The multiplicity of women's role portrayals in magazine advertisements

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The multiplicity of women's role portrayals in magazine advertisements

By

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy

For the Graduate College
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to advance the understanding of how women are portrayed in magazine advertisements by employing interval measurements in standard content analysis techniques. It also intends to provide a comparison between the advertisements and actual trends of the population in the United States. Although this study is a content analysis, the 18 constructs measured by unipolar, seven-point scales are expected to provide a more detailed account of the depiction of women in advertising. This method allows for a richer description because it goes beyond the use of stereotypes as the sole basis for classification. This study builds on the recommendation of previous researchers that found the inability of stereotypes to measure the less dominant features of character portrayal. By revealing the multi-faceted nature of how women are portrayed in print advertising, this study hopes to better illuminate if advertising is increasingly providing a true depiction of societal trends.

The Woman's Role: Revolution to Evolution

The interest in women's role portrayals was initially spurred by the changes created by the women's movement that peaked during the 1960s. Since the 1960s, several studies using content analysis have been performed to measure the changes in female role portrayals in magazine advertising due to the criticism
advertisers were receiving from feminist groups. With the added attention drawn by feminist researchers and the general public after the emergence of the women’s movement, marketers were forced to re-examine depictions of women and make changes to the roles women are depicted to play in advertisements (Bartos, 1982). Prior to the studies, women were, with the exception of a rare few, portrayed as sex objects or as homemakers. After the initial scrutiny, more advertisements began showing women in other roles to satisfy public clamor for more balanced and sensitive gender portrayals (Bartos, 1982). By and large, however, the changes were not drastic; they came in small increments over the years.

Ideally, advertising should reflect multi-faceted and multidimensional changes in society. In life, women’s roles have been changing in leaps and bounds since the 1960s, but the depictions of their roles has evolved slowly. Advertisers who wish to keep up with trends in gender role portrayals are forced to aim at a “moving target” (Bartos, 1982) as the definitions of the roles of men and women evolve into something totally different from those of previous decades.

The number of studies focusing on women’s role portrayals seems to taper off around the early 1990s, but the research possibilities have not been exhausted. There are many areas left to explore, including the re-examination of areas previously researched. Previous studies, for instance, have classified women by using rigidly defined categories, not allowing for possibilities of overlap among categories. Women as a group not only perform a broad range of roles; many individual women portray several roles concurrently. This led Rena Bartos to characterize women as the “moving target” (Barry et al., 1985) because female
career categories have been shifting at a rapid pace over the last three decades.

Longitudinal comparisons of role portrayals in advertisements from 1955 to 1989 showed a greater design sophistication, but the main categories of women's roles researched were limited to "traditional" and "modern." In these studies, the traditional role is defined as that of the homemaker, the domestic woman who stays at home to raise the family. The professional role, on the other hand, is performed by the modern woman who has entered the workforce and now holds power and control equivalent to men.

There is mounting evidence that gender stereotyping in advertising does play a role in sustaining misconceptions about women (Courtney and Whipple, 1983). Stereotypes provide "a limited vocabulary of interaction," encouraging people to think and speak of women primarily in terms of their relationship to men, family, or their sexuality (Tuchman, 1979). However, advertising can also play a positive and beneficial role in debunking the stereotypes (Ferguson et al., 1990). Women are no longer restricted to traditional roles in the home, and many women have in fact entered the workforce. Advertising should reflect these trends, or run the risk of being irrelevant.

Although role portrayal studies have found that the number of advertisements depicting women in modern settings has risen over the years, many of these still show women in traditional settings. Studies that attempt to track advertisements depicting women as sex objects indicate conflicting results. Venkatesan and Losco (1975), for example, found a decrease in the number of advertisements portraying women as sex objects while another study (Ferguson, Kreshel and Tinkham, 1990)
actually found a resurgence in such advertisements. Some studies (i.e., Ferguson et al., 1990 and Steinberg, 1986) have shown that women are still depicted as ornaments for the male figures in advertisements, even though such portrayals have quantitatively decreased. Such divergent results may be due to differences in definitions and measurement of constructs.

