $p < .01$ ) was found, but again the Pearson correlation coefficient showed to be very weak ( $r = .14$ ). The positive relationship shows that as one's personal offense increases; the likelihood to file a complaint increases as well.

Post hoc analysis was run using the likelihood to file a complaint variable and the variable of perceive offense of others. A bivariate correlation showed significance ( $p < .01$ ) and another weak positive correlation ( $r = .14$ ). The correlation between these two variables means that as the amount of offense perceived by others increases, so does the likelihood to file a complaint.

#### *Research question 5*

For this social distance research question, paired samples t-tests were used to test the relationships between self-reported levels of offense and each of the four groups of others individually. In survey one, significant differences in means ( $p < .001$ ) were found between personal offense and each various group of others. Mean differences in order from largest to smallest were the elderly (2.74), children under 12 (2.42), all other people (1.55), and other college students (1.28) (see table 15) In survey two, significant differences in means ( $p < .001$ ) were found between personal levels of offense and three of the four groups of others: the elderly (3.04), children under 12 (1.97), and all other people (1.53) (see table 16). RQ<sub>4</sub> lends support to the social distance hypothesis because as social distance increases, the mean differences between personal offense and others offense also increases (see table 17).

In the second survey, the group of other college students was not significantly different than the self-reported offense levels. This suggests the possibility that

respondents found the group of people of closest social distance and associated themselves with that group. In order to test this, post hoc analysis was done using paired samples t-tests comparing the levels of other college students offense to the three other groups of “others” used in the study (children under 12, the elderly, and all other people). Results showed that there were significant ( $p < .001$ ) differences between means, demonstrating a third-person effect between other college students and the three groups of others (see table 18). This supports the notion that when not given the chance to rate for the self, respondents may look to the closest social group and rate them as they would normally have rated the self.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study examined how offended people believe they, as well as others, would be if certain products were to be advertised. The seven products used in this research have been shown to be controversial by previous research (Waller, 1999) and were thus adopted for this study. The major finding was that there is initial support of a third-person effect when asking participants to rate the expected offense levels of other groups of people.

### Third-Person Effect Results

The notion of a third-person effect has been shown to exist in many areas of communication research. This study appears to be the first to examine the effect in the specific context of advertising various controversial products. By condensing the data as much as possible, the researcher was able to recognize a statistically significant difference between the mean level of personal offense and the mean level of offense attributed to others. This showed direct evidence that a third person effect had taken place in the study. Because this study asked for offense levels to seven different product categories and utilized two different surveys, a more detailed assessment was in order. Using data from the first survey, further analysis established that participants exhibited a third-person effect in the categories of cigarettes, feminine hygiene products, funeral services, and gambling. The second survey yielded similar results as the first, in which participants demonstrated a third-person effect in the product categories of cigarettes, feminine hygiene products, funeral services, gambling, and political parties. The difference between the two surveys was the appearance of a third-person effect for

political parties only in survey two. It is undetermined what may have caused this effect to happen in only the second survey. Common sense would dictate that it was the manipulation of question order in survey two that caused these results. However, the rejection of  $H_{4b}$ , which predicted a statistically significant difference in robustness of third-person effect between both surveys, does not lend support to that idea. Another possibility is that the 2004 presidential election could have made an impact on the results of this study. Data from the first survey were collected two months prior to the election, while the second survey data were collected roughly two months after. In the first survey, participants said that they did not believe others would be more offended than they were to political party advertising. On the other hand, in the second survey, participants *did* believe that they would be less offended than others to these advertisements. The 2004 election seems to be the only obvious rationale for this change in beliefs from one semester to the next.

### First-Person Effect Results

Participants in both surveys demonstrated a first-person effect for the category of racially extremist groups. This outcome was hypothesized and supported by the data. This was an expected outcome due to the sensitivity and political incorrectness of the category. All of the categories used in this study have been previously deemed as controversial, yet racial extremist groups, by nature, seem to be a more controversial category than the rest. It is believed that participants attributed very high levels of offense to themselves because it is socially acceptable to be offended by racial extremist groups; in fact it is virtually a social demand. The reason for attributing lower levels of offense to

various groups of other people than to themselves is most likely because participants would like to believe they are more sensitive, or “politically correct,” to these types of issues than are others. These results are consistent with previous research suggesting a self-serving bias to be present in first and third-person effect studies (Duck et al., 1995).

### Social Distance

Many of the studies on third-person effect have gathered data that lumped “other people” together as one homogenous group. This study traveled beyond that trend by dividing up the widely clustered group of “general society.” This methodology served to recognize “others” as a heterogeneous group that may realize different results in the sense of third-person effects versus the self. The groups that were used for this study were children under 12, the elderly, other college students, and all other people. These groups provided the basis for a social distance research question.

