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Eirini Tsihla

Assistant Professor, University of Western Macedonia, Greece
etsichla@uowm.gr

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The Changing Roles of Gender in Advertising: Past, Present, and Future

Eirini Tsihla*

The purpose of this paper is to navigate the rich academic literature on gender portrayals in advertising, and then to provide an overview on key findings and trends observed throughout the years. For several decades, women in advertising were likely to be depicted in traditional and domestic roles and were excluded from empowering roles and professional settings. Some progress has been acknowledged during the last decades, however, it seems that female role stereotyping is becoming subtler but still remains present. Male depictions have changed as well, moving from mere traditional masculine portrayals to a greater variety of roles, including decorative and family ones. In addition, the paper offers a cultural perspective by summarizing key findings regarding the relationship of gender stereotyping in advertisements and various country gender indices. Popular methodologies employed by content analytic studies in print advertisements are also presented. Finally, the paper accentuates current developments and tendencies regarding gender portrayals in advertising and outlines a research agenda that proposes timely and promising avenues for future studies.

Keywords: Gender stereotypes, advertising, gender roles

Introduction

Few domains in advertising have received such abundant academic attention as gender portrayals in advertising. The investigation of gender stereotypes was initiated in the 1960s, propelled by feminist thought and remained timely and relevant due to the evolution of gender roles in society that challenged traditional structures of gender hierarchy and raised ethical considerations about the representation of women in the media. Today, almost 60 years later, social movements like #Me Too and Time's Up breathe new life into the conversation about women's sexualization and objectification, and the investigation of gender portrayals continues to generate thought-provoking findings. The pervasive and ethically questionable nature of advertising has been repeatedly noted.¹

* Eirini Tsihla is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Communication and Digital Media of the University of Western Macedonia in Greece. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Economics from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, an MSc in Marketing from the University of Stirling, UK and a Ph.D. in Marketing from the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Her research interests lie in the field of advertising, gender and emotion. She has published articles in international peer reviewed journals such as the International Journal of Advertising, the Journal of Marketing Communications, Communication Research Reports and the International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing. Her work has been also presented in international marketing and advertising conferences including the European Marketing Academy Conference (EMAC) and the International Conference on Research in Advertising (ICORIA).

¹ See Pollay, Richard. 1986. The Distorted Mirror: Reflections on the Unintended Consequences of Advertising. *Journal of Marketing* 50(2), 18-36.

The general consensus is that advertising reflects society in a distorted fashion, calling attention to and exaggerating some aspects of everyday life. Advertisers are often accused of using such distortion in order to push boundaries in creating attention-grabbing advertising messages that have stopping power and generate hype in a cluttered media landscape.²

On the other hand, gender stereotypes are considered popular due to their clarity, conciseness, and ability to get quickly the message across.³ In that sense, stereotypes are regarded by advertisers as general knowledge that prevents distraction, is attractive to audiences, encourages focus on the brand message and simplifies cognitive processes and categorization on consumers' behalf.⁴ Hence, advertising practitioners rely on simplistic and reductive stereotypes that convey a large amount of information in a succinct fashion.⁵ From a cynical perspective, advertisers continue to use gender stereotypes because they work, otherwise, they either would have stopped using them or would be driven out of business by companies that use more ethical and effective advertisements devoid of stereotypical portrayals.⁶

According to feminist thought, advertising in popular media clearly contributes to gender inequality by promoting sexism and distorted image ideals as valid and acceptable.⁷ Traditional gender roles depicted in advertisements are hierarchical, as men are more often presented in a higher position, whereas women are more often depicted in inferior and passive roles.⁸ Although the role of women in society has begun to shift since the 1960s, numerous studies indicate that female portrayals in advertising have been slow to adjust to their evolving status. Particularly, the depiction of women in professional roles and as voices of authority reports a significant time lag before its depiction in advertising imagery.⁹ Even recently, studies postulate that advertisements do not reflect

² Rumbo, Joseph. 2002. Consumer Resistance in a World of Advertising Clutter: The Case of Adbusters. *Psychology & Marketing*, 19(2), 127-48; Zotos, Yorgos and Eirini Tsihla. 2014. Female Stereotypes in Print Advertising: A Retrospective Analysis. *Procedia-social and behavioral sciences* 148, 446-54.

³ Pollay, *The Distorted Mirror*, 27

⁴ Windels, Kasey. 2016. Stereotypical or just Typical: How Do US Practitioners View the Role and Function of Gender Stereotypes in Advertisements? *International Journal of Advertising* 35(5), 864-87.

⁵ Patterson, Maurice / O'Malley, Lisa and Vicky Story. 2009. Women in Advertising: Representations, Repercussions, Responses. *Irish Marketing Review* 20(1), 9-22.

⁶ Miller, Alan and Satoshi Kanazawa. 2007. *Why Beautiful People Have More Daughters: From Dating, Shopping, and Praying to Going to War and Becoming a Billionaire: Two Evolutionary Psychologists Explain Why We Do What We Do*. New York: Perigee Book.

⁷ Kilbourne, Jean. 1999. *Deadly Persuasion: Why Women and Girls Must Fight the Addictive Power of Advertising*. Free Press; Lazar, Michelle. 2006. Discover the Power of Femininity! Analyzing Global "Power Femininity" in Local Advertising. *Feminist Media Studies* 6(4), 505-17.