More comparative analyses (Klassen, Jasper and Schwartz, 1993) have examined male and female relationships in advertisements and have shown that women have achieved equality with men. These studies also indicate that in advertisements where both men and women are present, women sometimes were portrayed more dominantly.

Other studies, however, gave more qualified results, pointing out that although the portrayals of women are gaining equality, they are still lacking authority. Steinberg (1986), for instance, showed that women are not portrayed as authority figures in advertisements for expensive products such as cars. An authority figure in these studies is not defined as one who is in charge of a particular situation, such as a mother in control of her children, but as a woman who has an educated knowledge of the product she is endorsing. Using this definition, women who are portrayed as chemical engineers for Dow cleaning products would be considered authority figures, whereas a woman who is mopping the floor as she admires the sparkly shine would not. Although in reality the models shown endorsing beauty products may also know how to use the products, most advertisers use the models in a decorative pose. The models are advertised for their beauty, not their knowledge.
Complexity of Women's Roles

Barry, Gilly, and Doran (1985) were among the first to acknowledge the complexity of women's role choices. Their study categorized women into three levels of the construct “desire to work.” They based their categorization scheme on population data that showed that there are women in the United States who strictly desire to either stay in the household (28%) or seek a career outside the home (22%). There are also those who only choose to work as a means of financial support (37%), but would actually prefer to devote all of their time to the duties of the homemaker. There are also women who are full-time homemakers with plans to enter the workforce in the future (13%).

The Barry, Gilly, and Doran study has shown that roles may appear to be simple, but in actuality may be impossible to place in exclusive categories due to the fact that one woman can hold several roles concurrently. They stress that each aspect of how women are portrayed today must be taken into consideration to derive a full account of current situations. Even though some women do not wish to be domestic or professional, they only do so out of necessity, these roles are still present in their daily lives. Depictions of women in advertising must therefore be analyzed in ways that do not discount this complexity.

In short, a woman can represent both domestic and professional careers simultaneously in a single advertisement, or may not reveal her association to either role when advertising the product. The average woman cannot be defined in simple dichotomous terms; gray areas need to be defined to capture the complexity of her role today.
Objectives of the Study

Other role portrayal studies have often used content analysis to examine the depiction of women in advertising, but these studies failed to create a method for measuring multiple aspects of women’s roles within an advertisement.

One problem previous studies failed to take into account is that women can be several things in one advertisement—sexy, career oriented, ornamental figures for male models, and independent all at once. Researchers who are looking to find one dominant trait in each advertisement may miss out on all of the other characteristics present in the advertisement. This study hopes to remedy this neglect by taking into account many of the different facets of women’s roles in advertisements that are as complex as the women receiving messages from advertisements.

This study, using content analysis with an enriched coding scheme, will not only analyze the most dominant characteristic of the portrayals of women in each advertisement; but will also allow for the measurement of multiple roles of women (if they exist in the portrayals) to reflect multiple dimensions of women’s roles as depicted in advertisements.

This study is also intended to determine whether images of women in magazine advertisements are accurate reflections of current trends in women’s roles. The study is not designed to determine what is ethically right or wrong; it is intended to examine whether magazine readers are receiving advertising messages that correlate with real life.

This study is not undertaken to support feminist theory, or even to expose
any particular viewpoint on feminist issues. It is meant to empirically examine how women are portrayed in 1996 magazine advertisements using a method that allows for the categorization of female characteristics into more than one classification. This study will not declare that one image is sexist or that one image is preferable to another. The analysis will focus on determining if print advertising is still largely based on old stereotypes, or if it reflects current population trends in women's roles.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

From the time the women's movement emerged, researchers have attempted to measure the portrayal of women in advertisements. Several of the studies revolved around messages presented in print media. Researchers have mainly focused on nominal categories of measurement that did not allow subjects (advertisements or people, depending on the study) to be placed in more than one category at a time.

