The Unrecognized Problem: An analysis of masculinity stereotypes in advertising across six channels

Darcy Semmler

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THE UNRECOGNIZED PROBLEM:
AN ANALYSIS OF MASCULINITY STEREOTYPES IN ADVERTISING ACROSS
SIX CHANNELS

by

Darcy Semmler

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the
University Honors Program

Department of Contemporary Media & Journalism
The University of South Dakota
May 2013
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ABSTRACT

The Unrecognized Problem:
An analysis of masculinity stereotypes in advertising across six channels

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Because advertising relies on simplifications to get messages across more quickly, gendered stereotypes are prevalent in advertising media messages, and have been well-researched for their content and effects. Researchers have been more critical of the messages that perpetuate stereotypes involving women, but have focused less on the stereotypes men must face. This thesis uses content analysis to examine commercials on six channels for the frequency of male or female voiceovers and the frequency in which men and women appear in commercial advertisements. The analysis also investigates the masculinity stereotypes present in the commercials in comparison to neutral or gender-reversed stereotypes in the same commercials. This thesis suggests questions about the significance of masculinity stereotypes in media, as results show a balance of male and female presence across various stations, but greater usage of male voiceovers in commercials and differences in stereotypes across channels targeting gender-specific audiences.

KEYWORDS: Stereotypes, Gender, Advertising, Media, Masculinity
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

One of the most effective ways to deliver a message to people is through advertising. Effective advertising aims to attract attention to a particular product, message, or idea that the target audience is most likely to accept. For some companies, reaching their audiences through advertising is a goal worth achieving at all costs; consequently, it is estimated that advertisers in the United States spend more than $400 per person each year, while other nations, such as the UK and Canada, spend an estimated average of $17 annually (Lafky, Duffy, Steinmaus, & Berkowitz, 1996). While the average number of advertisements one is exposed to ranges from about 300 to thousands of ads, one article in *The Los Angeles Times* reported that the average American adult is exposed to as many as 3,000 advertising messages a day (Hotz, 2005). This includes ads from television, radio, print, magazines, stores, the Internet, and many other sources.

Various controversial issues have arisen in the advertising industry throughout history, such as manipulative tactics used by tobacco companies to target adolescents, political ads containing unfair attacks, or even controversial Super Bowl ads created by companies expecting to see the commercials banned, so they can then boast their banned status and reach audiences by enticing them to watch the racy content online. In addition to all these controversies, the prevalence of gender issues in the media has come to light in recent decades after the awareness created by the second wave of feminism in the
1970s. However, advertising and news often revert to stereotypical gender roles as a quick-view processing strategy helping to promote certain products or convey messages (Lafky et al., 1996).

Gender roles are commonplace in mass media, causing scholars to analyze their effects in various forms of media, particularly in commercial advertising. A company’s success depends on whether consumers are satisfied with their products, and the most effective way to create a good first impression on consumers is to present an appealing message about the product in advertising. For some advertisers, this means that gender roles and stereotypes are the most effective way to capture consumer attention, providing opportunities for the public to receive the message, interpret it, and, advertisers hope, act upon it in the direction of buying the company’s product. Gender roles and stereotypes are becoming more difficult to combat, as the objectification of men has also increased in recent years, but an increase of media literacy and advertisers’ use of nontraditional images are beginning to create a greater awareness of gender issues in advertising (Reichert, LaTour, Lambiase, & Adkins, 2007).
Definitions

To understand fully the specifics of gender issues in advertising, it is necessary to define terms such as “stereotypes” and “feminism,” and to differentiate between “gender” and “sex.”

Defining gender and sex is important because these terms are often used interchangeably. “Gender” is defined as “the social and cultural meanings associated with the maleness and femaleness imposed and expected by society” (Wolin, 2003, p. 111). “Sex” is associated with the biological differences between males and females, more specifically in reference to primary and secondary sex traits. Gender is viewed more frequently as part of the “nurture” aspect of psychology, focusing on what separates men and women in cultural and social terms beyond the most basic biological qualities (Acker, 1992). Understanding that gender is socially constructed is part of educators’ push for media literacy, which establishes “knowledge about how the mass media function in society” (Reichert, 2003, p. 82). More importantly, media literacy helps viewers recognize different gender roles and stereotypes prevalent in ads, and know when a stereotype is present. The most recognizable definition of a stereotype is “a preconceived and oversimplified idea of the characteristics which typify a person, situation, etc.” which surfaced in 1922. However, older meanings of the word date back
to the 1800s, when a stereotype was a method of printing with a solid type-metal plate cast from a mold taken from the surface of a form (Stereotype, 1922).

Another key aspect of analyzing gender issues in media is how sexuality is portrayed in advertising. According to *Sex in Advertising*, there are five types of sexual content that are typically the subject of advertising research, including 1) nudity; 2) sexual behavior; 3) physical attractiveness; 4) sexual referents; and 5) sexual embeds. Some types are self-explanatory, such as nudity, which includes how much or how little the models are wearing and how the clothes are styled, while physical attractiveness focuses on the general perception of physical beauty in terms of hair, physique, and facial structure. Sexual behavior research focuses either on “individual behavior or interpersonal interaction” (Reichert, 2003, p. 18), including flirting, eye contact, and model posture, as well as more intimate contact, such as kissing and hugging. Finally, sexual referents and embeds are represented through subtle – and sometimes not so subtle – implied references to sex. Referents often relate to double entendres and innuendos coupled with certain kinds of music, images, and other elements to suggest a sexual mood. Embeds are imperceptible to most viewers, and are typically referred to as subliminal advertising, often using certain key words such as “sex” or representing certain body parts. All of these sexual elements, whether implicit or explicit, work as part of advertising’s persuasive nature (Reichert, 2003). Not only is it important to understand the stereotypes presented through these elements, but it is also crucial for viewers to recognize when sexual content is used to capture consumers’ attentions.

Defining feminism is more difficult than one would expect. Wood references a study that defined feminism as “a movement for social, political, and economic equality
of women and men” (Wood, 2008, p. 3), and defined the term in her own words as “an active commitment to equality and respect for all forms of life” (p. 4). The same basic definition is provided by the Oxford English Dictionary, which explains feminism as the “advocacy of equality of the sexes and the establishment of the political, social, and economic rights of the female sex” (Feminism, 1895). All of these definitions identify feminism’s general goal as achieving social and professional equality for both women and men; however, the second definition is generally the more commonly used one, as implied by previous research (Aronson, 2003; Crowe, 2011).

Feminism comes up in a variety of subjects, from women’s studies and gender studies to psychology and history. However, of the five textbooks consulted on the topic of feminism, only one provided a clear, concrete definition – Wood’s text. The significance of so many texts leaving out a definition of a key element in recent history speaks volumes. Historically, feminism is usually described by some as appearing in three distinct waves (Wood, 2008; Robinson & Richardson, 2008). Although the first wave of feminism is rooted in the 19th century, popular use of the term “feminist” began around 1910, when feminism was considered a somewhat radical approach to equality with a broad scope, given that “all feminists are suffragists…but not all suffragists are feminists” (Woloch, 2002, p. 236). The objectives of feminism have changed over the decades, as have the people who participate and support those goals. Therefore, the definitions for feminism have changed to reflect the various meanings the term has to different factions within the women’s movement, including radical feminism, liberal feminism, and womanism, to name a few. These distinctions between factions began to appear during the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and ’70s. However, the
different ideas espoused by these different factions have also led to a division of power, diminishing the influence feminism used to have and negatively affecting its perception by the public during the current, third wave of the movement.