In the first survey, analysis of perceived levels of offense between the self and other groups of people showed that mean differences were all statistically significant. The smallest difference in means came from the group of other college students, while the largest difference came from the elderly. These results show that the students participating in this survey felt that the group who would be offended at a level most similar to themselves, was other college students. The group in which they felt would differ the most in offense from themselves was that of the elderly. In the second survey, there were statistically significant difference in means between the self and all groups except for one: other college students. It is undetermined why participants in the second

survey felt closer, socially, to other college students than the participants in the first survey.

Reliability alphas for each scale created for the third-person effect variables were calculated and are reported in table 19. Regarding scales that combined all four groups of “others” (children under 12, other college students, the elderly, and all other people), it is interesting to note that alpha levels for all but one, funeral services, would have increased if the variable of children under 12 had been removed from the scale. This is thought-provoking because it was assumed by the researcher that one of the major factors involved in a third-person effect regarding finding advertising offensive would be that young children may potentially see the ad. Overall, results for the social distance aspect of this study were consistent with previous research that also found significance with robustness of third-person effect and increased social distance from the self (David et al., 2004).

#### Question Order

This research was broken up into two different surveys because it was expected that when participants did not realize that they would be able to rate for others, they would think in a collectivist manner. Under this assumption, survey one’s self-reported levels would have been statistically different from those gathered in survey two due to the manipulation of question order. There were no findings that supported this hypothesis. Other previous research has found a similar lack of results in this area as well (David et al., 2004). These findings do not suggest that there should be no further research on whether the order in which people rate themselves and groups of others makes a



difference in a third-person effect. Though, the findings do suggest that results gathered in the Waller (1999) study may have not been a result of collectivist thinking.

#### Results In Accordance With Waller (1999)

The only product categories that were adopted for this study were ones that received a mean offense level of 2 or higher in the Waller (1999) research. Because Waller's (1999) data set could not be obtained for this study, there was no accurate way to determine if mean levels gathered here were significantly different from those gathered by Waller. The prediction made by this research was that because Waller (1999) only asked for *personal* levels of offense, participants were thinking in a collectivist manner. More specifically, it was hypothesized that even though they did not feel offended to these product categories, they were rating themselves as though they were due to their belief that *others* would be offended. In this study, participants were given the opportunity to rate for others as well as themselves. In both surveys, personal offense was lower than results found in Waller (1999) to every category but racial extremist groups. Though these results are pleasing because they were in fact lower, as predicted, in many cases the amount of difference between means was very small. Moreover, it cannot be determined whether they bear statistical significance.

#### Attention to Advertising and Likelihood to File a Complaint

Only about one in 20 participants in this study stated that it would be likely for them to file a complaint. This is an interesting finding, yet this statistic certainly does not have generalizability to any larger population. From the examples provided at the

beginning of this study, it is evident that there are in fact people that have no problem complaining when offended. A possible explanation for why such a low amount of people said they would complain is that the sample used for this research consisted of only college students. It is expected that students around the ages of 18-20 would not take the time out of their schedule to track down the number that they need to call in order to file a complaint and actually follow through with it.

There were no robust findings in accordance with the variables of attention to advertising and likelihood to file a complaint. A weak correlation was found that suggest that as attention to advertising increases, as does the likelihood to file a complaint. Another weak correlation suggested that as personal offense to the advertising of the seven product categories in the study increased, the likelihood to file a complaint increased also. These findings are less than mind-blowing because common sense may seem to dictate these relationships; however, their presence has been noted and future research may serve to delve deeper into these relationships to discover if stronger ones exist.

### Summary

Though results did show that respondents were less offended on a personal level than were participants from the Waller (1999) study, the sizes of these differences were quite small. Because a data set from Waller (1999) could not be obtained, it is hard to tell whether the differences in means would be statistically significant. However, because they were so small, the idea that a concealed third-person effect affected self-reported offense ratings in Waller's (1999) study did not receive great support. This study expanded on the growing body of research conducted on the third-person effect. It also

served to bring the third-person effect hypothesis into a new area of advertising research—offense to controversial product advertising. All in all, had the controversial product categories been advertised, it appeared as though no one in this sample would be offended, themselves; however, they believed that various groups of others would be offended. Use of a true random sample would have certainly added to the external validity of this research and provided a clearer picture of how offended the general public really would be to the idea of advertising these product categories.

### Limitations

An important limitation of this study is the homogeneity of sample. Due to the use of a convenience sample, there was a lack of varying range of demographic characteristics, which drastically diminish the external validity of the data. A very large portion of the participants was 18 years old, while an even larger segment of the sample was white. It should also be noted that only college students were used for this study. Many studies rely on self-report data; however, research on third-person effect may sometimes call into question the validity of these results. Studies have suggested a self-serving bias to be the cause of the third-person effect (Duck et al., 1995), yet others have explained the results as an overestimation on the part of others (Davidson, 1983). While it is hard to determine which of these positions is accurate, the real question at hand is whether researchers can rely on truthful self-reports. If the self-serving bias is in fact the cause, then it has to be assumed that respondents are providing false data on each third-person effect questionnaire. In light of the fact that this study used anonymous surveys, it is hoped that participants were honest when providing self-report data.