⁸ Gallagher, Margaret. 2004. *The Impact of Monitoring Media Images of Women*, in *Critical Readings: Media and Gender*, edited by Carter, Cynthia and Linda Steiner. Maidenhead: Open University Press, 148-61.

⁹ Gilly, Mary. 1988. Sex Roles in Advertising: A Comparison of Television Advertisements in Australia, Mexico, and the United States. *Journal of Marketing* 52(2), 75-85.

contemporary gender roles,¹⁰ raising concerns that advertisers rely on stereotypical images that no longer exist.¹¹

Recently however, advertising seems to communicate new meanings of gender by constructing images of active, confident, or sexually powerful women and loving fathers, evident in the advertising appeals of “*femvertising*” and “*dadvertising*.” To a certain degree, these shifts reflect societal changes regarding the role and depictions of men and women.¹² A possible reason behind this progress could be the corporate tendency to embrace and effectively communicate practices of brand responsibility or brand advocacy¹³ in order to appear more socially responsible and satisfy the audience, especially the ethically conscious millennial consumers.

Taking all the above into consideration, it is evident that gender portrayals in advertising constitute a dynamic research domain that continues to evolve and keeps yielding important insights for both academics and practitioners. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the early and recent pertinent literature, present two coding instruments frequently employed in the investigation of gender portrayals in print advertisements, and highlight important areas for future research endeavors.

Gender stereotypes

A stereotype is defined as a group concept that reflects inferior judgment and gives rise to a simple structure, suggesting that stereotypes are predominantly evaluative.¹⁴ According to Barker,¹⁵ a stereotype involves the reduction of persons to a set of exaggerated, usually negative, character traits. Stereotypes do not necessarily bear negative connotations, though they may lead to oversimplified conceptions and expectations that devalue and restrict potential opportunities of subjects of a social category.¹⁶ Gender stereotypes are defined as beliefs that certain attributes differentiate women and men.¹⁷ In that sense, gender stereotypes provide a limited “vocabulary of interaction,” encouraging people to think and speak of women primarily in terms of their

¹⁰ Plakoyiannaki, Emanouella and Yorgos Zotos. 2009. Female Role Stereotypes in Print Advertising: Identifying Associations with Magazine and Product Categories. *European Journal of Marketing* 43(11/12), 1411-34; Tsihla, Eirini and Yorgos Zotos. 2016. Gender Portrayals Revisited: Searching for Explicit and Implicit Stereotypes in Cypriot Magazine Advertisements. *International Journal of Advertising* 35(6), 983-1007.

¹¹ DeYoung, Susan and Frederick Crane. 1992. Females' Attitudes toward the Portrayal of Women in Advertising: A Canadian Study. *International Journal of Advertising* 11(3), 249-55.

¹² Kapoor, Deepa and Alka Munjal. 2019. Self-Consciousness and Emotions Driving Femvertising: A Path Analysis of Women's attitude Towards Femvertising, Forwarding Intention and Purchase Intention. *Journal of Marketing Communications* 25(2), 137-57.

¹³ Champlin, Sara / Sterbenk, Yvette / Windels, Kasey and Maddison Poteet. 2019. How Brand-Cause Fit Shapes Real World Advertising Messages: A Qualitative Exploration of 'Femvertising'. *International Journal of Advertising* 38(8), 1240-63.

¹⁴ Perkins, Tessa. 1997. *Rethinking Stereotypes*, in *The Media Studies Reader*, edited by O' Sullivan, Tim and Jewkes, Yvonne. Bristol: Arrowsmith, 75-85.

¹⁵ Barker, Chris. 1999. *Television, Globalization and Cultural Identities*. London: Open University Press.

¹⁶ Eisend, Martin. 2010. A Meta-Analysis of Gender Roles in Advertising. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 38(4), 418-40; Zotos and Tsihla, *Female Stereotypes in Print Advertising*, 447.

¹⁷ Ashmore, Richard and Frances Del Boca. 1981. *Conceptual Approaches to Stereotypes and Stereotyping*, in *Cognitive Processes in Stereotyping and Intergroup Behavior*, edited by Hamilton, David. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1-35.

relationship to men, family, or their sexuality.¹⁸ According to Kay Deaux and Laurie Lewis,¹⁹ gender stereotypes have four different and independent components: trait descriptors (e.g., self-assertion, concern for others), physical characteristics (e.g. hair length, body height), role behaviors (e.g., leader, taking care of children), and occupational status (e.g. truck driver, housewife). Every integral part is associated with a masculine and feminine version, which is strongly related to males and females, respectively. Each gender stereotyping component may lead to negative consequences such as body dissatisfaction, feelings of insecurity, reduced self-confidence, and confinement of professional opportunities. These findings raise key concerns, especially considering that women tend to be more sensitive than men to the detail of advertising messages and get more emotionally involved with advertising.²⁰ In addition, exposure to sexually explicit images of women in ads may induce violence against women and rape myth acceptance.²¹ However, Moss-Racusin and Good²² argue that gender stereotypes impact both genders, creating unrealistic expectations for men as well. Hence, the European Parliament's resolution on eliminating gender stereotypes in the EU (2013) addresses these concerns, acknowledging the limiting depictions of women in the media and advertising in particular and calling for actions that deconstruct gender stereotypes.