Theoretical Framework

Social theories offer a window into understanding why certain advertising strategies are used in conjunction with gender roles. The social comparison theory is one relevant framework because it is based on the human tendency to compare oneself to others in society. This is important, considering that advertising consistently portrays “the glamorous, the better, and the more” (Xue & Ellzey, 2009, p. 2). Consumers process advertising messages by implicitly considering questions such as, “How does this advertisement relate to me?” and “How does this apply to my interactions with other people?” From the standpoint of social comparison theory, the first question may lead viewers to feel less satisfied with different aspects of their lives. Answering the second question requires the introduction of other social theories about why men and women react differently or similarly to certain advertising messages.

One way in which men and women differ is sexual motivation. Two models were considered in a study done by Dahl, Sengupta, and Vohs (2009): an evolutionary model, and a socialization model. The first suggests that women tend to choose partners who would contribute long-term resources to care for their offspring. By contrast, men tend to seek multiple partners, selected primarily for their attractiveness as an indicator of fertility, to ensure greater likelihood of having offspring. The socialization model is similar, suggesting that many women relate sexual motivation to long-term commitment, while many men view sex as a recreational activity. Another theory referenced by Dahl
et al. is the social exchange theory. This theory is based on the economic ideas of maximizing benefits and minimizing costs, where a person’s goal is to gain more than what is offered. Individuals unwilling to engage have more power.

The social exchange theory and the models of sexual attitudes have merged to form a new theory proposed by Dahl et al.: sexual economics, which proposed that a woman will deny an exchange (sex) if she is unlikely to receive maximum benefits (long-term commitment). Her refusal puts her in control of when the exchange shall occur, making women “gatekeepers of sex” (p. 217). From the standpoint of sexual economics, advertisements portraying men as offering a valuable resource would create more favorable responses from women (Dahl et al., 2009).

Dahl et al. found that women did not respond in a significantly positive manner when an advertisement showed a general idea of commitment. However, if there is a directional component of commitment from the man to the woman, then women responded positively. Men’s responses had less variance; regardless of the message, men responded positively to all sex-based advertising, unless they were reminded by the ad that sometimes monetary resources are needed for sex to occur. This reaction was in conjunction with Dahl et al.’s first experiment regarding gift giving, particularly when the men were shown giving gifts to women; therefore, advertisements that elicited positive reactions in women led to negative reactions from the men (Dahl et al., 2009). Advertisements that resemble this gift giving, such as a man giving a woman a ring or other piece of jewelry, surely causes a great deal of stress for the male sex.

Advertising effects are also often analyzed from the standpoint of heuristics, an information-processing strategy that provides a simplistic solution instead of complex
problem solving, leading to judgments that may be inaccurate (Lafky et al., 1996). A 1996 study by Lafky et al. defined a representative heuristic as a probability bias that predicts outcomes based on categories representing certain people or objects. Another cognitive mechanism is the availability bias, in which predictions are based on what memories are most strongly associated with a possible outcome (Lafky et al., 1996). These two mechanisms explain why people engage in stereotyping, and the perpetuation of gender biases. In this particular study, the researchers investigated whether gender-specific heuristics affect the processing of advertising messages. The findings showed that men and women processed visuals differently, although both were influenced even when the exposure was brief. These results were credited to individual beliefs and values, affecting how a person will make quick associations with a particular image or message. Heuristics are a way for consumers to quickly form a conclusion about a message, which is especially significant when there is constant competition between brands for media present. Advertising seems to have formed a society of short attention spans, which explains why advertisers must spend hundreds of dollars to target Americans.

**Gendered Advertising to the Youth**

Since the 1970s, gender roles and stereotypes have concerned many sociologists and psychologists. In the world of advertising, images and messages are created to have an effect on readers and viewers. However, the impact has the potential to be especially significant on young people, whose minds are still developing; in addition, gendered stereotypes are often more pronounced and exaggerated in children’s advertising. Numerous studies examining how children and adolescents react to advertisements,
especially television commercials, focus on determining at what age adolescents begin to view advertisements critically and what advertising techniques work best for different age groups (Bakir, Blodgett, and Rose, 2008; Browne, 1998; Rouner, Slater, & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2003).

Children are likely to internalize many of the implicit and explicit messages conveyed by society. Authors Courtney and Whipple compiled studies completed in the 1970s, finding evidence of gendered advertising during the early stages of the media literacy campaign. Initial studies focused on ads portraying girls with dolls and boys with transport vehicles, sharing stereotypical “themes of popularity and beauty” for girls and ideas of power and strength for boys (Courtney & Whipple, 1983, p. 22). During this time, evidence also suggested that stereotypes for both boys and girls were on the rise in advertising content, but were more predominant for young girls (O’Bryant & Corder-Bolz, 1978). Studies often showed that men were seen as the default and the more credible sex. For example, a study by Hentges, Bartsch and Meier (2007) showed that men outnumbered women two to one in ad presence, while 90% of voiceovers were male. Another study indicated that commercials targeting boys used exclusively male voiceovers, while 11% of commercials meant for girls used male voiceovers as well (Johnson & Young, 2002).

Data on voiceovers are particularly significant, in that a commercial viewer does not have to actively watch a commercial to subconsciously note whether the voiceover is male or female. A voiceover from a commercial heard by a child who is primarily focused on a toy can still have an effect (Johnson & Young, 2002). There is no doubt that men dominate commercial advertising in terms of voiceovers, which poses an
interesting scenario. A girl exposed to female-dominated messages for products directed to her could still be listening to a product explanation by a male voice. If a boy were to pay attention to commercials targeting him, he would be exposed exclusively to male voices. This suggests that boys could potentially be affected more than girls in terms of embracing conformist gender messages (Brannon, 2010). Therefore, Johnson and Young’s study suggests an important hypothesis that male voiceovers would be used more frequently in commercials on stations targeting male audiences. Based on this literature, I propose the following:

H1: Male voiceovers will be used more frequently in commercials on stations targeting male audiences and stations with gender-neutral audiences.

Ads are not all-powerful, but coexist alongside familial and community influences that offer differing ideas of what is acceptable in a given society at a given time. Research suggests that various social factors are at work when children process advertising messages (Cheles-Miller, 1975). At least one study suggested that children had a natural “filter” toward advertising influences, largely based on experience and personality (Courtney & Whipple, 1983). Experiences and personalities are elements with which advertising has to work with rather than battle through various persuasion tactics (Dahl, Sengupta, & Vohs, 2009). Adolescents specifically represent the age group most concerned with being socially accepted, using a “mental guidebook” of social rules and gender roles that help them navigate through life (Merskin, 1999, p. 95).

Children are inundated with advertising during kids’ programs, and it is evident that young viewers are more perceptive in their ad interpretations than one would think.
A study from 2008 explored differences between five-year-olds’ and six-year-olds’ attitudes toward advertising (Bakir et al., 2008). The study reported that boys’ perceptions of advertising contained more traditional gender roles. More notably, the study sought to determine the degree to which communal and agentic attributes affected viewers. As defined by the article, communal orientations are “expressive,” which relate to girls’ tendency to create social circles; agentic attributes are “instrumental,” reflecting hands-on experiences considered typical for boys. Popular toy brands reflect these supposed gender traits in their ads. Barbie commercials often portray one young girl playing with Barbie and some of Barbie’s friends, or show many young girls playing with their own Barbies in a social gathering (McDonough, 2012). Similarly, Hot Wheels ads portray boys customizing their own racetracks and competing against their friends (Hotwheels, 2013). These images of competitions outside of the realm of board games are unique to boy-branded games, as opposed to the more domestic images of girls playing quietly and cooperatively with Barbies.