Another limitation recognized is that levels of offense to controversial products were the only ones gathered. The researcher could have included categories of products that have not been shown to offend to serve as a control group.

An additional limitation to this study is that a data set could not be obtained from the Waller (1999) study. Acquisition of this data set could have served to determine if there were significant differences between the mean levels of personal offense reported between that study and the current one.

### Implications

The results from this study suggest that no one is really too offended by the idea of advertising these controversial products, yet they believe other people are. These findings have implications to both advertisers and marketers. The primary idea that practitioners of these fields should take away from this study is that people may label an advertisement offensive solely because they believe the ad could offend someone else. If true, advances in direct marketing may reduce sensitivity to advertising as people think less about others and more about their own beliefs. It could be suggested that even people with secretive racist views attributed high levels of personal offense to the category of racial extremist groups in this study. However, the question remains whether this same person would truly deem an ad for the Arian Nation as offensive if they believed they were the *only* one seeing it? Innovations in direct marketing and customized advertising are developing rapidly. If advertisers can successfully reach a specific target market while assuring consumers that only known patrons of this product were viewing a

specific ad, they may potentially be able to advertise a product that would normally be deemed extremely controversial.

The Tecate beer example provided in the introduction leads one to believe that further advancements in advertising techniques could have served to halt at least a portion of the complaints received. If Tecate had not chosen a billboard advertisement in which control of viewership is unfeasible, they may have been able to get their edgy message to the audience for which it was intended. Because there were correlations found between likelihood to file a complaint and both self-reported and perceived offense from others, it should be noted that one may not need to be offended themselves for them to file a complaint.

Until the point in which advertisers figure out how to successfully reach only their target market for edgy ads, it is important to note this study's suggestions of collectivist thinking on the part of viewers. The realization of the third-person effect phenomenon by both advertisers and marketers can potentially serve as a forewarning when accepting clients with controversial products.

#### Future Research

Future studies of this nature should include additional controversial product categories. Recommendations such as advertisements about abortion and gay rights may exhibit interesting findings. If results from this study regarding racial extremist groups are any predictor, it can be suggested that a first-person effect may be found with extremely controversial categories. This would imply that participants would rate themselves as more offended to extremely controversial categories than they believe other people would be.

Future studies should fully manipulate the order in which participants rate for themselves and groups of others. In this study, the only manipulation of question order came in the sense that participants either rated for themselves and others all at once, or they rated for themselves before realizing they would be rating for others. Having participants rate for others before rating for the self may yield interesting results.

Another interesting idea for future research is collecting an array of actual ads depicting the product categories from this study. The researcher could gather mean levels of offense to the actual ads and compare them with the perceived levels of offense to the categories. This research endeavor would help determine if the perceived levels of offense that studies such as this one have gathered towards controversial product advertising are accurate when ad execution is taken into consideration. Also, it may be interesting to look at advertisements that offend people, yet do not portray a product that is considered controversial. This study would bring to light additional elements of ad execution that may offend people regardless of the actual product being advertised.

**Table 1. Percentages of demographic data for survey one.**

Variables	%
<hr/>	
Gender	
Male	34.8
Female	<u>65.2</u>
	100.00%
	(N = 208)
Year in School	
Freshman	39.1
Sophomore	12.6
Junior	26.6
Senior	21.3
Graduate	<u>.5</u>
	100.00%
	(N = 208)
Race/Ethnicity	
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.0
Asian or Asian American	2.4
Black or African American	8.7
Black (with Hispanic/Latino origin)	0.0
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	.5
White	69.9
White (with Hispanic/Latino origin)	9.2
Hispanic/Latino	4.9
Multiracial	2.4
Other race	<u>1.9</u>
	100.00%
	(N = 208)
American citizen	
Yes	98.6
No	<u>1.4</u>
	100.00%
	(N = 208)

Table 2. Mean and standard deviation for age in survey one.

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Age	19.88	2.59	207

Age	%
18	38.6
19	12.1
20	16.9
21	16.9
22	7.7
23	2.4
24	2.4
25	.5
27	.5
28	.5
30	.5
31	.5
41	.5
	100.00%
	(N = 207)



**Table 3. Means and standard deviations for controversial products among the five dimensions of raters for survey one.**

Controversial products	Yourself	Children under 12	Other college students	The elderly	All other people
Cigarette*	2.39 (1.36)	3.11 (1.54)	2.00 (1.03)	2.73 (1.31)	2.58 (1.08)
Feminine hygiene products*	1.71 (1.17)	2.71 (1.36)	1.75 (.90)	2.24 (1.27)	2.02 (.98)
Funeral services*	1.90 (1.17)	2.63 (1.47)	2.00 (1.14)	2.83 (1.47)	2.19 (1.10)
Gambling*	1.81 (1.15)	2.46 (1.52)	1.69 (.90)	2.22 (1.15)	2.10 (.98)
Political parties*	1.93 (1.13)	1.65 (1.07)	2.12 (1.09)	2.22 (1.15)	2.14 (1.03)
Racially extremist groups*	4.11 (1.30)	3.52 (1.38)	4.10 (1.04)	4.10 (.99)	4.08 (.93)
Religious denominations*	2.63 (1.43)	2.20 (1.25)	2.92 (1.11)	2.85 (1.18)	2.89 (1.04)
Total**	16.47	18.29	16.55	19.23	18.01

\* Responses were coded from 1 = “not at all offensive” to 5 = “extremely offensive.”

