

Audience Responses to Gender Stereotypes in Advertising

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RESPONSES TO STEREOTYPES IN ADVERTISING

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Abstract

Advertising has demonstrated linguistic, contextual, and sexual gender stereotypes since its inception; it seems poised to continue doing so as advertising's presence in society proliferates. Upon analyzing these stereotypes, examples can be found throughout media, especially in television. All this begs the question: Are these stereotypes actually effective at selling products or services to their intended audience? Do men react positively to stereotypes of men or women; and vice versa, how do women react? If gender stereotypes are employed in advertising purely through force of habit and not evidenced prudence, then the advertising landscape stands to gain immensely from taking a more progressive view; otherwise, stereotypical advertising is defensible if only from a financial perspective.

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Audience Responses to Gender Stereotypes in Advertising

Gender stereotypes have persisted in various cultures around the world. While the specifics of their expression may have varied throughout time and between countries, the general motifs have remained the same. These stereotypes are embedded in society and so also the advertising present in society.

(For the purposes of this thesis, we will draw primarily from Western sources with some variation; individual studies consulted have accounted for cultural variation, but this thesis alone will not address this aspect in detail, since it could easily necessitate a separate thesis of its own.)

According to Grau and Zotos (2016), scholarly research on gender stereotypes in advertising has increased over the past 50 years. Throughout that time frame, advertising has frequently demonstrated traditional roles for men and women, though there is a demonstrable (though gradual) shift towards more nuanced depictions of gender in recent years.

Neuhaus (2013) uses the example of “funny fathers” (p. 1)—that is, incompetent male parents who appear to have no idea how to change a diaper or care for an infant in advertising—as an example of these traditional roles. The funny fathers are regularly contrasted against deeply caring, capable mothers. This trope recurred throughout Neuhaus’ researched diaper advertising from the 1970s to 2012.

In short, “Past research has yielded a consistent picture of stereotyped advertising content that has varied little over time... Portrayals of adult women in American television and print advertising have emphasized passivity, deference, lack of intelligence

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and credibility, and punishment for high levels of effort. In contrast, men have been portrayed as constructive, powerful, autonomous, and achieving” (Browne, 2019, p. 84).

While another paper entirely could be devoted to the question of whether society pushes these gender stereotypes into ads or vice versa, the question posed here is not why these stereotypes are still widespread in even most modern marketing, or even whether the stereotypes themselves have a positive or negative effect on consumers. This thesis seeks strictly to explore whether these stereotypes, when seen in advertising, make the ads in question more or less effective to target male and/or female audiences.

For the purposes of this thesis, the compiled research will focus exclusively on cisgender, binary male and female gender identities when referring to men and women (given that they comprise the largest percentage of the population,) how they are portrayed, and how those portrayals are received by the intended male or female target audience. References to sexual stereotypes will also be within the context of heterosexual orientations, given that most advertising skews towards heterosexual expectations. Stereotypes surrounding the gender roles and sexuality of LGBT people in advertising would warrant another thesis entirely, especially since representation of LGBT people in popular culture was far less prevalent only a few decades ago.

Each category of gender stereotypes will be first defined, then exemplified through television advertising, and finally critically examined according to the concept’s actual success rate in promoting the given product to men or women via gendered stereotypes.

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Categories of Gender Stereotypes

Gender Stereotypes Defined

First, before delving into discussion of gender stereotypes, it is necessary to illuminate the definition of a stereotype. According to Petcu (2018):

Beyond the wide diversity they take, stereotype definitions follow the idea of mental scheme, of a simplified structure, easily applicable and recognizable in actual situations. The stereotype helps an individual build a certain way to perceive things and understand reality, a way of knowing the world, or an anchorage in a certain context (p. 1).

In this thesis, stereotypes as presented in advertising will be differentiated by the categories of linguistic and/or abstract gender stereotypes, contextual or role-based stereotypes, and sexual stereotypes. All these categories prescribe different traditional techniques for marketing to men or women in different ways. First, it is necessary to determine what these gendered tactics are; second, as is the primary purpose of this thesis, one can examine the positive and/or negative responses of men or women to advertising which seeks to gain and keep their attention via gendered approaches and expectations.