The Barbie franchise has frequently been criticized in the literature for the unrealistic body proportions of Barbie (Norton, Olds, Olive, & Dank, 1996). This lack of realism arguably can have negative effects on girls’ body image, which is a concern for both sexes at any age. Body image concerns also surround action figures aimed toward boys (Barlett, Harris, Smith, & Bonds-Raacke, 2005). Barbie’s male counterpart, Ken, released in 1961, has since his debut held more than 40 occupations (Keeping Ken, 2011). By contrast, Barbie has held over 130 careers since her debut in 1959 (Mattel, 2012), making remarkable strides in providing young girls a role model capable of being an astronaut, a doctor, or an engineer. Barbie’s independence is well-established, and
despite the many times she has modeled bridal outfits, none were made with Ken, who, “for all his virile good looks and affable charm, really is an accessory” (McDonough, 2012). Young girls who play with Barbie have many opportunities for expanding young horizons, but those girls also shape ideas on what Ken’s relationship with Barbie is. Therefore, what does this mean for boys who are expected to meet girls’ expectations shaped by a deeply devoted, yet lesser accessory?

The Bakir et al.’s study found that younger girls had more favorable attitudes towards ads with communal attributes, while older girls responded more to advertisements that deviated from traditional gender norms. Overall, boys and girls did not favor the attributes that typically make up gender stereotypes, which led the authors to suggest that marketers utilize ads aimed at both boys and girls, and ads that target all ages of preadolescent boys. This can be a cost-saving strategy in an important market, considering that “children account for more than $30 billion in direct purchases” (Schor, 2004), which is double the $15 billion a year spent on children’s advertising, and “indirectly influence more than $600 billion of U.S. household spending” (Bakir et al., 2008, 256).

Hentges, Bartsch, and Meier (2007) determined that males were predominantly portrayed in all elements of ads for all ages, but especially so in ads targeting younger children. Specifically, the ads for school-age children had a ratio as high as 13.2 for male to female protagonists. Considering the study by Bakir et al., the literature suggests that young consumers of both genders responded positively to ads that used boys or boy products. However, the study found that boys rejected advertising that used female protagonists, which is indicative of several well-known double standards, such as that
boys are more limited to the variety of roles available to them. For example, it is acceptable for young girls to play actively or play with boys; this image is then labeled as girls displaying “tomboyish” behavior, but is widely accepted (Brannon, 2010). There are no images of boys in a similar reversal of gender roles; instead, advertisers spend more on creating ads that utilize males as the default gender. Based on this literature, I propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Ads with a male presence will be more prevalent than ads with a female presence across all stations.

Many believe that adolescence is a period of growth during which advertising can be most influential. However, evidence suggests that some adolescents are less vulnerable to stereotypes in advertising thanks to experience and values they have already established. One study analyzing adolescents’ responses to advertising found that traditional gender stereotypes were present in most ads shown (Rouner et al., 2003). To the authors’ surprise, 16% of respondents recognized sexism in at least one ad, while 4% noticed the objectification of a model, usually with the complaint that women are presented “in rather limited, narrow, and negative background roles,” but making “relatively neutral comments about male images in advertising” (Rouner et al., 2003, p. 445). The study noted that adolescents used cognitive self-socialization processes to search the ads for messages that were most relevant to them, suggesting the ads were effective in reaching particular audiences through relevancy. This suggests that women will be more accepting of commercials relevant and relatable to them; therefore, it suggests a hypothesis that female voiceovers would be more prevalent on commercials on stations trying to appeal to female audiences. The following hypothesis is proposed:
H3: Female voiceovers will be more frequent in commercials broadcast on stations targeting mostly female audiences.

The evidence of self-socialization and critical thinking is promising for those pushing to encourage media literacy among adolescents and “to challenge advertising claims and content” (Rouner et al., 2003, p. 449), but the lack of recognition of potentially negative stereotypes involving men is troubling. The neutral perception of male models in ads could be indicative of indifference or a lack of knowledge about negative or limited male roles.

Research on children’s advertising continues to reflect many of the concerns that were present decades ago. In a study analyzing sensory elements in advertising, researchers found that boys’ commercials were louder and contained more scene changes (which hold viewers’ gaze by eliciting their orienting reflex) than girls’ commercials. Another interesting discovery was that ads portrayed boys as “winning” in competitions more often than girls (Browne, 1998). This could be attributed to the tendency to show boys competing, such as racing their Hot Wheels or battling through their Transformers. Browne’s article further points out “overwhelming evidence” that children pick up nonverbal gender cues at a very young age (1998, p. 84).

Defining some of the common stereotypes about men is of importance to future studies of stereotypes in commercials. One of the earliest studies of gendered stereotypes involved the Cult of True Womanhood for girls and the Male Gender Role Identity for boys (Brannon, 2010). For men specifically, stereotypes varied from being aggressive and adventurous, to unemotional and dominant. It is worth noting that women’s stereotypes were opposite to the men’s, in that they were expected to be pious,
submissive, and domestic. While the list of stereotypes is limiting for women, the long
list of male stereotypes suggests that their sense of gender freedom is false. All of the
stereotypes in the Brannon study were standards men were expected to meet, and should
they not meet those expectations, their masculinity could potentially be questioned. A
number of studies suggest the presence of negative stereotyping of men, while others
have indicated that male stereotypes are more difficult to uphold (Brannon, 2010). These
stereotypes are not conducive to boys’ access to various gender roles. Females showing
masculine “tomboy” traits are more easily accepted than boys who exhibit feminine
traits. Brannon’s study of gender stereotypes suggests that commercials on television
stations targeting men would utilize more stereotypical portrayals of men. The study also
suggests that since women have more gender role flexibility, commercials on stations
targeting women will show less extreme masculine stereotypes. Thus, the following
hypotheses are proposed:

H4a: Commercials broadcast on male-oriented stations will utilize more
gendered stereotypes than commercials broadcast on stations targeting
female audiences.

H4b: Commercials broadcast on female-oriented stations will feature less
extreme stereotypes of masculinity than commercials aired on stations
targeting male audiences.

**Push for Media Literacy**

Given that gender stereotypes have become less frequent and significant in the
past 40 years, early research findings nowadays appear surprising. In a 1977 study
investigating men’s and women’s attitudes towards advertised products being sold, Lundstrom and Sciglimpaglia (1977) found that males and females were equally willing to buy products featured in sexist advertisements, even though women tended to be more critical toward gendered portrayals. The most critical were women from homes that had high income, levels of education and occupational status. This suggested that more education could lead to greater awareness of stereotypes. During the 1970s, advertisers also began using techniques such as dual roles, role switching, and role blending to avoid ads that appeared heavily stereotypical. While role blending and role switching promote the notion that there are no dominant sexes or that women are able to do men’s work, the technique of dual roles presents women in both traditional and nontraditional roles (Lundstrom & Sciglimpaglia, 1977). This portrayal of women suggests great progress, in retrospect, but it has a downside: instead of feeling that both feminine and masculine roles are possible, women are increasingly burdened with having to fill both roles. As mentioned earlier, women are more often shown in mixed gender roles, while men are still limited to gender-traditional roles. For men, most gender-reversals have humorous overtones (Scharrer, Kim, Lin, and Liu, 2006).