\*\* Total possible scores range from 7 to 35.

**Table 4. Percentages for third-person effect variables in survey one.**

Variables	Yourself	Children under 12	Other college students	The Elderly	All other people
<b>Cigarettes</b>					
1	36.5	23.6	39.4	26.1	20.4
2	21.6	13.9	31.3	14.5	22.3
3	17.3	20.2	21.2	29.0	41.3
4	14.9	13.0	5.8	20.8	11.2
5	9.6	29.3	2.4	9.7	4.9
<b>Feminine hygiene products</b>					
1	64.7	27.2	50.5	39.5	37.6
2	15.5	18.0	29.1	22.9	30.2
3	11.1	22.3	16.5	16.6	25.4
4	1.9	21.4	2.9	15.6	5.9
5	6.8	11.2	1.0	5.4	1.0
<b>Funeral services</b>					
1	52.4	33.0	44.4	29.0	33.3
2	21.2	17.5	25.4	14.0	29.5
3	15.9	18.4	21.0	19.8	26.6
4	5.3	15.5	3.9	19.8	6.3
5	5.3	15.5	5.4	17.4	4.3
<b>Gambling</b>					
1	58.2	40.1	55.1	37.2	33.8
2	18.3	18.8	26.1	21.3	30.9
3	11.1	12.1	14.0	26.6	28.0
4	9.1	12.6	4.3	12.6	6.3
5	3.4	16.4	.5	2.4	1.0

Responses were coded from 1 = “not at all offensive” to 5 = “extremely offensive.”

**Table 4. Percentages for third-person effect variables in survey one (cont).**

Variables	Yourself	Children under 12	Other college students	The Elderly	All other people
<b>Political parties</b>					
1	49.0	65.2	39.6	36.7	35.3
2	23.6	15.9	21.7	21.7	25.6
3	16.8	11.1	27.1	27.5	31.4
4	6.7	3.9	10.1	10.6	5.8
5	3.8	3.9	1.4	3.4	1.9
<b>Racially extremist groups</b>					
1	7.7	11.1	2.4	1.4	1.4
2	8.2	13.9	6.3	4.8	1.9
3	8.7	22.6	16.3	21.6	25.5
4	16.3	16.8	29.3	26.9	29.8
5	59.1	35.6	45.7	45.2	41.3
<b>Religious denominations</b>					
1	31.9	39.6	13.0	17.4	12.6
2	16.4	23.2	18.4	16.9	15.9
3	23.2	22.2	41.1	37.7	48.3
4	14.0	7.2	18.8	19.3	16.4
5	14.5	7.7	8.7	8.7	6.8

Responses were coded from 1 = “not at all offensive” to 5 = “extremely offensive.”

**Table 5. Paired samples t-tests for self-reported offense and others' offense to each product category for survey one.**

Variables	Offense levels		t value	df	significance
	Self-Report Means (& SD)	Others' Means (& SD)			
Cigarettes*	2.40 (1.36)	2.61 (0.92)	-2.50	205	$p < .05$
Feminine Hygiene products*	1.71 (1.17)	2.18 (0.87)	-6.18	204	$p < .001$
Funeral Services*	1.89 (1.17)	2.41 (1.01)	-8.35	204	$p < .001$
Gambling*	1.81 (1.16)	2.12 (0.81)	-4.54	206	$p < .001$
Political Parties*	1.93 (1.13)	2.03 (0.78)	-1.56	206	ns
Religious Denominations*	2.63 (1.43)	2.72 (0.95)	-1.09	206	ns

\*Responses were coded 1 to 5 (1 = not at all offensive, 5 = extremely offensive)

**Table 6. Differences between Waller (1999) and surveys one and two.**

Product Categories	Waller (1999)		Jensen Survey 1		Survey 1 Difference		Jensen Survey 2		Survey 2 Difference		Difference between survey 1 & 2	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1. Cigarettes	2.47	(1.32)	2.39	(1.36)	0.08	0.04	2.41	(1.36)	0.06	0.04	0.02	0
2. Feminine hygiene products	2.49	(1.24)	1.71	(1.17)	0.78	-0.07	1.69	(1.04)	0.8	-0.2	-0.02	0.13
3. Funeral services	2.04	(1.20)	1.90	(1.17)	0.14	-0.03	1.95	(1.18)	0.09	-0.02	0.05	-0.01
4. Gambling	2.14	(1.21)	1.81	(1.54)	0.33	0.33	2.04	(1.19)	0.1	-0.02	0.23	0.35
5. Political parties	2.35	(1.35)	1.93	(1.13)	0.42	-0.22	2.04	(1.07)	0.31	-0.28	0.11	0.06
6. Racially extremist groups	3.44	(1.45)	4.11	(1.30)	-0.67	-0.15	4.19	(1.16)	-0.75	-0.29	0.08	0.14
7. Religious denominations	2.67	(1.42)	2.63	(1.43)	0.04	0.01	2.83	(1.38)	-0.16	-0.04	0.2	0.05