The Mirror versus the Mold argument

The nature of the relationship between gender-related values of society and gender portrayals in advertising is the focus of a long-standing debate. Two opposing arguments have been suggested, namely the “*mirror*” versus the “*mold*” argument²³. The “*mirror*” argument posits that advertising reflects values that already prevail in the society.²⁴ As a result, men and women featured in advertisements generally have been typecast to adhere to the dominant concepts regarding gender roles.²⁵ According to this view, given the multiple interrelated factors in the contemporary socioeconomic and political environment that influence the value system of a society, the impact of advertising seems insignificant. A meta-analysis by Eisend²⁶ provides empirical support in favor of the “*mirror*” argument, suggesting that advertising has historically reflected,

¹⁸ Tuchman, Gaye. 1979. *The Symbolic Annihilation of Women by the Mass Media*, in *Hearth and Home: Images of Women in the Mass Media*, edited by Tuchman, Gaye / Daniels, Arlene and James Benet. New York: Oxford, 3-38.

¹⁹ Deaux, Kay and Laurie L. Lewis. 1984. Structure of Gender Stereotypes: Interrelationships among Components and Gender Label. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 46(5), 991-1004.

²⁰ Meyers-Levy, Joan and Durairaj Maheswaran. 1991. Exploring Differences in Males' and Females' Processing Strategies. *Journal of Consumer Research* 18(1), 63-70.

²¹ Lanis, Kyra and Katherine Covell. 1995. Images of Women in Advertisements: Effects on Attitudes Related to Sexual Aggression. *Sex Roles* 32(9-10), 639-49; MacKay, Natalie and Katherine Covell. 1997. The Impact of Women in Advertisements on Attitudes toward Women. *Sex Roles* 36(9-10), 573-83.

²² Moss-Racusin, Corinne and Jessica Good. 2015. Measure of a Man: Outcomes of Gender Stereotyping for Men and Masculinity (Editorial). *Social Psychology* 46(4), 179-81.

²³ Pollay, *The Distorted Mirror*, 26; Pollay, Richard. 1987. On the Value of Reflections on the Values in “The Distorted Mirror”. *Journal of Marketing* 51(3), 104-9; Zotos and Tsihla, *Female Stereotypes in Print Advertising*, 447; Grau, Stacy and Yorgos Zotos. 2016. Gender Stereotypes in Advertising: A Review of Current Research. *International Journal of Advertising* 35(5), 761-70.

²⁴ Holbrook, Morris. 1987. Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall, What's Unfair in the Reflections on Advertising?. *Journal of Marketing* 51(3), 95-103; Eisend, *A Meta-Analysis*, 421.

²⁵ Holbrook, *Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall*, 96.

²⁶ Eisend, *A Meta-Analysis*, 436.

rather than challenged, female stereotypes and roles in society, but the characteristics of women's advertising depictions in advertising tend to lag behind female contemporary roles in society.

On the contrary, according to the "mold" argument, advertising molds and impacts the values of its target audience.²⁷ Drawing on cultivation theory,²⁸ media content influences social and psychological attitudes toward men and women. Ultimately, people tend to incorporate gender clichés presented by the media into their own concepts of reality, forming perceptions of themselves²⁹ and behaving in a consistent manner in order to match the stereotyped images that are omnipresent everywhere.

Taking all the above into consideration, it could be suggested that the truth lies somewhere in a continuum between the "mirror" and the "mold" argument. Since advertising, as a system of visual representation, creates meaning within the "circuit" of culture, it seems that it both reflects and contributes to culture.³⁰ Advertising proposes lifestyles and forms of self-presentation that individuals use to define their roles in the society.³¹ The majority of ad campaigns invoke gender identity, drawing their imagery primarily from the stereotyped iconography of masculinity and femininity.³²

The Past: Overview of the Literature

Early studies conducted in the USA during the 1960s and 1970s indicate that stereotypes existed in terms of setting, as females were limited to explicit domestic roles such as happy housewives and mothers, while men were usually depicted outdoors and in professional settings. In addition, women were likely to be portrayed dependent on men's protection, appear as unintelligent consumers incapable of making important decisions, or were sexually objectified.³³ On the contrary, professional women were notably underrepresented. Even though more recent studies document a decrease in female housewife and dependency roles, a significant increase of decorative roles has been noted, while representations of women in professional settings and career roles are still rare.³⁴ In a meta-analysis of studies on gender roles in TV advertisements from

²⁷ Pollay, *The Distorted Mirror*, 27; Pollay, *On the Value of Reflections*, 104.

²⁸ Gerbner, George and Larry Gross. 1973. *Cultural Indicators: The Social Reality of Television Drama*. Pennsylvania University, Philadelphia: Annenberg School of Communications.

²⁹ Dahlén, Micael / Rosengren, Sara and Edith Smit. 2014. Why the Marketer's View Matters as much as the Message: Speaking down to the Consumer speaks badly to a Brand's Image. *Journal of Advertising Research* 54(3), 304-12.