Linguistic Gendered Stereotypes

Advertising is a highly visual art, especially in the digital age, but even in the absence of imagery, stark expectations for men and women remain evident. In a 2016 study, Christopher compiled 500 slogans from the preceding 11 decades—all from well-known, successful companies—and divided them between traditionally male or female language.

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Traditionally male language is stylistically lean, direct, assertive and action-oriented, while traditionally female language is elaborate, often hyperbolic and frequently indirect. Christopher's (2016) complete findings indicate an increasing trend since the 1970s towards the masculine approach to marketing and away from the feminine approach, with nearly 77% of slogans written in the masculine style as opposed to less than a quarter in the feminine.

Some of this shift towards concise language can be credited to the increasing clutter of messages in a vast, growing digital space, but gender remains a significant component, as indicated by the continued presence of feminine language almost exclusively in ads targeted towards women. These feminine slogans are "relatively long, use subordinate clauses, co-ordination, hedges, and play on words and emotions" (Christopher, 2016, p. 5). Masculine language, however, persists in male-oriented products such as automobiles and alcohol.

This persistence of male language is surprising, given that the target audiences are often female or mixed, not strictly male. Eisend (2009) states, "For example, more than 50% of buyers of new cars, a product that is traditionally perceived as primarily bought by men, are female" (p. 9).

The preference for direct, concise, action-oriented slogans for men—rather than more flowery, abstract slogans for women—also reflects an expectation that men are practically motivated while women are more emotionally driven. Eisend continues, "While the feminine style demonstrates the outpouring of feelings, the masculine style is brief, 'clear and rational', 'assertive' and shows control... It appeals to authority unlike

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the feminine style. The feminine expressions are also more indirect compared with the curt male expressions” (Christopher, 2016, page 2).

Contextual Gender Stereotypes

Eisend’s study broke down contextual elements of gender in advertising to include several subcategories, namely occupational status (role location), physical characteristics (age), and the “role behaviors” of characters in an ad as they interact with the product advertised, such as the mode of presentation, reasons given for credibility, argument, product type, concluding comments, and setting/environment (Eisend, 2009, p. 6). The ads sampled were all released between 1971 and 2005.

Men and women were portrayed with multiple differentiations throughout this broad sample pool. Most specifically, women are four times more likely than men to be presented in a dependent role, 3.5 times more likely to be shown in a domestic environment, more than twice as likely to be associated with domestic products, and three times as likely to be using a product rather than authoritatively recommending it. Men, on the other hand, are four times more likely to be shown visually rather than reduced to a voice-over and more than three times more likely to be presented against a background of women, whereas women are rarely presented as the foreground against a background of men (Eisend, 2009, p. 14).

According to Eisend (2009), “The magnitude of stereotyping is highest for occupational status,” with men nearly four times more likely to be shown in a position of workplace authority than women (p. 14).

In a similar sampling of 87 advertisements from 2006, “When women were not something to gaze upon, they often were depicted in the roles of nurturers of children,

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keepers of order within the home, or cooperative brokers, usually among other girls and women” (Timke, O’Barr, 2017, para. 17).

Regarding children, Bush’s (2013) study of advertising for children’s products (featuring children) determined that gender stereotypes appear even at that young age, ranging from more obvious stereotypes (boys shown with cars; girls are shown with dolls) to a variance in perceived independence of little boys versus girls. Male children are shown alone, on a group of other boys, or entirely unsupervised far more often than female children, who are almost always shown supervised. In addition, there are differences in who is expected to supervise children. Post-1990, men are shown supervising children alongside women more often than pre-1990, but even so, women still are the default for supervising a singular child in an advertisement (Bush, 2013, pp. 1-12).

Sexual Gendered Stereotypes

Additionally, the phrase “sex sells” is well-known for a reason: the advertising industry has used sex as a marketing tool since its earliest days. According to Mager and Helgeson (2010), a focus on body parts as opposed to whole people and the continued reliance on suggestive poses indicates “a stronger emphasis on the female body... Females were depicted in these ways more often than males were. Further, males were represented by body parts less frequently over time” (p. 12).

The phrase may simply be “Sex sells,” but based on commonly employed advertising practices, most advertisers clearly believe that a sexual appeal to heterosexual men is more powerful than an equivalent appeal to heterosexual women.