The effectiveness of feminist education and media literacy has also been supported by research by Reichert, LaTour, Lambiase, and Adkins (2007). After seeing a media-literacy video, women in their study viewed objectifying advertisements more critically than they did before. Surprisingly, the media literacy video did not cause a change in men’s responses, suggesting that men are more resistant to recognizing objectifying messages. The authors argued that men experience a natural biological response to advertisements focusing on women, and that men and women have cognitive
and affective differences leading to different responses to stimuli, many of which may not be consciously controlled by the individual. Advertisers have to be aware that biological attraction has the potential to capture viewers’ attention (Reichert et al., 2007). However, it is possible that the men’s responses reflected a lack of understanding of feminist concepts limited media literacy. It would have been interesting to see the study reversed and investigate how women would have reacted to ads showing men being objectified.

**Unequal Portrayals, Equal Treatment**

Alcohol ads are often criticized for their gender portrayals. Rouner et al. (2003) found that beer ads were predominantly directed toward male audiences, but rarely targeted women. Adolescent participants surveyed by the study commonly made neutral comments about the male images, but were more critical of women’s portrayals and gender roles, and were especially opinionated in regards to female attractiveness.

Gendered beer ads, however, have recently taken a different direction. For example, Miller Lite has recently used an advertising campaign telling men to “man up” and order a Miller Lite (Trustcollective, 2010). These commercials frequently feature women at the bar counter with a full glass of beer while a man asks for a light beer. The bartender, always a woman, asks if the man wants a beer with great taste; then points out a feminine flaw in the man and tells him to come back for a Miller Lite when he has “manned up.” These scenarios suggest many stereotypes, such as the man literally has to take off his skirt or quit being a mama’s boy before choosing Miller Lite. Most of the notable commercials involve clothing or accessory choices near the man’s crotch, such as skinny jeans, or a bag at hip level. The men in the ads appear unintelligent and average in appearance. By contrast, the women in the ads appear above-average in attractiveness,
and are implied to be the smarter sex; after all, it is the women sitting at the counters with what viewers assume to be glasses of Miller Lite in front of them, the superior beverage. It is also a female bartender who is pointing out the feminine flaws of the men and brilliantly suggesting the more superior Miller Lite.

The Miller Lite commercials are just one example of ads deviating from typical gender stereotypes. One has to wonder whether this is becoming the norm, though, or if this is just a singular case. Another characteristic that companies like Miller Lite has is the opportunity for repetition. These advertisements are repeated as often as the company can afford or fit time in for, and this perpetuation of advertising messages can be beneficial for the audience. Yet, that does not make these stereotypes any more acceptable or accurate.

In Lundstrom and Sciglimpaglia’s study, women felt that “neither men nor women are portrayed accurately in advertising” (1977, p. 75). While women were facing images telling them to stay at home, men were facing images that portrayed the perfect job, returning to the perfect home, and expecting to be the leader of the household. The same stereotypes are evident from the covers of Good Housekeeping and Gentleman’s Quarterly, featuring the perfectly groomed mother and the man who wears a suit even when he is supposedly casually dressed. However, recent magazine advertisements feature increasingly less clothing for both sexes (Reichert, 1999). And it would seem that a shirtless man on the cover of Rolling Stone or GQ faces similar levels of objectification as the woman on the cover of the Sports Illustrated swimsuit edition.

Attracting female consumers is not the only reason behind an increase in objectified male images, according to recent research. In a 2002 study, researchers noted
similar changes at the time of the women’s rights movements in the 1960s. While women were challenging their place as the weaker sex, the gay liberation movement was also challenging masculinity from another angle (Rohlinger, 2002). Therefore, as women’s influence altered advertising’s images, the gay community’s voice led to increasing portrayals of sexualized men, most commonly through the use of embeds. This “erotic male” image was the most commonly documented portrayal of men in Rohlinger’s study, followed by the hero depiction, the man at work, and the consumer. None of the protagonists in these depictions was shown in a homosexual relationship, but the number of ads portraying the erotic male with an unknown sexuality has increased over the years. Further analysis added that the erotic male depiction was also evident in an increase in portrayals without clothing, with up to 81.3% of all ads featuring eroticized men in 1997 (Rohlinger, 2002).

Rohlinger suggested that the advertisers exercise a “balancing act” by attempting to create images that appeal to the greatest number of consumers (p. 71). While an image of two or more women carries the connotation that they are friends, images of two or more men is often more sexually suggestive. The message may feel demoralizing for those striving for acceptance of a different sexual orientation, but to suggest anything unequivocally homosexual risks losing female and heterosexual consumers who are not attracted to those images (Rohlinger, 2002). As advertisers attempt to appeal to multiple audiences, they resort to objectifying men through the prevalence of the erotic male with an unknown sexuality, allowing different groups to project different assumptions onto the model, thus creating a more relatable and successful advertisement. This broad projection from multiple audiences suggests another hypothesis, that a male presence in
commercials will be prevalent across many television stations, regardless of the targeted gender.

However, it is more difficult to determine what to hypothesize in regards to female presence, which requires the following research question:

RQ1: How different will the prevalence of commercials with female presence be on stations trying to appeal to female audiences versus stations trying to appeal to male audiences?

Similar to the portrayals of women in ads, the portrayals of men in advertising face narrow stereotypes, arguably even narrower, considering that women are accepted more readily as “tomboys” whereas men have few, if any, avenues for gender bending. Prior research suggests that society holds physical strength, athletic ability/domination, and competency as the most important ways for differentiating the strong masculine from the weak feminine (Rohlinger, 2002; Kolbe & Albanese, 1996).

It is becoming increasingly clear that ad portrayals show a vicious cycle of desire and pandering to the opposite sex. The advertising trend that started with the portrayals of the ideal woman, seen as having worth to men (Rohlinger, 2002) has now included portrayals of men, striving to become the ideal man to whom women would flock to, which leads women once again to strive to be the ideal woman, deserving of the ideal man. The importance of perfection and the lengths to which one would go to achieve it have been well documented for women, but now a similar focus on body image is becoming evident for men. While biological attraction is a powerful mechanism to ensure the effectiveness of ads, so are the psychological messages both implied by the ad
and inferred by the consumer. Considering the increases in male plastic surgery procedures and eating disorders among men, it is evident that men are not immune to messages that suggest ideal depictions of athleticism and physical fitness; research suggests that almost 10% of people with eating disorders are male (Rohlinger, 2002).

Indeed, the general depiction of men in ads does not represent the average male (Kolbe & Albanese, 1996). A content analysis of sole-male images conducted by Kolbe and Albanese found that common characteristics of male advertisements help consumers better differentiate between masculine and feminine stereotypes. These common characteristics include body proportions and positioning, body type, clothing, jewelry, hairstyles, and facial hair. Kolbe and Albanese found that the advertisements tended to have a conservative or conventional appearance; most of the ads showed clean-shaven men, with either wet/moussed hair or moderate-length hair, and dressed in “classic menswear” or “casual downscale” clothing (p. 5). Surprisingly, receding hairlines were commonly portrayed in ads in all of the magazines studied, but so were mesomorphic shapes, or more specifically a “strong and hard” or physically fit body type (p. 5). Bodies were most commonly positioned with the head and body parallel (the man’s eyes looking straight ahead), and 31-41.3% of models were positioned looking directly at the camera. *Rolling Stone* and *Playboy* had the most ads portraying bare-chested men and other men’s images that could be considered objectifying. *Playboy* had the highest percentage of men shown as partially clothed or nude. The ads clearly reflected the content of each magazine; for example, in *Rolling Stone*, ads showed men with longer hair than in the more conservative images (Kolbe & Albanese, 1996).
One important question that remains open deals with the interaction between gender stereotypes and repetition. The same commercial or a single company’s variety of commercials is often aired multiple times in the course of an evening, hour, or single show’s broadcast. Companies also tend to make a series of advertisements with a common theme to get their message across, such as the Miller Lite “Man Up” commercials. A company may buy a large number of advertising spots and choose from a short list of commercials to prevent desensitization to the ads among the viewers (Reichert, 2003). If an ad is shown too often, the meaning of the message may be forgotten or even disliked by viewers, just like the common desensitization to pornography, as observed by Norman Cousins: “The trouble with this wide-open pornography is not that it corrupts, but that it desensitizes….not that it encourages a mature attitude, but that it is a reversion to infantile obsessions; not that it removes the blinders, but that it distorts the view” (Reichert, 2003, p. 178). Such desensitization is especially evident in regards to sexual imagery in advertising, which is more common now than in the past. Furthermore, gender differences are portrayed more commonly in a humorous light, which often masks gender stereotypes and presents them as a source of amusement, ultimately suggesting that the stereotypical portrayal is acceptable.