³⁰ Albers-Miller, Nancy and Betsy Gelb. 1996. Business Advertising Appeals as a Mirror of Cultural Dimensions: A Study of Eleven Countries. *Journal of Advertising* 25(4), 57-70; Hall, Stuart. 2001. *Encoding/decoding*, in *Culture, Media, Language*, edited by Hall, Stuart / Durham, Meenakshi and Douglas Kellner. MA: Blackwell Publishing, 163-73.

³¹ Plakoyiannaki, Emmanuella / Mathioudaki, Kalliopi / Dimitratos, Pavlos and Yorgos Zotos. 2008. Images of Women in Online Advertisements of Global Products: Does Sexism exist? *Journal of Business Ethics* 83(1), 101-12.

³² Schroeder, Jonathan and Detlev Zwick. 2004. Mirrors of Masculinity: Representation and Identity in Advertising Images. *Consumption Markets & Culture* 7(1), 21-52.

³³ See Courtney, Alice and Sarah Lockeretz. 1971. A Woman's Place: An Analysis of the Roles Portrayed by Women in Magazine Advertisements. *Journal of Marketing Research* 8(1), 92-5; Belkaoui, Ahmed and Janice Belkaoui. 1976. A Comparative Analysis of the Roles Portrayed by Women in Print Advertisements: 1958, 1970, 1972. *Journal of Marketing Research* 13(2), 168-72.

³⁴ Mitchell, Paul and Wendy Taylor. 1990. Polarizing Trends in Female Portrayal in UK Advertising. *European Journal of Marketing* 24(5), 41-49; Piron, Francis and Murray, Young. 1996. Consumer Advertising in Germany and the United States: A Study of Sexual Explicitness and Cross-Gender

1971 to 2005 that covered 28 countries, Eisend³⁵ found that females were more likely to be depicted in domestic environments, as product users, in dependent roles, as younger than males; they tended to be presented visually (not speaking) and to provide opinions or nonscientific arguments rather than facts. The study concluded that stereotyping persists, particularly for women, despite significant changes in the educational, occupational, and societal status of women. Of all dimensions, occupational status and sexualization represent the components with the highest degree of stereotyping. Other studies suggest that gender stereotyping is decreasing, though this trend could be attributed to the fact that is becoming more subtle.³⁶ Furnham and Paltzer³⁷ observed a declining trend in gender-role stereotyping in Western countries, but this progress is limited to certain categories like credibility, role, and age.

As far as male portrayals are concerned, evidence from the UK³⁸ and Greece³⁹ shows that men tend to be portrayed with themes of sex appeal, career orientation, or occupied with activities outside the home. At the same time, the depiction of muscular bodies that propagate the image of a strong male icon is becoming increasingly popular in magazine advertisements.⁴⁰ In that sense, pictures of male bodies have now become objects of display, representing a physical and sexual ideal.⁴¹ According to Rohlinger,⁴² the “erotic male” is the most prominent portrayal of masculinity in a sample of magazine advertisements drawn from 1987 and 1997. On the other hand, the tendency to portray males as authorities seems to persist,⁴³ as several studies indicate that advertising rarely depicts males in domestic settings and family roles.⁴⁴

Contact. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing* 8(3-4), 211-28; Plakoyiannaki and Zotos, *Female Role Stereotypes in Print Advertising*, 1124.

³⁵ Eisend, *A Meta-Analysis*, 431.

³⁶ Wolin, Lori. 2003. Gender Issues in Advertising: An Oversight Synthesis of Research: 1970–2002. *Journal of Advertising Research* 43(1), 111-29; Hovland, Roxanne / McMahan,Carolynn / Lee, Guiohk / Hwang, Jang-Sun and Juran Kim. 2005. Gender Role Portrayals in American and Korean Advertisements. *Sex Roles* 53(11-12), 887-99.

³⁷ Furnham, Adrian and Stephanie Paltzer. 2010. The Portrayal of Men and Women in Television Advertisements: An updated Review of 30 Studies published since 2000. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology* 51(3), 216-36.

³⁸ Lysonski, Steven. 1985. Role Portrayals in British Magazine Advertisements. *European Journal of Marketing* 19(7), 37-55.

³⁹ Zotos, Yorgos and Steven Lysonski. 1994. Gender Representations: The Case of Greek Magazine Advertisements. *Journal of Euromarketing* 3(2), 27-47.

⁴⁰ Kolbe, Richard and Paul Albanese. 1996. Man to Man: A Content Analysis of Sole-Male Images in Male-Audience Magazines. *Journal of Advertising* 25(4), 1-20.

⁴¹ Patterson, Maurice and Richard Elliot. 2002. Negotiating Masculinities: Advertising and the Inversion of the Male Gaze. *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 5(3), 231-49.

⁴² Rohlinger, Deana. 2002. Eroticizing Men: Cultural Influences on Advertising and Male Objectification. *Sex Roles* 46(3-4), 61-74.

⁴³ Furnham, Adrian and Twiggy Mak. 1999. Sex-role Stereotyping in Television Commercials: A Review and Comparison of Fourteen Studies Done on Five Continents over 25 Years. *Sex Roles* 41(5-6), 413-37; Furnham and Paltzer, *The Portrayal of Men and Women in Television Advertisements*, 218.