**Table 7. Independent samples t-tests for levels of offense using survey as the grouping variable.**

Variables	Offense levels		t value	df	significance
	Survey One Means (& SD)	Survey Two Means (& SD)			
Yourself*	16.47 (5.29)	17.16 (5.40)	-1.40	477	ns
Children under 12*	18.29 (6.94)	18.15 (7.09)	0.22	474	ns
Other college students*	16.55 (4.32)	17.00 (4.72)	-1.05	473	ns
The elderly*	19.23 (4.54)	20.03 (5.48)	-1.68	474	ns
All other people*	18.01 (4.38)	18.50 (4.95)	-1.12	473	ns

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\*Possible means range from 7 to 35

**Table 8. Percentages for demographic variables in survey two.**

Variables	%
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	39.9
Female	<u>59.3</u>
	100.00%
	(N = 271)
<b>Year in School</b>	
Freshman	33.7
Sophomore	24.4
Junior	27.0
Senior	14.8
Graduate	<u>0.0</u>
	100.00%
	(N = 270)
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
American Indian or Alaska Native	.7
Asian or Asian American	3.0
Black or African American	6.0
Black (with Hispanic/Latino origin)	.4
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	.4
White	62.7
White (with Hispanic/Latino origin)	9.7
Hispanic/Latino	10.4
Multiracial	4.9
Other race	<u>1.9</u>
	100.00%
	(N = 268)
<b>American citizen</b>	
Yes	97.0
No	<u>3.0</u>
	100.00%
	(N = 271)

**Table 9a. Mean and standard deviation for the variable of age in survey two.**

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Age	20.13	2.42	269

Age	%
18	20.4
19	27.1
20	23.0
21	13.8
22	5.2
23	3.7
24	2.2
25	1.9
26	.4
28	.4
29	1.1
33	.4
39	.4
	<u>100.00%</u>
	(N = 207)



**Table 10. Means and standard deviations for controversial products among the five dimensions of raters for survey two.**

Controversial products	Yourself	Children under 12	Other college students	The elderly	All other people
Cigarette*	2.41 (1.36)	2.99 (1.53)	2.05 (1.11)	2.91 (1.30)	2.61 (1.04)
Feminine hygiene products*	1.69 (1.04)	2.90 (1.35)	1.76 (.92)	2.29 (1.33)	2.05 (.98)
Funeral services*	1.95 (1.18)	2.71 (1.46)	2.05 (1.10)	3.01 (1.46)	2.31 (1.02)
Gambling*	2.04 (1.19)	2.47 (1.48)	1.70 (.97)	2.42 (1.20)	2.26 (1.00)
Political parties*	2.04 (1.07)	1.71 (1.16)	2.39 (1.19)	2.46 (1.26)	2.32 (1.06)
Racially extremist groups*	4.19 (1.16)	3.22 (1.45)	4.10 (1.07)	4.02 (1.10)	4.01 (1.07)
Religious denominations*	2.83 (1.38)	2.17 (1.27)	2.95 (1.16)	2.92 (1.28)	2.92 (1.11)
Total**	17.16	18.15	17.00	20.03	18.50

\* Responses were coded from 1 = “not at all offensive” to 5 = “extremely offensive.”

\*\* Total possible scores range from 7 to 35.

**Table 11. Percentages for third-person effect variables in survey two.**

Variables	Yourself	Children under 12	Other college students	The Elderly	All other people
<b>Cigarettes</b>					
1	37.0	24.9	42.5	18.7	16.1
2	17.9	16.5	23.8	19.4	27.8
3	22.3	18.7	22.3	27.5	39.6
4	12.5	14.7	8.8	20.9	11.7
5	10.3	25.3	2.6	13.6	4.8
<b>Feminine hygiene products</b>					
1	61.5	21.2	49.8	39.2	35.9
2	17.9	17.9	30.4	22.0	31.5
3	12.8	25.3	15.0	19.4	26.0
4	5.1	20.5	3.7	9.9	5.1
5	2.6	15.0	1.1	9.5	1.5
<b>Funeral services</b>					
1	48.7	31.5	42.1	24.5	26.0
2	24.2	15.4	22.7	13.9	29.7
3	16.8	17.6	26.0	16.1	34.1
4	3.7	21.2	5.9	27.1	8.1
5	6.6	14.3	3.3	18.3	2.2
<b>Gambling</b>					
1	46.9	36.3	56.0	31.1	26.7
2	19.0	24.9	26.0	19.8	32.2
3	20.9	11.0	12.1	29.3	30.8
4	9.2	11.4	3.7	15.8	8.8
5	4.0	16.5	2.2	4.0	1.5

Responses were coded from 1 = “not at all offensive” to 5 = “extremely offensive.”