Advertising utilizes gender stereotypes in a variety of ways, including by objectifying men, which is a relatively new trend. Although strides in media literacy have led adolescents and children to understand more clearly how advertising messages work, gender stereotypes persist, and so does a negative attitude toward feminism. But despite these negative attitudes, society has made great strides in accepting gender
equality for women, while providing men with equal opportunities to be objectified or limited in their portrayals in media.
CHAPTER 3

Methods

Most of the commercials analyzed were 30 seconds long, but some 60-second and 15-second commercials were also studied. The repetition of commercials was also recorded as a more important indicator of potential impact, given that some commercials were shown repeatedly on multiple stations and others shown rarely. Also recorded was the time commercials were shown to distinguish between those intended for daytime programming slots and those aired during prime time. All commercials were collected during primetime programming hours, approximately between 7 and 10 p.m. Central Standard Time. The commercials appeared on six stations, selected because of the gender makeup of their audiences, which was expected to influence the choice of commercials and the direction of stereotypical messages contained in them. Lifetime TV and The Learning Channel were chosen because they have predominantly female audiences, while Spike TV and The History Channel were chosen because their audiences include mostly men (Bureau, 2010). Finally, NBC and CBS were chosen to represent gender-neutral programming and mixed-gender audiences, along with their accessibility as major networks.

No prior programming choices were made; a station was randomly selected for one evening for the analysis. The nights coding occurred were February 7, 10, 11, 13, 18, 21, and 28. This was done to limit coding of extensively repeated commercials on the same station and to maintain a manageable number of commercials available for the
analysis, for a total of 246 commercials. Most importantly, the random selection of channels was intended to reflect the choices of the average television viewer.

A second coder participated in coding for two of the nights. The second coder was trained ahead of time for any known potential problems. A coding sheet was provided (see Appendix), and the second coder was given thorough definitions of what each section meant. There was a 97% agreement between the coders.

The coding of each commercial was based on initial impressions, reflecting the speed at which viewers may catch certain key aspects of the advertising message. Three elements were coded for each of the commercials: (a) male presence, defined as the appearance of a man or a boy; (b) female presence, defined as the appearance of a woman or a girl; and (c) the sex of the person reading the commercial’s voiceover. Voiceovers were defined as omnipresent, spoken messages for the duration of the commercials, without showing the person speaking. Occasionally, the speaker was accessible for identification at some point during the commercial, or there were no spoken messages present, in which case the voiceover was coded as non-existent.

Qualitative data were also collected by allowing coders to record distinguishing features of each advertisement. For example, in addition to coding for female presence, a coder could take notes about whether that represented one girl or a group of adult women. Similarly, it was considered worth noting an advertisement featuring many individuals of both sexes as different from one showing a large male group with only one female present. The qualitative data allowed for seeing themes and categorizing the masculinity stereotypes present in ads. Three categories of stereotypes emerged during the coding process: (a) the stereotypical male, portraying men in exaggerated masculine roles; (b)
the gender-neutral male, whose behavior does not align with any particular stereotype; and (c) the feminine male, engaging in at least one behavior (i.e., folding laundry) that reverses traditional masculinity stereotypes. As a second coder was not used for the identification of stereotyped versus neutral messages, intracoder reliability was implemented; the author (who was also the first coder) coded the commercials a second time for gendered messages one month after the initial coding. The resulting intracoder agreement was about 98%, reflecting a change in the coding of only two or three commercials coded for gendered messages.
Overall Descriptive Analysis

The results showed that in terms of presence, men and women were remarkably equal in their representation in commercials across the six television stations. Both men and women were present in about 74% of the analyzed commercials (see Table 1).

| Table 1 |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| **Gendered Messages Throughout All Stations** |
| Male Presence | Commercials | Percentage |
| Y | 183 | 74.39% |
| N | 60 | 24.39% |
| Female Presence | | |
| Y | 184 | 74.80% |
| N | 62 | 25.20% |
| Voiceovers | | |
| M | 153 | 62.20% |
| F | 65 | 26.42% |
| None | 26 | 10.57% |

Table 1. Male/female presence and voiceovers in analyzed commercials throughout all stations.

Across all of the stations sampled, 62% of the commercials used a male voiceover in the commercial. In comparison, only 26% of the commercials had a female voiceover, and the remaining 10% used no voiceovers.
Table 2

_Gendered Messages From Neutral Network Stations_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Voiceover</th>
<th>Male Presence</th>
<th>Female Presence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBC</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Presence</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Presence</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBS</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Presence</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Presence</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Data of gendered messages from neutral network stations.

From the data collected on NBC and CBS, 73% of advertisements had a male presence, while 80% of commercials indicated a female presence for NBC specifically. CBS showed a similar balance with around 75% of commercials featuring women and 70% for men. In comparison to other stations, the gender-neutral networks stations had a relative balance in the gender of voiceovers, with male voiceovers on about 57% of commercials on NBC, and about 60% for CBS (see Table 2).

Table 3

_Gendered Messages From Male-Oriented Stations_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Voiceover</th>
<th>Male Presence</th>
<th>Female Presence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History Channel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Presence</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Presence</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spike TV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Presence</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Presence</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Data on commercials from male-oriented stations.
Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1 stated that male voiceovers will be used more frequently in commercials on male-dominated stations targeting male audiences, which was supported. Differences in voiceovers were far more prevalent on the male-oriented stations, Spike TV and The History Channel. Spike TV only had one commercial with a female voiceover, and the male-to-female voiceover ratio for History Channel’s commercials was close to 5:1. However, it must also be noted that Spike TV had the highest number of commercials that did not use voiceovers, which could be a compensation for the lack of female voiceovers.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that ads with a male presence will be more prevalent across all stations. This hypothesis was supported. Spike TV showed more ads with male presence (92%) than with female presence (64%). The presence was more balanced on History Channel (78% for women and 83% for men), but this could be attributed to the larger sample size (see Table 3).

Hypothesis 3 also proposed that female voiceovers will be used more frequently in commercials broadcast on stations targeting mostly female audiences. This hypothesis was not supported. A number of advertisements on female-oriented stations had a male voiceover – specifically, 50% of The Learning Channel’s commercials and 68% of Lifetime’s voiceovers. However, the results did not indicate female voiceovers outnumbering the percentage of male voiceovers as hypothesized (see Table 4).
Table 4

_Gendered Messages From Female-Oriented Stations_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Learning Channel</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voiceover</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Presence</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Presence</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lifetime</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voiceover</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Presence</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Presence</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Data from female-oriented stations.

Research question 1 asked how different will the prevalence of commercials with female presence be on stations trying to appeal to female audiences versus stations appealing to male audiences. Results showed that most commercials on female-oriented stations featured female presence more than male presence. Both TLC and Lifetime showed female presence in 72% of their commercials, compared to 70% and 62% of male presence, respectively.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commercials with Masculinity Stereotypes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type of Station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male-Oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female-Oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender-Neutral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Distribution of gendered messages from commercials with a male presence.