⁴⁴ Gentry, James and Robert Harrison. 2010. Is Advertising a Barrier to Male Movement toward Gender Change? *Marketing Theory* 10(1), 74-96; Zayer, Linda. 2010. [A Typology of Men's Conceptualizations of Ideal Masculinity in Advertising](#). *Advertising and Society Review* 11(1) (accessed: 14 December 2019).

A cultural perspective

Over the last few decades, the literature of gender stereotypes in advertising has proliferated to a number of comparative studies of gender roles portrayed in different cultural contexts.⁴⁵ Countries' scores in Hofstede's Masculinity Index are commonly employed in order to examine whether gender stereotypes are more common in highly masculine rather than feminine countries. The findings were conflicting: To illustrate, Judith Wiles, Charles Wiles, and Anders Tjernlund⁴⁶ showed that high-masculinity countries were associated with higher percentages of men's working roles and a higher percentage of female decorative roles, while other studies produced findings opposite from those predicted by Hofstede's Masculinity Index,⁴⁷ concluding that there are other forces in each country (i.e., self-regulation of advertising) affecting gender stereotyping in advertising. In a similar vein, several researchers⁴⁸ used the gender empowerment measure (GEM), a degree of women's participation in political, economic, and professional activities. Eisend⁴⁹ demonstrated that gender-related values in society, as indicated by GEM, precede and influence stereotypical depictions in advertising. However, both the Masculinity Index and GEM seem to have a relatively small predictive value. On the contrary, Matthes, Prieler, and Adam⁵⁰ analyzed a sample of advertisements from a total of thirteen Asian, American, and European countries and demonstrated that gender stereotypes in TV advertising were independent of a country's gender indices such as Hofstede's Masculinity Index, GLOBE's Gender Egalitarianism Index, the Gender Equality Index, and the Global Gender Gap index. These findings challenge the belief that stereotypes in advertisements depend on developments related to gender equality and indicate that despite variations in gender-role portrayals across cultures, advertising visuals are perhaps becoming more universal due to global markets and networked publics.⁵¹

Investigating gender portrayals in print advertisements: The coding schemes

The vast majority of research studies conducted within the realm of gender stereotypes implemented quantitative content analysis in order to detect the specific types of stereotypical portrayals. A useful instrument for the investigation of gender role stereotypes should reflect a variety of men and

⁴⁵ An, Daechun and Sanghoon Kim. 2007. Relating Hofstede's Masculinity Dimension to Gender Role Portrayals in Advertising. *International Marketing Review* 24(2), 181-207.

⁴⁶ Wiles, Judith / Wiles, Charles and Anders Tjernlund. 1995. A Comparison of Gender Role Portrayals in Magazine Advertising: The Netherlands, Sweden and the USA. *European Journal of Marketing* 29(11), 35-49.

⁴⁷ Odekerken-Schröder, Gaby / De Wulf, Kristof and Natascha Hofstee. 2002. Is Gender Stereotyping in Advertising More Prevalent in Masculine Countries? *International Marketing Review* 19(4), 408-19; Paek, Hye-Jin / Nelson, Michelle and Alexandra Vilela. 2011. Examination of Gender-Role Portrayals in Television Advertising Across Seven Countries. *Sex Roles* 64(3-4), 192-207.

⁴⁸ Moon, Young and Kara Chan. 2002. Gender Portrayal in Hong Kong and Korean Children's TV Commercials: A Cross-Cultural Comparison. *Asian Journal of Communication* 12(2), 100-19; Paek, Nelson and Vilela, *Examination of Gender-Role Portrayals in Television Advertising*, 202.

⁴⁹ Eisend, *A Meta-Analysis*, 436.

⁵⁰ Matthes, Jörg / Prieler, Michael and Karoline Adam. 2016. Gender-Role Portrayals in Television Advertising across the Globe. *Sex Roles* 75(7-8), 314-27.

⁵¹ Paek, Nelson and Vilela, *Examination of Gender-Role Portrayals in Television Advertising*, 203.

women's roles. A popular coding scheme adopted by numerous studies in the field⁵² is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Categories for male and female stereotypes

Categories for female stereotypes	Categories for male stereotypes
Women in traditional roles	1. The theme of sex appeal
1. Dependency	2. Dominant over women
2. Housewife	3. Authority figure
Women in decorative roles	4. Family man
3. Women concerned with physical attractiveness	5. Frustrated male
4. Women as sex objects	6. Activities and life outside the home
Women in non-traditional roles	7. Career oriented
5. Women in non-traditional activities	8. Nontraditional role
6. Career oriented women	9. Neutral
7. Voice of authority	
Women portrayed as equal to men	
8. Neutral	

In 1979, Goffman suggested an innovative approach for the examination of gender stereotypes called semiotic or frame analysis.⁵³ Rather than observing the manifest content of an advertisement, his primary focus was directed to more subtle details implied by hands, eyes, knees, facial expressions, head and body postures, relative sizes, body positioning, and head-eye aversion. These cues work at a largely subconscious level to inform culturally bound ideas about gender and are indicative of differences in social power, influence, and authority. Through an analysis of purposefully selected print advertisements, he illustrated that advertising imagery weakens women, as pictures of men reflect confidence, competence, and authority, while women are cast as deferential and childlike. His coding scheme enables the scrutiny of the relationships among men and women shown in advertisements and consists of the following categories: (1) "Relative size" that signals women's inferiority through the depiction of women as smaller and/or shorter than men, (2) "feminine touch," a form of ritualistic touch that indicates the female body's delicacy and preciousness, (3) "function ranking," which pertains to the tendency of males rather than females to perform the executive role and exercise control of the situation, (4) "ritualization of subordination," designed to capture the adoption of postures that signal the need for protection and indicate submission and (5) "licensed withdrawal," which shows women removing themselves psychologically from the situation through images of decontextualization, gaze aversion, and avoidance of action.