**Table 11. Percentages for third-person effect variables in survey two (cont).**

Variables	Yourself	Children under 12	Other college students	The Elderly	All other people
<b>Political parties</b>					
1	41.8	65.2	31.1	32.2	28.9
2	23.4	13.9	22.0	17.6	23.8
3	25.3	9.2	27.8	27.8	35.5
4	7.7	7.7	14.7	16.5	9.5
5	1.8	4.0	4.4	5.9	2.2
<b>Racially extremist groups</b>					
1	4.8	15.4	2.9	3.3	3.7
2	6.6	19.9	6.6	7.7	6.3
3	11.4	22.4	15.4	16.5	15.8
4	19.8	12.1	27.9	28.7	33.8
5	57.5	30.1	47.1	43.8	40.4
<b>Religious denominations</b>					
1	24.9	40.1	12.5	17.3	11.8
2	16.1	27.6	22.4	21.7	22.1
3	24.2	15.8	33.1	25.4	36.4
4	20.9	8.1	21.7	23.5	21.7
5	13.9	8.5	10.3	12.1	8.1

Responses were coded from 1 = “not at all offensive” to 5 = “extremely offensive.”

**Table 12. Paired samples t-tests for self-reported offense and others' offense to each product category for survey two.**

Variables	Offense levels		t value	df	significance
	Self-Report Means (& SD)	Others' Means (& SD)			
Cigarettes*	2.41 (1.36)	2.64 (0.87)	-3.33	272	$p < .001$
Feminine Hygiene products*	1.69 (1.04)	2.25 (0.84)	-9.36	272	$p < .001$
Funeral Services*	1.95 (1.18)	2.52 (0.94)	-8.69	272	$p < .001$
Gambling*	2.04 (1.19)	2.21 (0.80)	-2.62	272	$p < .01$
Political Parties*	2.04 (1.07)	2.22 (0.85)	-2.81	272	$p < .01$
Religious Denominations*	2.82 (1.38)	2.74 (0.99)	-1.13	271	ns

\*Responses were coded 1 to 5 (1 = not at all offensive, 5 = extremely offensive)

**Table 13. Percentages for the variables of attention to advertising.**

Variables	%
When I watch television, I pay a lot of attention to advertisements.	
Strongly Agree	5.0
Agree	14.8
Somewhat Agree	39.4
Somewhat Disagree	18.8
Disagree	15.8
Strongly Disagree	<u>6.3</u>
	100.00%
	(N = 484)
When I listen to radio, I pay a lot of attention to advertisements.	
Strongly Agree	.6
Agree	5.1
Somewhat Agree	18.6
Somewhat Disagree	16.5
Disagree	34.4
Strongly Disagree	<u>24.9</u>
	100.00%
	(N = 484)
When read a newspaper, I pay a lot of attention to advertisements.	
Strongly Agree	1.9
Agree	7.1
Somewhat Agree	27.9
Somewhat Disagree	17.0
Disagree	27.0
Strongly Disagree	<u>19.1</u>
	100.00%
	(N = 484)
When I read a magazine, I pay a lot of attention to advertisements.	
Strongly Agree	9.3
Agree	29.1
Somewhat Agree	32.7
Somewhat Disagree	11.2
Disagree	10.8
Strongly Disagree	<u>7.0</u>
	100.00%
	(N = 484)

**Table 14. Percentages for the variable of likelihood to file a complaint.**

Variables	%
<hr/>	
If an advertisement were to offend you, how likely would you be to file a complaint with the company or another organization?	
Very Likely	.8
Likely	5.2
Neutral	16.7
Unlikely	38.4
Very Unlikely	<u>38.8</u>
	100.00%
	(N = 484)

**Table 15. Paired samples t-tests for social distance hypothesis using survey two data.**

Variables	Offense Means (& SD)	t value	df	significance
Yourself*	12.34 (4.68)			
Children under 12*	14.75 (6.07)	5.72	203	$p < .001$
Yourself*	12.35 (4.68)			
Other college students*	13.63 (3.71)	4.91	202	$p < .001$
Yourself*	12.39 (4.66)			
The elderly*	15.13 (4.41)	8.21	203	$p < .001$
Yourself*	12.39 (4.67)			
All other people*	13.94 (4.11)	5.25	202	$p < .001$