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Even when the context is changed—an attractive woman in a print ad targeting women, for instance, or vice versa for men—the chosen depictions of men and women rarely shift away from stereotypes. In Petcu’s aforementioned 2018 study, which compared 2012 editions of *Cosmopolitan* and *Men’s Health*, there were twice as many ads in the women’s magazine as compared to the men’s. Many of *Cosmopolitan*’s ads featured a provocative, young, traditionally beautiful woman, but those ads rarely featured men in a sexual capacity, even though the presumed target market is heterosexual women. The implied benefit of using the advertised products is the achievement of an abstract, feminine ideals. To the contrary, *Men’s Health*’s ads frequently featured attractive women flanking any present male models, offering a sexual reward to purchasers of a product. Even in ads that didn’t feature male models, women were still placed in close proximity to the marketed product, often touching it, again associating sexually appealing women with product ownership.

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Examples of Gender Stereotypes in Television Advertising

To further illuminate the presence of these stereotypes, the next section will evaluate contrasting examples of ads in each category which employ either male or female gender stereotypes in their approach.

Linguistic Gender Stereotypes

An example of the masculine ad approach is the Mercedes Benz 2018 Super Bowl commercial, in which a man, dressed in business casual attire, is stopped by a red light. While he waits for the light to change, various intimidating motorcycles and race cars pull up alongside him, revving their engines. A voice-over describes the horsepower and rapid speed of the new Mercedes. The driver, the commercial's main character, makes eye contact with the racecar drivers—an unspoken challenge. As the light shifts from red to green, another random businessman frantically sprints across the street, the narrator commenting that given the Mercedes' new speed, people will get out of your way. This relies heavily upon competition, assertiveness, statistics-based superiority, and an implied threat of violence (BestAds 247, 2018).

Contrast the Mercedes commercial with a 2018 ad for Enterprise Car Sales, in which a woman (actress Kristen Bell) sits in a stationary car, visibly frazzled, yelling a combination of warnings and directions at her children in the backseat. The camera moves to reveal the punchline—Enterprise salespeople, not children, occupy the back seat. Bell is supposed to be test-driving the car, but her idea of a test-drive is imagining what it will be like to manage her unruly children in a new vehicle. A voice-over plugs Enterprise's customer service without a word about what cars are offered, what the stats

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on those cars are, or anything to do with price. The emotional relatability of Bell's character, the suburban mom, is the advertisement's central conceit, an approach that would seem comically out of place if it were a father "test-driving" the car by yelling at imagined children (Enterprise, 2018).

Contextual Gender Stereotypes

The opening statistics of this section—that men are far more likely to authoritatively recommend a product rather than using it, especially domestic products—prove true in a comparison between a 2018 ad for Tide detergent and a 2017 ad for Lysol cleaning supplies.

The 2018 Tide ad series originally aired during the Super Bowl, revolving around central actor David Harbour from Netflix's *Stranger Things*. Each commercial pretends to be another type of typical commercial. Harbour drives a car beneath a perfect sunset; he laughs raucously while drinking beer with friends; he places shiny new jewelry on a woman's neck. In each instance, it is revealed at the end of the ad that it isn't an ad for a car, beer, jewelry, or otherwise—actually, it's a Tide ad, designated by the overwhelmingly clean whiteness of all fabrics shown in the commercial (Dalibor Truhlar, 2018, 10:06-11:06).

No one, not even spokesperson Harbour, uses a Tide product onscreen in the "It's a Tide ad" series. Both men and women shown in the commercial have newly white clothes, but never suggest that Harbour (or any other men) are doing their own laundry. Harbour serves as a recognizable face for a recommendation and a humorous central character, but as the statistics presented at this section's start indicate, even the Tide ads

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targeted towards men avoid directly associating men with the use of household products and presume authority from a speaker that never visibly uses the product.

In the 2017 Lysol ad, on the other hand, various young children face daily difficulties. A little girl falls asleep on the couch; bullies steal a young boy's hat; but in each situation, a larger-than-life animal friend steps in, whether it be a lion serving as a pillow or an elephant rescuing the harassed youngster. At the commercial's end, text appears on the screen: "Protect like a mother. It's what you do. It's what we do." The Lysol logo appears, and the commercial fades out (Lysol, 2017).

Not only does this commercial echo the feminine focus on emotion mentioned in the previous section, but it also presumes that women, primarily, will be the ones interested in domestic cleaning products, even though both men and women obviously need to keep their homes clean.