Overall, the stream of literature that adopts Goffman's categories postulates that contemporary advertising still places women in subordinate and dependent positions that signal vulnerability and lower status. Only slight changes have been detected regarding the type of stereotyping across time.⁵⁴ For instance,

⁵² See Courtney and Lockeretz, *A Woman's Place*, 93; Mitchell and Taylor, *Polarizing Trends in Female Portrayal in UK Advertising*, 42; Lysonski, *Role Portrayals in British Magazine Advertisements*, 41; Zotos and Lysonski, *Gender Representations*, 31; Plakoyiannaki and Zotos, *Female Role Stereotypes in Print Advertising*, 1417.

⁵³ Goffman, Erving. 1979. *Gender Advertisements*. London: Macmillan International Higher Education.

⁵⁴ See Umiker-Sebeok, Jean. 1996. Power and Construction of Gendered Spaces. *International Review of Sociology* 6(3), 389-404; Kang, Mee-Eun. 1997. The Portrayal of Women's Images in Magazine Advertisements: Goffman's Gender Analysis Revisited. *Sex Roles* 37(11-12), 979-97; Lindner, Katharina. 2004. Images of Women in General Interest and Fashion Magazine

there was more body display and licensed withdrawal in magazine advertisements in 1991 compared to 1979.⁵⁵ From 1950 to 2000, an increase of men in suggestive poses and women in subordinate poses was recorded, as well as a decrease in men performing the executive role.⁵⁶

Tsihla and Zotos⁵⁷ investigated the relationship between explicit stereotypical portrayals and the subtler, implicit stereotyping suggested by Goffman (1979) in an effort to understand whether contemporary egalitarian roles of men and women depicted in advertising images contain subtle cues that signal hierarchical patterns and therefore jeopardize progress in terms of equal representation. The analysis revealed interesting patterns that can be summarized as follows: (1) Women are size subordinated in the majority of “dependency” portrayals and in a large number of “career oriented” and “neutral” displays. (2) The overwhelming majority of females perform the subordinate rather than the executive role when pictured with a male, with the highest frequency observed in the “dependency portrayals.” (3) Feminine touch, ritualization of subordination and licensed withdrawal are typical of women, even in seemingly egalitarian portrayals such as “voice of authority” and “career oriented.” (4) Body display is highly observed in several female roles including “women in non-traditional activities,” “concerned with physical attractiveness,” “housewife,” and “voice of authority.” (5) Ritualization of subordination was more common in male roles such as “family man,” “neutral,” “non-traditional,” and “theme of sex appeal” than “authority figure” and “career oriented” depictions. (6) Body display does not prevail in male portrayals, but out of all the categories it was most frequently identified in “the theme of sex appeal” and “dominant over women” stereotypes.

In that sense, the size subordination of “career oriented” and “neutral” women coupled with the almost exclusive performance of executive roles by males reflects signals of incompetence and association with low-status occupations that devalue contemporary women’s status and achievements. Moreover, the depiction of women in revealing attire across a variety of roles, from decorative to non-traditional, indicates that through semiotic cues embedded in advertising visuals, traditional patterns of gender hierarchy manage to manifest.⁵⁸ As Masée and Rosenblum⁵⁹ encapsulate, change is as real as “*Career Barbie*,” considering that the core identity of the professional woman is still sexually defined and longs for masculine approval.⁶⁰

The future: New roles and emerging trends

Recently, changing trends in gender portrayals have been noticed that seem to renegotiate the role of gender in advertising. These include depictions of

Advertisements from 1955 to 2002. *Sex Roles* 51(7-8), 409-21; Mager, John and James Helgeson. 2011. Fifty years of Advertising Images: Some Changing Perspectives on Role Portrayals along with Enduring Consistencies. *Sex Roles* 64(3-4), 238-52.

⁵⁵ Kang, *The Portrayal of Women’s Images in Magazine Advertisements*, 990-2.

⁵⁶ Mager and Helgeson, *Fifty Years of Advertising images*, 248.

⁵⁷ Tsihla and Zotos, *Gender Portrayals Revisited*, 992-1000.

⁵⁸ Tsihla and Zotos, *Gender Portrayals Revisited*, 999.

⁵⁹ Massé, Michelle and Karen Rosenblum. 1988. Male and Female Created by Them: The Depiction of Gender in the Advertising of Traditional Women’s and Men’s Magazines. *Women’s Studies International Forum* 11(2), 127-44.