---

\*Possible scores range from 6 to 30

**Table 16. Paired samples t-tests for social distance hypothesis using survey two data.**

Variables	Offense Means (& SD)	t value	df	significance
Yourself*	12.96 (4.76)			
Children under 12*	14.93 (6.08)	4.84	271	$p < .001$
Yourself*	12.96 (4.76)			
Other college students*	12.90 (4.22)	-.272	271	ns
Yourself*	12.96 (4.76)			
The elderly*	16.01 (5.03)	9.60	271	$p < .001$
Yourself*	12.96 (4.76)			
All other people*	14.50 (4.43)	5.73	271	$p < .001$

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\*Possible scores range from 6 to 30



**Table 17. Paired samples t-tests for social distance hypothesis using survey one and two data.**

Variables	Offense Means (& SD)	t value	df	significance
Yourself*	12.70 (4.73)			
Children under 12*	14.86 (6.07)	7.34	475	$p < .001$
Yourself*	12.70 (4.73)			
Other college students*	13.21 (4.02)	2.92	474	$p < .01$
Yourself*	12.72 (4.72)			
The elderly*	15.63 (4.79)	12.63	475	$p < .001$
Yourself*	12.72 (4.73)			
All other people*	14.26 (4.30)	7.77	474	$p < .001$

---

\*Possible scores range from 6 to 30

**Table 18. Paired samples t-tests for post hoc social distance analysis using survey two data.**

Variables	Offense Means (& SD)	t value	df	significance
Other college students*	12.90 (4.22)			
Children under 12*	14.93 (6.08)	-5.50	271	$p < .001$
Other college students*	12.90 (4.22)			
The elderly*	16.01 (5.03)	-13.64	271	$p < .001$
Other college students*	12.90 (4.22)			
All other people*	14.49 (4.43)	-8.86	271	$p < .001$

---

\*Possible scores range from 6 to 30

**Table 19. Various scale alpha's.**

Product Categories	Reliability Alpha	Increased alpha if children under 12 deleted	Increased alpha if elderly deleted
1. Cigarettes	0.72	0.81	
2. Feminine Hygiene Products	0.76	0.81	
3. Funeral Services	0.77		0.80
4. Gambling	0.65	0.83	
5. Political Parties	0.69	0.91	
6. Racially Extremist Groups	0.83	0.88	
7. Religious Denominations	0.85	0.90	

APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

My name is Keith Jensen, and I am a graduate student at the University of Central Florida. I am inviting you to participate in this research study. Involvement in this study is voluntary, so you may choose not to participate if you wish. If you choose to participate, you are under no obligation to answer any question that you do not feel comfortable providing an answer to. I am undertaking this research endeavor along with my advisor, Dr. Steve Collins. This sheet will explain the study; however, if you have any questions please contact Dr. Collins at 407-823-6236.

This study sets out to gather information regarding feelings and sentiments toward advertising. You will be asked questions regarding expected levels of offense that may be experienced if certain categories of products, services, or ideas were to be advertised. You will be providing valuable information to help support or refute previous research in this subject matter. Although you will not be compensated for participation in this survey, you will be doing a great service to me, a fellow student, as well as adding your personal opinion to those of many others whom have answered similar questions in other studies of this nature. All information will be kept anonymous and confidential; this means your name will not appear anywhere and no one will know your specific answers except myself and Dr. Collins. **After you have turned in your survey, this consent form that contains your name will be ripped from the survey and no longer associated with your answers. If you are under 18 years of age, you will not be permitted to participate in this study.**

Should you choose to become involved in this study, it will take about 10 minutes to complete. If at any time you no longer wish to continue, you have the right to withdraw from the study without penalty.

Please read the following statement and fill out the bottom portion of this sheet to indicate you will participate in the survey.



All of my questions regarding participation in this survey have been answered, and I wish to partake in this research study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Print name of participant)

**Thank you for your cooperation!**

## APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE

Please indicate how offended you believe that the following groups of people would be if the products/services mentioned were to be advertised. Please indicate the levels of offense on the five-point scales (1 = “not at all offensive” and 5 = “extremely offensive”)

**Cigarettes:**

Yourself:	1	2	3	4	5
Children under 12:	1	2	3	4	5
Other college students:	1	2	3	4	5
The elderly:	1	2	3	4	5
All other people:	1	2	3	4	5

**Female hygiene products:**

Yourself:	1	2	3	4	5
Children under 12:	1	2	3	4	5
Other college students:	1	2	3	4	5
The elderly:	1	2	3	4	5
All other people:	1	2	3	4	5

**Funeral services:**

Yourself:	1	2	3	4	5
Children under 12:	1	2	3	4	5
Other college students:	1	2	3	4	5
The elderly:	1	2	3	4	5
All other people:	1	2	3	4	5

**Gambling:**

Yourself:	1	2	3	4	5
Children under 12:	1	2	3	4	5
Other college students:	1	2	3	4	5
The elderly:	1	2	3	4	5
All other people:	1	2	3	4	5

**Political parties:**

Yourself:	1	2	3	4	5
Children under 12:	1	2	3	4	5
Other college students:	1	2	3	4	5
The elderly:	1	2	3	4	5
All other people:	1	2	3	4	5