Hypothesis 4 consisted of two parts. It proposed that (a) commercials broadcast on male-oriented stations will feature more overtly masculine men, and (b) commercials
broadcast on female-oriented stations will feature more gender-neutral men. The first part of the hypothesis was supported. Results of the coded commercials showed that commercials aired on male-oriented channels showed more male gendered messages, in which 61% of the gendered messages were either stereotypical or role-reversed. The second part of the hypothesis was also supported. On female-oriented channels, the number of neutral male images outnumbered the stereotypical male images. Among the commercials that appeared on gender-neutral stations, the number of neutral male images outnumbered stereotypical messages at 57%. However, the gender-neutral channels had the highest absolute number of commercials with neutral male messages, while the absolute numbers of commercials with stereotypical or role-reversed images were equal across stations.

Of the 150 commercials with male presence chosen for qualitative analysis, 66 presented a traditional or overt masculine stereotype. Only 9 offered a gender role reversal, showing a man performing a traditionally feminine task, displaying a traditionally feminine trait, or engaging in a stereotypically feminine behavior. Another 74 of the commercials did not have any identifiable masculine stereotype present, and were thus coded as gender-neutral. Combined, the number of commercials containing a stereotype (traditional/exaggerated, neutral, or gender reversed) made up half of the commercials with a male presence.

**Qualitative Analysis**

The qualitative data allowed for categorization of male stereotypes as outlined in the method section. Of all commercials analyzed, the most prevalent masculine stereotypes featured men as managers, salesmen, possessing technological knowledge or
power, fathers, or men trying to impress women for attention. As part of these stereotypes, men are not allowed to show emotion, are in dominant positions, or are providing goods or services to women. Other stereotypical portrayals included men watching or engaging in sports or men dealing with difficult domestic tasks.

Many commercials still contained femininity stereotypes, often in conjunction with masculinity stereotypes, but some challenge these stereotypes as well. An OreIda commercial on NBC, for example, showed a young boy paired with an older sister, walking around a food store interviewing female shoppers; no male shoppers were present. This suggests an underlying stereotype that men do not participate in grocery shopping and another overarching femininity stereotype that this is a job left to mothers or the women in the household. Other advertisements, such as a Sprint commercial, portrayed young boys with their mothers; the Sprint ad introduces the stereotype of “mama’s boy” by showing the distinct relationships between mothers and sons.

Jewelry commercials portrayed men in either neutral or stereotypical ways. Kay Jewelers always showed men as the providers, giving the gift of expensive jewelry to their female partners. These also showed men as dominant and sophisticated, typically wearing a suit or clean dress clothes. Showing men as the instigators of proposing marriage or declaring commitment through jewelry is a romantic script instilled early in children, especially young girls. Commercials from Kay and Jared tend to romanticize engagements and jewelry, thus creating high expectations for girls and young women who hope their men will propose just like in the commercials or spoil them with gifts, which in turn place even higher expectations on men to act as providers.
Many commercials also showed men as salesmen. One Best Buy commercial that aired February 7 on NBC showed a male employee answering the customer and celebrity Amy Poehler’s questions, regardless of how ridiculous the questions were. The commercial used humor to highlight the common “dumb blonde” stereotype about women incompetent with technology; humor also covered up Poehler subtle, sexual double entendres. Had the commercial featured a man making similar remarks to a female sales employee, there would likely have been a public backlash. However, the ad’s humor, Poehler’s celebrity status, and the assumption that men are always interested in sexual opportunities, stereotypically suggest that it is more acceptable for a female customer to flirt with an attractive male employee while he is on the job than the other way around.

Samsung commercials were also indicative of many masculinity stereotypes. Men in Samsung’s ad that also aired February 7 on NBC were stereotyped as nerds or geeks, intelligent and knowledgeable about new technology and capable of creating the next big smartphone application, yet lacking in marketing savvy. Most of the Samsung ads highlighted the Unicorn Apocalypse app and primarily showed men in meetings, playing with the new technology without any female presence or influence. Other Samsung ads used popular male celebrities to market the product. Women sometimes appeared in the ads as coworkers, but these were rare.

Some commercials used blatant stereotypes to get their point across. A Clear Man commercial on Spike TV February 13 emphasized the message that women hate dandruff; it showed a man deprived of water in a desert with his clothes unkempt, and women not willing to help him. Once he has used Clear Man, he steps out of a tent into
an oasis, wearing a crisp suit, and a woman comes to greet him as the “heroic” man. Such advertisements often imply that women will flock to a man after he has used a product, which is a commonly masculinity-boosting approach.

Similar blatant stereotypes were present in Dos Equis beer advertisements, which aired on Spike TV February 13, and on the History Channel February 11. Well-known for its Most Interesting Man in the World campaign, Dos Equis continues to provide satirical commercials about an aging, overtly masculine man by narrating his adventures. The commercial’s protagonist has seen numerous countries, met prominent leaders, rescued bears from traps and shown multiple feats of impressive strength. And without a doubt, whatever feat he accomplishes, he will surely have a beautiful woman around at the end of the day. What makes the Most Interesting Man even more interesting is that he engages both in hypermasculine behavior and in occasional gender role reversals.

Another example of masculinity stereotypes is a Hyundai commercial, which aired on the History Channel February 11 showing a young boy being pushed around by a group of bullies playing football. When told to come back when he has a team, the boy and mother drive around town picking up other boys engaged in stereotypically masculine activities. The first couple of boys are using heavy bench-presses or lifting weights in the driveway; another boy is welding metal at a metal shop; a young boy carries a grown man three times his size out of a building engulfed in flames, and pats the adult on the head before leaving; yet another boy is even wrestling a bear and has the bear pinned in the mud, while his clothes look remarkably clean. Of course, because these boys are supposed to represent men, they also insist on playing tackle football rather than touch football. While the scenarios may seem harmless, these represent
heavily masculine stereotypes that expect boys to be tougher, stronger, and fearless, all underneath a thin veil of humor.

One of the few gender reversals were evident in the new Snickers commercial featuring actor Robin Williams on CBS February 10. Snickers’s recent campaign starts with a 2012 commercial, in which a man is told he needed a Snickers because without it, he turned into Betty White. The new 2013 commercial shows actor Robin Williams replacing the head coach of a football team, telling his players to “kill them with kindness” and making tea cozies, all traits that would be labeled as weak or feminine. At the end of the commercial, a man falls off the top of the cheerleaders’ pyramid routine – yet another major role reversal because men are not usually cheerleaders, or at the top of an air routine because they tend to be physically larger than women.

Other role-reversal commercials were not as blatant. Progressive insurance commercials often use their female customer support employee Flo. One of the analyzed commercials, aired on CBS February 11, involved Flo and a stranded customer in a rainstorm. The man approaches her and says “I can’t do this without you,” a signifier of his weakness and dependence on a woman – or in the commercial’s case, dependence on Progressive’s insurance coverage. A commercial aired on the History Channel February 11 for Kayak.com also shows a hint of gender role reversal, as a man dances in happiness for the deal he made on a hotel. According to traditional masculinity stereotypes, men are not supposed to show strong emotion, and the man’s dancing would deviate from this stereotype (Brannon, 2010). Another stereotype is that men do not know how to dance or do not enjoy dancing leisurely, from which this commercial deviates as well. Most other gender role reversal commercials showed men as patients or customers, such as for a
medicinal product like Kerasal Nails, aired on the History Channel, or an obscure product like QuiBids.com on Spike TV, both shown on February 13. Interestingly, these examples also showed women in the positions of knowledge or power, speaking to the men about the product.