Sexual Gender Stereotypes

Countless examples of sexual advertising exist, but once again, Super Bowl ads provide an excellent example of high-profile campaigns to critically examine.

Technological products are frequently associated with and marketed primarily to men, but Go Daddy, a host website that sells domain names, took it one step further in their 2012 Super Bowl commercial. The ad features a completely nude female whose face, eyes, and any other personifying features are never shown in frame, making her more of a prop than a central character. Two other women, clad entirely in leather and heels, are the characters of the commercial. The two women proceed to write new domain names in body paint all over the nude subject's body, the camera angles heavily implying that they're also painting body parts which could not be aired on TV. At the commercial's

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end, onscreen text prompts the viewer to “see more” at Go Daddy’s website in an obvious double entendre (Commercial TV, 2017).

Even though the ad completely features women and excludes men, the women are treated as sexual objects for the benefit of a presumed male viewer. The nude model is completely stripped of agency, and the other women are present only to comment on and/or react to her body in a sexualized way. The ad also provides no unique information on Go Daddy’s web hosting service, choosing instead to focus entirely on the sexual appeal for their non-sexual product.

Contrast this with the 2008 Victoria’s Secret Super Bowl ad. Victoria’s Secret only sells products for women, but while the ad is certainly sexual, it makes no appeal to the sexual desires or fantasies of presumed female viewers. Instead, it features a beautiful female model in lingerie playing seductively with a football. Text onscreen reminds male viewers that the football game will soon be over, and the real “games” can begin after the television is deactivated (moetdude, 2008).

The price, comfort, quality, or confidence-building qualities of the lingerie for the woman wearing it are ignored in lieu of her making prolonged eye contact with the camera, batting her eyelashes, parting her lips, making an unspoken promise to men instead of female consumers of the product.

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Statistical Success of Gendered Stereotypes in Ads

Evaluating Approaches

Having examined the various subcategories of gender stereotypes in advertising, a researcher is now equipped to pose the question: are these stereotypes still effective in selling product? It is not the morality, but the effectiveness, of these traditional tactics that stands in question. From a purely practical business standpoint, do men in 2019 still become more interested in a product when marketed via to-the-point language, action-oriented pitches, male-oriented power dynamics, and appeals to heterosexual male sexuality? Are women in 2019 positively influenced by ads which rely on elaborate linguistics, emotional resonance, presumed domestic focus, and frequent redirection from sexual desire to achieving sexual desirability? In the following section and subsections, each category of gender stereotypes in advertising will be analyzed according to its statistical success and critical reception in recent years.

Concrete or Abstract Advertising Approaches

First, there is the question of traditionally masculine and feminine, or concrete/action-based vs abstract/emotional, approaches in advertising. As the earlier section established, flowery language is usually reserved for ads targeting women, as are emotional appeals to the target market. Are women actually more responsive to emotional advertising than men? If so, how much of a difference is there? Is there still an untapped market of men who react positively to emotional ads, or does it make business sense to assume that more straightforward pitches are preferable to male consumers?

To begin with, regarding masculine or feminine phrasing choices, Mukherjee's 2014 study on female, male, or neutrally perceived keyphrases in online searches is

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helpful in examining these questions. Mukherjee (2014) divides brand slogans/keyphrases into six categories: “female-branded, female-unbranded, male-branded, male-unbranded, neutral-branded and neutral-unbranded” (p. 3). Branded keyphrases mention the brand in question, while unbranded phrases do not. Mukherjee’s study indicates that feminine keyphrases which also mention the brand in question performed the best of all six.

Overall, women’s online searching converts directly to purchasing much more often than men. Unbranded phrases, especially those targeting men, are significantly less successful at translating searches into sales. As a result, it follows that phrasing slogans differently for women than for men—or deliberately targeting women rather than men in an online campaign—makes good business sense beyond simple stereotypes.

According to Lee and Hong’s 2016 study of social media marketing, there are several principles which govern the general effectiveness of emotional ads on social media:

our results determined three antecedents of behavioral intention to express empathy about a SNS ad; namely, attitude toward empathy expression, subjective norm, and privacy concerns... informativeness and advertising creativity were found to be significant predictors of attitude toward empathy expression while emotional appeal was not (p. 371).