**Racially extremist groups:**

Yourself:	1	2	3	4	5
Children under 12:	1	2	3	4	5
Other college students:	1	2	3	4	5
The elderly:	1	2	3	4	5
All other people:	1	2	3	4	5

**Religious denominations:**

Yourself:	1	2	3	4	5
Children under 12:	1	2	3	4	5
Other college students:	1	2	3	4	5
The elderly:	1	2	3	4	5
All other people:	1	2	3	4	5

**Next, we'd like to ask you some questions about the various media to which you pay attention.**

TELEVISION

In the last week, how many days have you watched television? (Please check one)

- None
- One day
- Two days
- Three days
- Four days
- Five days
- Six days
- Everyday
- Don't know

On the average day, how much time do you personally watch television?  
(in hours & minutes) \_\_\_\_\_

**Please express your level of agreement with the following statement.**

When I watch television, I pay a lot of attention to advertisements. (Please circle one)

Strongly Agree      Agree      Somewhat Agree      Somewhat Disagree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

RADIO

In the last week, how many days have you listened to the radio? (Please check one)

- None
- One day
- Two days
- Three days
- Four days
- Five days
- Six days
- Everyday
- Don't know



On the average day, how much time do you personally listen to the radio?  
(in hours & minutes) \_\_\_\_\_

**Please express your level of agreement with the following statement.**

When I listen to radio, I pay a lot of attention to advertisements. (Please circle one)

Strongly Agree      Agree      Somewhat Agree      Somewhat Disagree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**NEWSPAPER**

In the last week, how many days have you read a daily newspaper? (Please check one)

- \_\_\_ None
- \_\_\_ One day
- \_\_\_ Two days
- \_\_\_ Three days
- \_\_\_ Four days
- \_\_\_ Five days
- \_\_\_ Six days
- \_\_\_ Everyday
- \_\_\_ Don't know

On the average day, how much time do you personally read a daily newspaper?  
(in hours & minutes) \_\_\_\_\_

**Please express your level of agreement with the following statement.**

When read a newspaper, I pay a lot of attention to advertisements. (Please circle one)

Strongly Agree      Agree      Somewhat Agree      Somewhat Disagree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**MAGAZINE**

In the last week, how many days have you read a magazine? (Please check one)

- \_\_\_ None
- \_\_\_ One day
- \_\_\_ Two days
- \_\_\_ Three days
- \_\_\_ Four days
- \_\_\_ Five days
- \_\_\_ Six days
- \_\_\_ Everyday
- \_\_\_ Don't know

On the average day, how much time do you personally read a magazine?  
(in hours & minutes) \_\_\_\_\_

**Please express your level of agreement with the following statement.**

When I read a magazine, I pay a lot of attention to advertisements. (Please circle one)

Strongly Agree      Agree      Somewhat Agree      Somewhat Disagree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

**You're almost done, just a few more questions!**

If an advertisement were to offend you, how likely would you be to file a complaint with the company or another organization? (Please circle one)

Very Likely                  Likely                  Neutral                  Unlikely                  Very Unlikely

If you did file a complaint, how offended would you have to be? (1 = "not at all offended" and 5 = "extremely offended") (Please circle one)

1                  2                  3                  4                  5                  I would never file a complaint

**How old** were you on your last birthday? \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender:**    Male    Female

**Year in school:**    Freshmen    Sophomore    Junior    Senior    Graduate

**What is your race/ethnicity?**

- \_\_\_ American Indian or Alaska Native
- \_\_\_ Asian or Asian American (Includes Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Filipino)
- \_\_\_ Black or African American
- \_\_\_ Black (with Hispanic/Latino origin)
- \_\_\_ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- \_\_\_ White
- \_\_\_ White (with Hispanic/Latino origin)
- \_\_\_ Multiracial, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_ Other race, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you an American citizen?

- \_\_\_ Yes
- \_\_\_ No

**The survey is over! Thank you for your responses!**

## APPENDIX C: IRB APPROVAL FORM



Office of Research

October 12, 2004

Keith Jensen  
14552 Lake Price Drive  
Orlando, FL 32826

Dear Mr. Jensen:

With reference to your protocol entitled, "Offensive Advertising and the Third-Person Effect," I am enclosing for your records the approved, expedited document of the UCFIRB Form you had submitted to our office.

Please be advised that this approval is given for one year. Should there be any addendums or administrative changes to the already approved protocol, they must also be submitted to the Board. Changes should not be initiated until written IRB approval is received. Adverse events should be reported to the IRB as they occur. Further, should there be a need to extend this protocol, a renewal form must be submitted for approval at least one month prior to the anniversary date of the most recent approval and is the responsibility of the investigator (UCF).

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at 407-823-2901.

Please accept our best wishes for the success of your endeavors.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Ward".

Barbara Ward, CIM  
IRB Coordinator

cc. IRB office

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