⁶⁰ Massé and Rosenblum, *Male and Female Created by Them*, 142.

empowering, active, confident, and sexually powerful women, figurations of the “new man” and the “new father”⁶¹ as well as androgynous, non-binary gender portrayals that attempt to address the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender consumer (LGBT) segment.

Femvertising, defined as “*advertising that challenges traditional female advertising stereotypes*”⁶² employs pro-female talent, messages, and imagery to empower women and girls and eliminate gender-based disparities.⁶³ Even though advertising has used feminist themes before, this is the first time that an advertising appeal attempts to challenge stereotypes created and perpetuated by advertising itself.⁶⁴ Other popular themes employed by brands in order to celebrate and empower women include attractiveness and body image concerns, responding to negative “self-talk,” and addressing taboo topics related to women.⁶⁵ Numerous advertisements featuring femvertising appeals have gone viral and have proven tremendously successful,⁶⁶ leading to more positive attitudes towards these ads than traditional advertising.⁶⁷ However, femvertising has faced criticism as well, evolving around the commodification of feminism and gender disparities⁶⁸ and the failure to highlight women’s financial, career, or athletic success.⁶⁹

In a study analyzing 200 advertisements drawn from the US and UK editions of upmarket women’s magazines, Kohrs and Gill⁷⁰ identified an established visual pattern of female portrayals described as follows:

Rather than appearing small, passive or deferential, women are presented as bold, confident and powerful, with strong and assertive patterns of looking [...] These women are being hailed through a composite of signifiers of assertiveness, boldness and power that together comprise a kind of confident appearing.

The depiction of women as appearing confident involves a direct gaze at the viewer, neutral facial expressions, heads held up high, and confident stances with the body erect that signals superiority and disdain.⁷¹ Interestingly, the study did not find evidence of common subtle cues that denote gender hierarchy suggested by Goffman, like relative size, canting positions, function ranking, and

⁶¹ Kohrs, Kirsten and Rosalind Gill. In Press. *Confident Appearing: Revisiting Gender Advertisements in Contemporary Culture*, in *The Routledge Handbook of Language, Gender and Sexuality*, edited by Baxter, Judith and Jo Angouri. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1-27. (accessed: 12 January 2020).

⁶² Åkestam, Nina / Rosengren, Sara and Micael Dahlen. 2017. Advertising “like a girl”: Toward a Better Understanding of “Femvertising” and Its Effects. *Psychology & Marketing* 34(8), 795-806.

⁶³ Zeisler, Andi. 2016. *We Were Feminists Once: From Riot Grrrl to CoverGirl, the Buying and Selling of a Political Movement*. New York: Public Affairs.

⁶⁴ Åkestam, Rosengren and Dahlen, *Advertising “like a girl”*, 795.

⁶⁵ Champlin, Sterbenk, Windels and Poteet, *How Brand-Cause Fit Shapes Real World Advertising Messages*, 1243.

⁶⁶ Schultz, E. J. 2014. Ad Age’s 2014 *Advertiser of the Year: Under Armour*. *AdAge*, 8 December 2014 (accessed: 10 January 2020).

⁶⁷ Åkestam, Rosengren and Dahlen, *Advertising “like a girl”*, 802.

⁶⁸ Mahdawi, Arwa. 2015. *Twerking Men and Ass-Kicking Girls: How Advertising Learnt to Gender Flip*. *The Guardian*, 16 February 2015 (accessed: 8 January 2020).

⁶⁹ Spears, Nancy and Clinton Amos. 2014. Twentieth Century Female Ad Images: Cultural Interconnections, Social Learning, and the Dialectical Logic of Advertising. *Journal of Business Research* 67(4), 441-8.

⁷⁰ Kohrs and Gill, *Confident Appearing*, 14

⁷¹ Goffman, *Gender Advertisements*, 40.

licensed withdrawal. In a similar vein, in a study examining the practitioners' perspective on female portrayals in advertising, Middleton, Turnbull, and de Oliveira⁷² described a new role stereotype, the "sexually powerful" woman who is in control and gets what she wants because she is sexually attractive, as opposed to being sexually objectified in order to be looked at or consumed for male gratification.

On the other hand, the term dadvertising is used to describe commodified representations of fatherhood that suggest that "*the new ideal masculine man is an involved parent and an emotionally vulnerable partner.*"⁷³ Similar to femvertising, dadvertising is suggested to primarily appeal to the female audience and employs themes of gender egalitarianism in service of personal and familial empowerment politics. Hence, men are depicted as being regarded as heroes by their children, devoted fathers, loving husbands, and less often, domestic workers. According to Baxter, Kulczynski, and Ilicic,⁷⁴ advertising messages featuring fathers as caregivers invoke positive responses regardless of people's ideological perspectives on gender. In a longitudinal analysis from 2003 and 2005, Fowler and Thomas⁷⁵ indicated that the role of father in advertising has increased, suggesting an acceptance of men in domestic and childbearing activities.