Some commercials encouraged blatant sex segregation between men and women, such as by focusing on the ideal “man cave” or a place where men should find relaxation and solitude, likely from women. On CBS February 10, a Discover credit card commercial portrayed a male customer talking to a male representative, and a second Discover commercial showed a female customer speaking to a female representative. This set of commercials likely intended to suggest that speaking to a customer service representative of the same gender would lend credibility to the situation. Even Beneful dog food commercials on Lifetime February 21 utilized sex segregation stereotypes by playing up to the “man’s best friend” mentality.

Many other commercials portrayed men in dominant positions. A different Hyundai commercial on NBC February 7 showed a man selling vehicles to a woman; History Channel aired commercials in which men were also shown at the head of a business meeting for LaQuinta Suites and a Volkswagen commercial shows a father playing ball with his son in the front yard, suggesting themes of masculinity passed on from father to son. Progresso has a confused man calling in to the customer service, and the chef he speaks to is a woman, implying that cooking and food service are not masculine activities.

Not surprisingly, commercials also use women to promote masculinity stereotypes. A recent Brita Filter commercial on Lifetime February 21 showed a
caveman juxtaposed against a modern woman. A Scrubbing Bubbles commercial on the same channel showed a man afraid to clean the dirty toilet, followed by a woman’s remark that the next step would be training him to put down the toilet seat. While these scenarios may seem innocuous, flippant comments about putting the toilet seat down or having other annoying male-stereotypical habits could be likened to flippant comments about women making sandwiches or taking too long to get ready to go out. These scenarios are meant to be humorous, but had the joke been directed at women, the public perspective on the humor likely would have changed.
CHAPTER 5
Discussion

This analysis and other literature suggest that a fair amount of progress is still needed in gender representation in the media, especially in the fields of television commercials and advertising, before both men and women are portrayed on an equal footing. Recent research indicates that trends in gender representation have changed significantly in recent decades. Male voiceovers have decreased from 90% in the 1970s and 80s to 71% in 2000, (Hentges et al., 2007). This content analysis indicates similar results, with 73% of the analyzed voiceovers being male. However, still little is still known about the effects of male voiceovers. Theories suggest that these continue to be preferred because of men’s naturally authoritative voice, because men are used as a default or gender-neutral option, or even because men’s voices or appearance play up to women’s attraction, the same way female models are used to persuade men into buying products (Brannon, 2010; Browne, 1998; Hentges et al., 2007). Regardless of whether a viewer pays attention to the commercial, s/he will likely still hear the voice in the background of each advertisement.

While quantitative data provides a solid, measurable identification of commercials’ attributes such as gendered voiceovers and persons present, qualitative analysis allows us to analyze various angles and provides a deeper critique.

It is interesting to note that the longevity of some commercials and the messages associated with them are sometimes due to a challenge to gender stereotypes. This could
be seen with the Dos Equis commercials. The long-lived Most Interesting Man in the World campaign utilized strong masculine stereotypes to capture viewers’ attentions and stimulate conversation on the subject, but the Most Interesting Man challenges masculinity by participating in traditionally feminine tasks. For example, one commercial in the series shows the man cooking in a large kitchen and then shooing away a mountain lion that jumps onto the kitchen table and simply shooing it away. While the underlying message is that his feminine actions are balanced by overtly masculine behaviors, he is still cooking and showing kindness to the animals by rescuing it from danger.

Campaigns like the Most Interesting Man commercials mix masculine and feminine stereotypes, encouraging viewers to reconsider whether they are really limited to any particular gender-appropriate behaviors. Is it really a stereotype to see women in the kitchen, or is this socially constructed by society to the point that showing a man in a kitchen is considered different? Is it really a feminine trait to show kindness or mercy to animals, or is this a sign of the ultimate masculine man? It is easy to forget that these masculine traits are somewhat exaggerated as no single man can accomplish all of these feats himself. The Most Interesting Man may be stressing masculine stereotypes, but if they encourage behaviors that appear moral and ethical, then maybe they are worth continuing. When stereotypes are challenged through the campaign, viewers can openly discuss a specific scenario and set change in motion.

It is worth mentioning that many of the commercials included in the qualitative analysis, such as the ones advertising Best Buy, Samsung, Snickers, and Hyundai, all debuted on February 3 during the 2013 NFL Super Bowl. The Super Bowl is a premier
advertising opportunity for companies, and commercials featured on it commonly challenged ideas and pushed limits. Some commercials test humor, or viewers’ emotions, but there are always commercials that challenge gender stereotypes. One of the most discussed Super Bowl commercials on the subject was for Doritos, showing a young girl talking her dad into playing dress-up with her instead of football with the guys by bribing him with Doritos chips. By the end, the father’s friends had joined in with the princess fashion show as well. Humor is used to make the gender role reversal acceptable, but stereotypes are fluid in their interpretations, and this could also be interpreted as stigmatization of cross-dressing, unless there is a masculine-enough reward, such as Doritos chips.

Other commercials from the Super Bowl are also representative of possibly fluid interpretations. The controversial GoDaddy commercial for 2013 showed an unattractive man kissing the beauty Bar Refaeli, playing up to the stereotype that “nerds get the hot girls.” What should have challenged stereotypes instead reinforced them and promoted the ideology that nerds are unattractive and socially awkward, while attractive women cannot be nerdy. Normally, GoDaddy has been criticized for using overly sexualized women in previous years, so this type of ad was different and unique from their usual work (Kim, 2011).

Different and unique is also applicable to the 2012 and 2013 Calvin Klein Super Bowl commercials. Calvin Klein’s ads show extremely fit men, such as celebrity David Beckham, modeling underwear, which has elicited positive feedback from female viewers. However, this is hardly different from the many male-oriented advertisements that show women in bikinis. Both men and women are objectified, so what is different?
In truth, the only difference is that audience members sees the commercials positively.

For example, Cindy Gallop, founder of MakeLoveNotPorn and one of five analysts who participated in a Super Bowl commercial live blogging event with the Wall Street Journal, offered comments full of gender-stereotype awareness, ranging from positive feedback on Toyota’s ad that interprets “princess” as a heroine and denouncing the Doritos ad for ‘assuming men in dresses is automatically funny.’ However, when it came to the Calvin Klein ad, her comment was simply: “This is OUR Bar Refaeli moment, ladies. Thank you, Calvin Klein” (Gallup, 2013). Why is a woman so aware of the stereotypes and gender inequality shown in so many commercials, not aware of issues of equality when traditionally female objectification is extended to men?

As with any stereotype, there is no simple solution for overcoming overt masculinity expectations and depictions. Femininity stereotypes have been analyzed across all forms of media, and as women’s roles have changed, stereotypes have become more openly challenged.

When it comes to masculinity stereotypes, many are still reluctant to recognize that men have any gender problems or expectations to overcome. Recently published books have analyzed boys’ decreasing performance in academics. While girls are consistently encouraged at home and by educators to push themselves and do their best academically, boys are more often encouraged to excel in athletic activities (Stossel, Breen, Gustafson, Messina, & ABC, 2001). Rarely mentioned are the times when boys and men are faced with the same problems that girls and women have struggled with for years. Rates of boys and young men facing body image problems have increased over the decades, and commercials such as the Calvin Klein ads may be responsible because
of setting impossible expectations of attractiveness and fitness for men. Men are increasingly aware of these stereotypes (Rohlinger, 2002), to which they are exposed with great frequency, but feminists and other social justice activists are still predominantly focused on the continued objectification of women, ignoring the objectification of men.