An emotional appeal, by itself, is often not enough to prompt the average consumer to like or share an ad on social media. Consumers also have preconceived notions about what ought to spark emotion for them, what sparks emotion for their peers,

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and how their peers online will perceive their display of a particular emotion in response to this particular ad, as evidenced by the stereotypical assumptions about men versus women throughout this research. In addition, if the emotional appeal is presented without informative details on the product or a creative approach surrounding the message, the resulting ad may be emotional, but it may nevertheless become lost in the noise. It follows that the masculine approach of informational ads must meet the feminine approach in the middle to form multi-faceted, effective ads that are less likely to be merely scrolled past online.

According to Wang (2008), however, there is still a degree of validity to presumptions that women are more emotional than their counterparts. Namely, he cites several studies which indicate greater sensitivity to external emotional stimuli, stronger emotional responses, and neurological differences in processing emotion-focused content, making women more likely both to feel deep emotions and to interpret others' emotions correctly. Women also have higher empathetic, sympathetic, and empathic responses in many situations as compared to men. Based upon this preexisting research, Wang (2008) proceeds to examine a study of PSAs intended to evoke sadness followed by a desire to help.

According to Wang's 2008 study, women wanted to help more so after watching a sad ad than after watching a rational one, while men displayed the same response to both ads. It follows that it remains wise to target women with PSAs seeking help for a cause, and also to make those ads emotion-centric. It also follows, however, that while men lack an increased positive response to an emotional ad, they also lack a more negative

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response to an emotional ad as compared to a rational one. As a result, to reach the broadest possible audience with a PSA, some companies ought to consider an emotional appeal that doesn't presume an entirely female audience. Men, while less emotional than women, might also be moved to help and are unlikely to have a negative response, even if they have a less positive response than their female counterparts.

Keshari and Jain's 2016 study repeats that "The effect of gender on consumer response to rational appeal and emotional appeal was not found to be significant" (p. 8). Beliefs that women have a better response to emotional advertising are not entirely based in fiction, but the contrast (or lack thereof) with men is far more negligible than one might expect.

Fisher and Dube (2005) approach the question from another angle, postulating that men's emotional responses are regulated by how they expect to be perceived socially. They state:

In particular, males are reluctant to express emotions that are low on agency—a metaconstruct that refers to a mode of relating to the world by striving for mastery and power—because low-agency emotions are contrary to the masculine stereotype (Wiggins 1982). Based on this logic, males' emotional responses depend on both the presence of others in the environment and the agency of the emotion that is evoked. In contrast, agency is not a component of the feminine stereotype, and so females' public and private responses should be equivalent (p. 1).

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Fisher and Dube (2005) further contend that males don't feel less than women scientifically, but they are socially discouraged from public emotion in a way that women are not. In their study, women showed the same responses to ads in both private and public settings, while men consistently had a reduced emotional response in a public setting.

Two conclusions follow from this. First, if men may be more comfortable expressing emotion in private than in public, than more personal, private forms of advertising, such as SMS or email, might be more likely to reach men with an emotional appeal. Second, as culture shifts over time, men's comfort with displaying emotional responses to advertising may increase, so further research on the social climate for masculinity would be more valuable than further research on perceived scientific differences between men and women's capacity to feel.

Lastly, a study by Zhang, Sun, Liu, and Knight (2014) determined that the type of service being advertised, not merely the gender of the target market, ought to be considered when choosing between an emotional or rational appeal. They write, "The use of emotional appeals in experience service advertising results in more favorable brand attitude than the use of rational appeals... The use of rational appeals in credence service advertising results in more favorable brand attitude than the use of emotional appeals" (p. 8). Regardless of if men or women are the target, the type of product or service being offered also ought to affect a marketer's choice of approach.

In summary of this section: when it comes to linguistic distinctions between male-focused and female-focused ad campaigns, women do consistently respond better to

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female-coded keywords, especially if linked to the brand in question. Women's online searches are more likely than men's to become eventual purchases, so targeting women with branded, traditionally female keywords in online advertising is in fact effective.