Even though companies seem to direct considerable attention to the historically ignored lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) audience in an effort to broaden their customer base,⁷⁶ explicit appeals to gay consumers in mainstream media have been systematically avoided in the fear of alienating heterosexual consumers.⁷⁷ Hence, advertisers often create covert strategies using encrypted messages that appear innocuous to heterosexual readers, but possibly interpreted as "gay" by bisexual, lesbian, and gay readers.⁷⁸ Such messages include the use of a single person instead of an opposite sexed couple, the representation of androgynous body parts,⁷⁹ and the use of partially clothed, muscular men with sexually ambiguous appeal.⁸⁰ In that sense, a closer look at the increasing images of male objectification and sexualization in advertising suggests that many of these images tend to represent male models with an

⁷² Middleton, Karen / Turnbull, Sarah and Mauro de Oliveira. 2019. Female Role Portrayals in Brazilian Advertising: Are Outdated Cultural Stereotypes Preventing Change? *International Journal of Advertising*, 1-20.

⁷³ Leader, Caroline. 2019. Dadvertising: Representations of Fatherhood in Procter & Gamble's Tide Commercials. *Communication Culture & Critique* 12(1), 72-89 (76).

⁷⁴ Baxter, Stacey / Kulczynski, Alicia and Jasmina Ilicic. 2016. Ads Aimed at Dads: Exploring Consumers' Reactions towards Advertising that Conforms and Challenges Traditional Gender Role Ideologies. *International Journal of Advertising* 35(6), 970-82.

⁷⁵ Fowler, Kendra and Veronica Thomas. 2015. A Content Analysis of Male Roles in Television Advertising: Do Traditional Roles Still Hold?. *Journal of Marketing Communications* 21(5), 356-71.

⁷⁶ Zotos and Tsihla, *Female Stereotypes in Print Advertising*, 452.

⁷⁷ Greenlee, Timothy. 2004. *Mainstream Marketers Advertise to Gays and Lesbians: Strategic Issues and Research Agenda*, in *Diversity in Advertising*, edited by Williams, Jerome / Lee, Wei-Na and Curtis Haugtvedt. London: Lawrence Erlbaum, 357-67; Oakenfull, Gillian. 2004. *Targeting Consumer Segments Based on Sexual Orientation: Can Advertisers Swing Both Ways?*, in *Diversity in Advertising*, edited by Williams, Jerome / Lee, Wei-Na and Curtis Haugtvedt. London: Lawrence Erlbaum, 369-81.

⁷⁸ Sender, Katherine. 1999. Selling Sexual Subjectivities: Audiences Respond to Gay Window Advertising. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 16(2), 172-96.

⁷⁹ Kahn, Eve. 1994. The Glass Closet. *Print* XLVIII, 21-31.

⁸⁰ Swisher, Kara. 1993. Targeting the Gay Market: Companies Spending More of their Ad Dollars to Attract Affluent Group. *Washington Post*, 25 April 1993, H1.

unspecified sexuality. Such depictions are able to appeal to multiple audiences as they do not bare specific sexual connotations, liberating the viewers to project their desired meanings.⁸¹ Alternatively, advertising targeting the LGBT community was directed to LGBT-specific publications. Only lately, in the light of significant changes in the societal landscape in terms of visibility and acceptance and the acceleration of marriage equality, some LGBT-specific ads appear in mainstream media.⁸²

The aforementioned emerging trends highlight the repeated call for the modification of the existing coding schemes⁸³ that would enable advertising researchers to fully examine contemporary gender stereotypes without the danger of neglecting or oversimplifying their projected meanings. It is surprising that despite the rich literature that has been developed over the years on gender stereotypes, few changes to existing coding schemes have been proposed, such as dropping categories that appear no longer relevant. For instance, several researchers argue that categories proposed by Goffman such as relative size and function raking seldom appear in modern advertisements.⁸⁴ Although existing coding schemes are able to capture sex object portrayals and the display of naked skin, they fall short of differentiating between passive, sexually objectified depictions and sexually powerful, confident, and empowering portrayals of women. Similarly, non-binary gender, trans, and androgynous depictions cannot be captured with the existing coding instruments. An image of a professionally dressed “superwoman” figure arriving home from work and occupying herself with domestic activities, trying to balance home life, work, and family would be oversimplified if considered and coded as a simple housewife. In that sense, future research could work towards this direction and update the existing coding instruments.

In addition, during the last years significant developments have occurred in the media landscape. On one hand, advertising spending in print media has decreased and changed in structure. In Greece for instance, male magazines and magazines with a more general audience nowadays feature only a limited number of advertisements, impeding attempts to draw conclusions about the type of stereotypes diffused to particular audiences. On the other hand, the boundaries between advertising and other media are continuously blurring, making it hard to distinguish between commercial and editorial content in newspapers, magazines, TV shows, and social media posts. This trend presents a new, challenging, and almost unexplored territory for the investigation of gender stereotypes that would surely yield interesting insights.

⁸¹ Rohlinger, *Eroticizing Men*, 65.

⁸² Nölke, Ana-Isabel. 2018. Making Diversity Conform? An Intersectional, Longitudinal Analysis of LGBT-specific Mainstream Media Advertisements. *Journal of Homosexuality* 65(2), 224-55.

⁸³ Zotos and Tsihla, *Female Stereotypes in Print Advertising*, 454; Grau and Zotos, *Gender Stereotypes in Advertising*, 768.

⁸⁴ Tsihla and Zotos, *Gender Portrayals Revisited*, 994; Kohrs and Gill, *Confident Appearing*, 10.

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