Historical Development of Findings

Venkatesan and Losco (1975) studied the portrayal of women in magazine advertisements from the years 1959 through 1971. They analyzed the different ways women were portrayed and what changes occurred as time progressed. In the study, 12 magazines were selected from the three categories: general interest, women's and men's magazines. The advertisements were classified as showing women in seven categories: woman as dependent on man, woman as overachieving housewife, woman as high living, woman as physically beautiful, woman as sex object, woman as sexy, and none of the above. Venkatesan and Losco based the categories for the study on “demands” developed by the Committee for the Image of Women, a part of the National Organization for Women (NOW).

The results of the study showed that the overall number of women depicted in advertising had not changed over the time period and that women were most
frequently portrayed as sex objects, physically attractive and dependent on men. The category "woman as housewife" was most frequent from 1959-1963; woman as physically beautiful was the most common from 1964-1971. The findings also show that although there has been a decrease in the portrayal of women as sex objects, the depiction was still the most frequent in men’s and general interest magazines (Venkatesan and Losco, 1975). Women depicted as being dependent upon men were also frequent in men’s and general interest magazines, and this depiction increased between the years 1961 and 1971. Depictions of women as physically beautiful and women as sexy increased during the time span studied, while the other categories decreased through the years.

A study by Duker and Tucker (1977) measuring women’s attitudes concerning a number of women’s roles, found that all roles, with the exception of the domestic/mother portrayal, were found to be socially acceptable by a female student sample (Duker and Tucker, 1977). This general acceptance was also consistent across the sample classified as "traditionalists," "neutrals" and "pro-feminists" although Duker and Tucker found that women’s attitudes regarding the domestic/mother portrayal varied between groups: female students and pro-feminists found the portrayal to be socially unacceptable, while the traditionalists and neutrals found it to be acceptable.

Whipple and Courtney in 1985 executed a review of surveys to determine how role portrayal is related to communication effectiveness. This meta analysis included studies that used both artificial or prototype advertisements and real advertisements. In one study, women indicated that they will buy soap that was
depicted as being masculine, but men indicated they would not purchase soap that
was depicted as feminine (Kanungo and Pang, 1973). Another study in the review
found that the use of non-sex-stereotyped roles indicated a significant increase in
effectiveness of communication. The subjects in the study viewed advertisements
with a male model, female model, male-female pair, and no model (Kanungo and
Johar, 1975).

Barry, Gilly and Doran (1985) hypothesized that people respond more
favorably to advertising which captures their interests, attitudes and behavior and set
out to test if women in different career orientations respond to advertisements
differently. A total of 240 subjects were used in the study, with equal representation
for each of the four career categories defined for women. Each group of women was
shown four advertisements for a magazine, each advertisement depicted a woman
from one of the four career categories. Women in the low-desire-to-work category
found the homemaker role to be most appealing and to reflect their own attitudes the
most. High-desire-to-work women found this role the least appealing. Moderate-
desire-to-work women were indifferent. Moderate- and low-desire-to-work women
were most likely to buy the magazine, while high-desire-to-work women were not
likely to make the purchase. Moderate-desire-to-work women showed higher
intentions of making a purchase than did the other two groups of women.

Does advertising correctly portray the increasing number of women entering
the workforce? To answer this question, Barry, Gilly and Doran (1985) documented
the change in the number of women in the workforce since 1940. They found that in
1940, the workforce consisted of 27 percent of the female population, 35 percent in
1960, 52 percent in 1981, and projections of 65 percent by the year 2000. Barry, Gilly and Doran also noted different career orientations of women, citing Richardson’s (1974) three categories of career orientation that expand upon the familiar dichotomy of homemaker/career women. The categories were: low desire-to-work women, moderate desire-to-work women, and high desire-to-work women.