Women are also more motivated by emotional appeals, but men show similar levels of response to emotional as compared to rational ads, making an emotional appeal extra effective on women without having a negative response from men. In addition, men are more likely to respond to emotional appeals when they aren't forced to admit or portray that emotion to their male peer group. The decision between an emotional or rational appeal also ought to be directed by the type of product or service being advertised, since strictly practical services naturally would lean towards a rational appeal, for instance.

Contextual Gender Roles

As was mentioned previously, contextual gender roles contain such elements as occupational status, apparent involvement in domestic affairs (or not,) age, stereotypical gender behaviors, perceived reasons for a man's credibility as opposed to a woman's, setting for the ad (an office or a home?), and position relative to the opposite gender (such as a man presented against a background of beautiful women.) Are stereotypical gender roles still viewed as relatable and enticing to consumers of the targeted gender? Do these responses differ between men and women?

Navarro's 2012 study of 215 articles from 151 academic journals indicated an overall increase in concern about stereotypes in advertising. The articles are predominantly written by women, addressing ads' depictions of young people ages 18-30 years, and more likely concerned with female stereotypes than male ones.

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“‘Advertising and woman’ was the most frequently used keyword in articles... at 35% of the total, followed by ‘advertising and gender’ with 33% and, much further behind, ‘advertising and stereotypes’ and ‘gender stereotypes and advertising’, with 11.9% and 6.9% respectively” (Navarro, 2012, pp. 6-7). In addition, “the concept of gender/sexist stereotypes appeared in 83.3% of the articles” (p. 7).

Despite this significant increase in concern about female gender stereotypes in advertising, Navarro (2012) also notes that even these academic sources rarely research audience response to the stereotypes, preferring to focus on the sheer prevalence of such stereotypes. Navarro’s study indicates a generalized increase in concern about gender stereotypes in advertising, but further sources are needed to address consumer response.

According to Chu, Lee, and Kim’s hypothesis, atypical approaches to gender stereotypes in advertising can pique interest in the ad. If, however, the approach is too different from what viewers have come to expect, then that interest can slide towards confusion or discomfort instead. Chu elaborates:

Whether an evaluation is relatively more favorable or unfavorable is a function of how easily the processor can satisfactorily resolve the incongruity. Mandler... suggests that resolving moderate incongruity leads to a positive state, such as curiosity or interest, whereas failing to resolve extreme incongruity leads to a negative state, such as anxiety or discomfort. Non-conventional ads... are viewed with curiosity because they are atypical, and viewers can resolve moderate incongruity (male spokespersons using female-gendered products such as home appliances) (2015, p. 3).

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Chu's 2015 study next explains two main categories of people, defined according to self-concept: independent and interdependent. The former category is comprised of people who see themselves as individuals, while the latter is comprised of people who mainly see themselves as members of one or more distinctive groups; independents may become more intrigued by an ad that features gender incongruity, while interdependents are more likely to dismiss such unusual ads out of hand (2015).

In addition to self-concept, all people have some degree of "need for uniqueness," or "the perception that they are special, unique, and separate from 'the masses'" (Chu, 2015, p. 6). Consumers with a particularly strong need for uniqueness might be more attracted to an ad which implies that the product's consumers do not conform to gender stereotypes, since this confirms their need for uniqueness. These consumers are also more likely to remember such an ad because it stands out and confirms their desired self-concept.

Critically, Chu (2015) also notes that some consumers may dismiss atypically gendered ads purely because they hold strongly stereotypical views of gender. Regardless of what progress society at large might like to believe it has made, there are still groups of consumers who agree with long-standing assumptions about male and female roles, behavior, etc., and these consumers are unlikely to embrace an ad that disagrees with their ideology.

In summary, we conclude that a person's self-concept (independent versus interdependent,) need for uniqueness, and preceding views on gender roles all contribute to how they react to an atypically gendered ad. Perhaps most importantly, consumers

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exhibited a decrease in stereotypical perceptions of gender after being exposed to advertising that countered their expectations. This means that as more varied gender messages spread throughout society, the response to atypically gendered advertising is likely to become more positive with time, even among those who might have initially displayed a negative response.

Cramphorn's study (2010) focuses more so on genetic differences in how men and women respond to advertising. Namely, women have more overall positive and/or emotional responses. They also consistently have a higher positive response to ads targeting women specifically rather than both men and women; the same is true regarding men, who are more responsive to ads targeting men specifically. There is still something to be said, then, for addressing an audience narrowed by gender. It isn't inherently sexist to limit an appeal to men or women, but this doesn't completely solve the question of whether that appeal containing stereotypes produces positive or negative results.