**Limitations**

There were a number of limitations to this study, such as the effort to avoid repetition. Some stations repeated commercials within a few hours’ time, especially if it was geared toward the same target audience. Repetition was even more important to leave out when analyzing stereotypes, which was why the total number of commercials was not utilized and in the analysis, focusing instead only on unique commercials.

Other limitations included difficulties to determine whether there had been any male or female presence during a short commercial’s duration, when neither of the two coders could catch it fully. The coders left the slots blank to retain an accurate representation of genders that could be identified.

Similar limitations included coder disagreement when groups of people appeared in commercials. On the one hand, there were usually both male and female presences with large groups of people. On the other hand, large groups are more commonly seen as a collective, rather than focusing on an individual male or female presence. As a compromise, commercials featuring groups but no individuals were labeled as having both male and female presence, and a note was made that this was a collective image. At least six ads had collective or group settings, in which indeterminate numbers of both men and women were shown in the commercial.
Furthermore, it is important to remember that the interpretations of gender stereotypes, as well as interpretations of the commercials themselves, are highly subjective. Each person will interpret them differently, and that interpretation may be influenced by frequency of exposure, demand for the product, or even established feelings associated with the brand.

**Directions for Future Research**

There may never be a satisfactory “solution” to gender stereotypes, although continued research on the content and effects of masculinity stereotypes is much needed. This study also suggests directions for social change and activist efforts. Research has shown that education and awareness of such stereotypes has significantly helped by re-shaping ideas and instigating changes. The challenge is that such education is only one step that would have to occur, and an effort that would have to span generations – much as it has for women’s movements over history. Education is already happening, as most gender studies textbooks devote a chapter to men’s studies and how men are affected by society’s understanding of gender. So why has nothing changed? The following section attempts to answer this question.
CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

The Feminist Promise

There is one plausible suggestion that could bring about change in regard to masculinity stereotypes. Much gender studies research is reflective of feminist theories. Feminism offers equality for both men and women, but is often spurned as irrelevant. I recall how in a class of approximately 150 students, several were asked to define feminism and answer whether they saw themselves as feminists. Not surprisingly, nearly all defined feminism in terms of women’s equality and women’s movements. What was surprising was the number of students who did not consider themselves feminists, despite agreeing with the feminist ideologies. Justifications varied, from blatant stereotypes about feminists as bra-burning man-haters, to arguing that there is no real need for feminism in current society. Male students also denied being feminists, and their denial was rooted mostly in the seemingly “crazy” notion that men could even be feminists. I brought up the class discussion with a male friend of mine afterward, and he pointed out that men who align themselves with feminists can still be labeled as misogynistic. They are viewed as insincere “white knights” or simply whiners.

This brought many questions to mind. Why aren’t there more men in feminism? If feminism strives for the equality of women, and its study incorporates LGBT groups as well, why are men alienated? Isn’t the ideological goal for feminism, to promote gender
equality? Most importantly, how are these attitude changes supposed to occur when so few men are participating in gender studies classes?

Gloria Steinem has argued that if we are to raise children equally, then we have to raise the boys more like the girls (Stossel et al, 2001). A similar notion is evident in suggestions that men who want to support feminism must be “willing to put aside their own interests and adopt, as far as possible, a female-oriented point of view” (Crowe, 2011, p. 51). However, this argument fails to address the possibility that men and women might have similar interests.

While men who identify as feminist exist, they are faced with criticisms from both men and women. Little research has been done to specifically analyze men’s attitudes towards feminism, much less men’s involvement. Most commentary on the subject has relied on the concept that feminism is women’s territory (Crowe, 2011; Connell, 1997). However, understanding stereotypes for either gender requires a comparison to the other. Relying on feminist research, which offers scholarly wealth, would not only help in analyzing masculinity stereotypes, but also removing the stigma of men as the common enemy.

While many women do not identify themselves as feminists, they still support the social ideals that feminists stand for (Aronson, 2003). There are a number of factors contributing to why women do not identify themselves as such, including the assumption that there is an activist obligation attached to feminism. Aronson discovered that while education on the subject helped women identify themselves more frequently as a feminist, most felt that the movement did not apply to them personally.
For others, it is the assumption that all feminists hate men that deter them from the movement. I can attest to this personally, as I have never been one to identify myself as a feminist until I discovered research and found people who had similar views. There are some days when I still am unsure whether I identify myself as a feminist, due to inconsistent definitions and feminist bloggers who take social justice and inaccurate assumptions to new heights. However, I have come to realize that if removing the taboo associated with feminism requires making feminism more inclusive, including in the direction of addressing masculinity stereotypes and expectations.

Change is a gradual progression of factors and events, and requires courage. The women who are most well-known for instigating changes in women’s social and political status such as Anne Hutchinson and Susan B. Anthony had to leave the comfort of home and speak out on subjects that neither women nor men were ready to accept. If more progress is to be achieved in future decades, more courage is required, even if it means going against common feminist assumptions to argue that men deserve inclusion into the feminist discussion about gender equality.

For example, Hooper has indicated that it is risky to explore masculinity studies because the topic “threatens to dissolve, or at least obscure, our view of the oppressor as a group” (qtd. Hebert, 2007, p. 37). Much as some men resisted allowing women into the public sphere in the past, this offers evidence that some feminist women are resistant to allowing men into what has been a women’s sphere.

Men are left out simply because of a historical context of patriarchal privilege and power. Double standards continue to exist for men, as they do for women, and men’s historical privilege is irrelevant to the rigid gender expectations men continue to face.
nowadays. Feminism also deserves criticism for dismissing everyday realities in a capitalist society: “Today’s feminism is so unbendingly negative in its approach to market activity that steps taken to present positive imagery in ads…are sweepingly dismissed” (Christians, Fackler, Richardson, Kreshel, & Woods, 2011, p. 157).

If feminism is going to remain a term that neither the average woman nor man is willing to accept, redefining it is increasingly necessary. Egalitarianism is known simply as asserting the equality of mankind (Egalitarian, 1885), which is identical to feminism if human was replaced with women’s. The ideologies are the same, and it is a social philosophy that equates what feminists and suffragists have accomplished over the centuries. The only challenge is relinquishing the negative reputation associated with feminism, and reestablishing a new association with egalitarianism. This would also include equality of all humans; in a society where members of the LGBT minority are still denied rights, bringing together so many groups would be a massive undertaking – if such groups are even open to the idea or opportunity.

Men may not be facing the same stereotypes that women have battled throughout history, but they do face stereotypes nonetheless. These stereotypes are extremely limiting as well as to women, by shaping their impressions of men. Women are influenced by masculinity stereotypes just as much as the men are, creating a cycle that is difficult to break once society has accepted such gender roles and set them in motion. The most we can do now is bring awareness to the prevalence of stereotypes faced by men the same way awareness has been brought to stereotypes faced by women, providing opportunities to think about and discuss people’s reactions to them.
Appendix

Coding Sheet: Masculinity Stereotypes in Commercials Across Six Channels

Coder name: ____________________
Date: __________________________
Channel: _______________________

Commercial Name: ______________________________________________________

Male/Female Presence

1. Is there a male present in the ad?
   a. Yes
   b. No
2. Is there a female present in the ad?
   a. Yes
   b. No

Voiceovers

3. Is there a voiceover used in the ad?
   a. Yes
   b. No
4. If yes, what is the apparent sex of the voiceover?
   a. Male
   b. Female

Distinguishing Features/Comments

5. Indicate if there is anything memorable about the ad, or if there is an apparent gendered message you see.
   a. ___________________________________________________________________
      ___________________________________________________________________
REFERENCES