In 1981, the Bureau of Labor Statistics compiled data that classified women into four categories: stay-at-home housewives, career-oriented working women, just-a-job working women, and plan-to-work housewives (Bartos, 1982). The overlapping nature of these categories is revealed when the Bureau found that half of the women could fall into both the career and homemaker categories simultaneously. This is the reason for Richardson’s classification, which was more accurate for subject groups of women used in surveys and experiments. The women that fall into the overlapping categories should be ideal for marketers because they can relate to both domestic and career representations (Barry et al. 1985). Since they experience both settings from day to day, there should be a decrease in the possibility of offending these women based on the selection of one setting over the other.

Media critic Jean Kilbourne (1986) observes that women are often left out of the picture when it comes to advertisements for expensive products such as cars and investments, products that have been traditionally classified as male decision areas. The luxury and status advertisements are aimed at men, with the woman as a decorative object, sort of another accessory (Steinberg, 1986). In an analysis of automobile commercials, Kilbourne did not encounter a single advertisement portraying a woman as an automobile authority figure (Steinberg, 1986). An authority
figure in this case is defined as a person who possesses an educated knowledge of the product.

In 1987, Stern examined the way financial information and products are marketed towards women. Through her research, Stern found that segmentation of the women's market was just beginning in 1982. Prior to this women were considered a single market, meaning that all women were seen as having the same interests and goals because it was assumed they all filled the same job description of mother and homemaker. Stern implied that women lack financial information, and that the strategies of marketing and advertising toward women need to be refined.

Although Venkatesan and Losco (1975) found that the depiction of women as sex objects has decreased over time, other studies have found the opposite to be true (i.e., Ferguson et al., 1990; and Klassen et al., 1993). One of these is Ferguson, Kreshel and Tinkham's (1990) study of advertising and the sex role portrayals of women in Ms. magazine during the publication's first 15 years of existence, 1973-1987. Declared the "magazine of record for women," Ms. espouses a strict policy against sexist advertising as well as advertising for harmful products. Ferguson's research team analyzed the changing trends of advertising within Ms. magazine in response to criticisms that the magazine made policy violations by advertising unhealthy products and allowing for sexist portrayals of women. They found evidence to support the allegations.

In their study, Ferguson et al. used Sexton and Haberman's (1974) rating system along with the system designed by Pingree et al. (1976) to examine both manifest and latent content. The study covered alternate years from 1973 through
1987, with three issues selected from each year. The products advertised were classified into three categories: personal appearance, business-travel-transportation, and home products and leisure items. Female roles were categorized as housewife/mother, social companion/date, employee/consumer, and model/other.

The study showed several relationships between products and the women’s roles. Their 14-year analyses showed a decrease in the decorative use of women in product advertising as well as a decrease in the number of advertisements depicting women in a homemaker setting. Alluring appearances seemed to increase over time. Of the total number of advertisements classified, one-third were found to be for harmful products. This study empirically supports the argument that, at least in some respects, the advertising practice at Ms. magazine has been inconsistent with its stated advertising policy regarding harmful products and sexist advertising content (Ferguson et al., 1990).

Young women’s magazines often imitate the content and messages of adult women’s magazines. To lend support to this contention, Peirce (1990) studied the socialization of teenagers through Seventeen magazine. Peirce was concerned that the messages presented may not have provided the information young women require to make sound choices. The study also looked at whether the messages presented held feminist or traditional ideals.

The magazine issues in 1961, 1972 and 1985 were selected to represent Cohen’s (1988) chronology of the women’s movement compared to Butler and Paisley’s (1978) analysis of media coverage. Three eras were defined for the study: premovement (1961), midmovement (1972), and postmovement (1985). The articles
were rated and categorized as intended for household activities or for self-development. The household articles included sub-categories of appearance, male-female relations, and home. Self-development articles, on the other hand, defined feminist messages which included the sub-categories of education, vocation and physical and mental health.

The author found that *Seventeen* failed to focus on feminist ideals; most of the sections and columns fell into antifeminist categories (Peirce, 1990). The research showed a peak in content related to self-development during 1972; the male-female relations were tremendously lower for this year compared to the other two years studied, prompting Peirce to define the magazine as having a traditional orientation.