Kolman (2012) conducted a focus group study on responses to gender stereotypes in advertising. One of the most notable conclusions drawn in this study is that men and women have vastly different perspectives on the commonly represented characteristics of men and women. Specifically, "Male respondents described men (in general) as competent, strong, active, and oriented towards useful things. Female respondents described men (in general) as authoritative, active, sometimes aggressive, physically stronger, and protective" (p. 6). Both men and women agreed that men are generally perceived as merciless, impulsive, less detail-oriented, and focused on sex, sports, and money.

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Men perceived women as “weaker, gentle, emotional, hard to understand and disloyal”, while women defined themselves as “emotionally stronger than men, loyal to their families and very easy to understand” (Kolman, 2012, p. 6). Both men and women agreed that women are commonly represented as focused on appearance over intelligence, reliant on men and male protection, more communicative, and good with children and homemaking.

In Kolman’s 2012 focus group experiment, women overwhelmingly were more offended by gender stereotypes than men. While men were indifferent, women voiced concern regarding “depicting women in the ads as less capable or the fact that only men give advice on how to use a product (especially if it’s a traditionally female product)” (p. 6). Despite this, women also self-disclosed that like their male counterparts, they perceived male spokespeople for products as more trustworthy than female ones, despite their offense at the concept. In addition, “Men stated that they tend to believe male voices more because they are pleasant and have a higher level of expertise” (p. 6). Men also stated that in the case of a voice-over, they were more likely to trust a male voice, while women disagreed.

Men and women both differed widely on whether an advertisement strongly affects their desire (or lack thereof) to purchase a product or service. Older participants in the focus group simultaneously called stereotypes offensive and agreed that they like ads which depict women in homemaking, child-rearing roles. Younger respondents, especially those with higher education, said that their negative responses to such stereotypes could translate into a negative opinion on the product or service being

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advertised. Kolman (2012) notes that overall, “Mentioned results are in line with previous research in other countries”, so the study remains applicable to discussions that encompass populations outside of Croatia (p. 9).

Wolin’s 2003 questionnaire on gender and web advertising further illuminates another dimension of the conversation. Men, more so than women, prefer web advertising overall to other forms of advertising: “Relative to females, males believe Web advertising is more enjoyable than magazine and newspaper advertising; more useful than newspaper and radio advertising; and more informative than newspaper advertising” (p. 6). On the other hand, women believe that online ads are “more annoying than magazine and newspaper advertising; more offensive than magazine, radio and television advertising; more deceptive than television advertising; and more useful than television advertising” (p. 6).

Men and women prefer to shop online differently. Men prefer “function and entertainment sites,” while women prefer sites designated for shopping (Wolin, 2003, p. 8). Women are also more likely to bargain hunt, comparison shop, use coupons, etcetera (p. 8). One might assume based on this data that despite their negative feelings towards online advertising, women are more likely than their male counterparts to make a purchase online, but this is not the case. In fact, “although males are far more likely to make Web purchases than females... females are more likely to use the shopping sites for enjoyment and information gathering (versus purchase) and then purchase in more traditional settings” (p. 9).

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Despite women stereotypically enjoying shopping more than men, this data indicates that men ought to be the primary target of online advertising designed to convert directly into an online purchase. Women, on the other hand, would be more appreciative of dedicated sites for researching, comparing, and the like, without the pressure of an immediate purchase from an online vendor.

In summary of this section: advertising to only men or only women in a specific campaign is consistently more effective than marketing to both simultaneously. Ads that buck traditional gender stereotypes are more noticeable in the crowded marketing landscape than traditional ads, but in order for the target audience's response to an atypical ad to be positive, they audience in question must have a higher preference for independence (as opposed to interdependence) and uniqueness (as opposed to group membership.)

Women, especially younger women with higher education, are more likely than men to be offended by contextual gender stereotypes in advertising. Even when they are offended by the content, many women still self-identify as more receptive to ads which fit stereotypes. Nevertheless, despite this paradox, the overall concern about gender stereotyping in ads has visibly increased in past years and shows an upward trend, so companies which intend to endure long into the future—or companies targeting younger audiences, particularly women—would be wise to consider adapting their methods to accommodate increasingly aware and concerned consumers whose tolerance for gender stereotypes is shrinking.

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Gendered Sexual Advertising

Finally, having considered both linguistic, emotional, and contextual gender stereotypes, all that remains is preconceptions about sexual content in advertising. Do men and women have different feeling about the sexualization of their own or the opposite gender? If so, how should this affect advertising approaches?

According to Dahl (2009), “in contrast to men, who reported positive attitudes, women on average exhibited a marked negative reaction to explicit sexual content in advertising. These findings... indicate that for a large segment of consumers, the old marketing cliché ‘sex sells’ may not hold” (Sex in Advertising, p. 2). Dahl further demonstrates through compiled research that men are likely to see sex as an end in itself, while women seek relational intimacy through physical intimacy, leading to the aforementioned difference in response to sexual ads.

In Dahl’s own subsequent study, women predictably had a negative response to implied casual sex as a sales tactic; however, when the advertised watch was presented as a gift in the context of a committed, romantic relationship, the negative effect of the sexual content could be counteracted. The four categories of commercials shown—sex/non-gift, sex/gift, non-sex/gift, and non-sex/non-gift—revealed that the most successful approach was a gift-focused, non-sexual one, but a sexual ad could be nearly as effective if presented in a commitment context (2009). A second study which removed the gift factor presented an even more dramatic difference between women’s negative responses to sexual ads and comparatively positive response to sexual content in a

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commitment context. Lanseng (2016) conducted similar studies, often referencing Dahl's work as a precedent and ultimately reaching the same conclusion.

Ferguson's 2010 study indicated another facet of sexual marketing's effect—namely, sex in commercials increases recall of products after viewing the ad. Depending on the purpose of a campaign, then, it might remain wise to use sexual advertising to increase brand awareness, but not necessarily to prompt a purchase or positive feelings.

Liu, Cheng, and Li (2009) add through their research that “country had a significant effect on consumers' attitudes towards the ad and the brand regarding nearly all of the four types of sex appeal ads... in international advertising, localization or standardization should be carefully considered” (p. 15).

Location is also deemed critical by Luk (and others') 2017 research: “Ads featuring nudity are deemed more acceptable if people in society embrace a less traditional and conservative sexual standpoint”, Luk writes, his own research indicating that the location of an ad has a greater effect than the gender of the viewer (2017, p. 1-15).

In addition, Wyllie (2014) concludes that overall, “findings suggest that whilst not all paths were significant, the use of mild sexual stimuli in advertising generated a positive and stronger influence on the system of relationships shared amongst affect, attitudes, and purchase intention than did the use of explicit sexual stimuli” (p. 15).

In summary, sexual advertising can generate higher recall of a product. Men generally have positive or neutral responses to sexual advertising, while women usually have a negative response; this can be somewhat mitigated by an implied context of

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commitment surrounding the sex, but women still lack a positive response in this case. Mild sexual stimuli is also more well-received by women than explicit stimuli in advertising. Country, city, and overarching culture surrounding sex can also affect these stats, so as culture shifts, more research will be warranted.

Conclusion

The reception of gender-stereotyped advertising varies across categories of linguistic/emotional, contextual, and sexual stereotypes, as well as between men and women. Overall, as culture shifts towards increasing concern about gender stereotypes, women may show increasingly negative responses to such ads in advertising; however, for the time being, that negative reaction doesn't always translate into a negative result from a sales perspective. Men are also less offended, in most cases, by gender stereotypes than women are, and even have positive responses to stereotypes which enable masculine power or perceived female sexual availability. Younger women, particularly those with higher education, more strongly demand a cessation of gender stereotypes.

In conclusion, the question of gender stereotypical advertising's effectiveness has a nuanced answer, affected by multiple aspects of the target audience and their surrounding culture that ought to be taken into account. The answer is not simply that stereotypes are either wholly effective or ineffective. It would be valuable for another thesis to eventually be written regarding differences in perspective according to nationality, gender identity beyond cisgender, sexual orientations other than heterosexual, etc. Due to the influence of external factors such as cultural gender expectations and levels of higher education, it also would be interesting to see this thesis rewritten in

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twenty or even ten years as culture evolves and perspectives shift, slowly changing the marketing landscape for good.

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