In 1991, Ford, LaTour and Lundstrom examined women’s perceptions of how women are depicted in advertisements. The study exclusively measured the attitudes of women who were involved in women’s interest groups through a survey consisting of 17 attitude statements.

Although the researchers indicated that the depiction of women in advertising has improved over time, the female respondents remained critical of female role portrayals in advertisements. Overall, the respondents felt advertising was changing for the better, but they did not agree that the advertisements gave an accurate portrayal of women in current society.

Ford and LaTour (1996) repeated the study this time using women not involved in women’s interest groups. Some of the answers given by these women tended to be a bit closer to neutral compared to the respondents in the first study,
but the answers seemed to slightly vary by age, social class, and education. Overall, the women in both studies held negative perceptions about women’s roles in advertising.

Not all of the results from previous studies are discouraging. Klassen and colleagues (1993), for example, found that advertising had progressed through the years in their analysis of advertisements in *Ms.*, *Playboy* and *Newsweek* to determine the portrayal of men and women when pictured together. The researchers used Goffman’s (1976) frame analysis to interpret visual images.

The time period studied covered the years 1972 through 1989. The magazines were chosen because they represented the three categories of women’s, men’s and general interest magazines. Advertisements were classified into three categories: traditional pose, reverse-sex pose and equality pose in which neither male nor female is dominant and both share equal power. The years of the study were grouped into three segments, 1972-1977, 1978-1983, and 1984-1989.

The study showed an association between the type of pose and the type of magazine. There was a significant difference in the percent of traditional poses in *Playboy*, which had a large number of traditional poses, compared with *Ms*. There was no difference noted in traditional poses between *Playboy* and *Newsweek*. *Playboy* had few reverse-sex poses, but had more of this type of pose than *Newsweek*; *Ms.* contained about 20 percent reverse-sex poses. *Playboy* had the least number of equality poses while *Ms.* had the most. Although *Ms.* was recorded as having the most number of equality poses, the difference between the number of such poses in *Ms.* and the number in *Newsweek* was not significant.
Over time, Playboy and Newsweek showed a decrease in the number of traditional poses and an increase in the number of reverse-sex poses. There was no trend noted for equality poses in either magazine. The overall tests for Ms. were insignificant.

Some researchers have gone beyond the study of traditional and non-traditional roles by focusing strictly on feminist and anti-feminist material. Budgeon and Currie (1995), for example, analyzed adolescent magazines to determine the amount of antifeminist material in them. All materials, including articles and advertising, were analyzed for content. The researchers found that although readers were encouraged by the magazines to think independently, they were also encouraged to seek out male companionship as an ultimate goal.

**Trends in Gender Role Portrayals and Advertising**

In their 1979 comprehensive review, Kerin, Lundstrom and Sciglimpaglia predicted that because of the increasing proportion of women in the professional workforce and social pressure on advertisers from the growing strength of the women’s movement, the 1980s would see an increasing emphasis on contemporary roles for women in advertisements (Ford et al., 1991). They predicted that future advertisements will lack a dominant gender. In their forecast for the future, products not targeted for a specific gender would be purchased by different types of people in advertisements; finally showing that the housewife isn’t the only type of person who uses laundry detergent. The authors also predicted women would portray traditional and modern roles at the same time (Kerin et al., 1979).
At this stage, the androgynous gender portrayal is yet to be developed for use in all advertisements (Gould and Stern, 1989: 130). Although some brands are trying to market androgynous products, such as Calvin Klein’s One cologne, there is not one androgynous sex used for all product categories. The reason for this may be that the population has been segmented into target audiences, the audiences most likely to buy the product.

Whipple and Courtney (1985) stated that the appropriateness of role portrayals for the product targeted to a particular market segment is also an important factor. It is necessary to segment the audience in order to effectively market a product. In support of this, Sexton and Haberman (1974) found that the effectiveness of role portrayals vary across product categories. Ferguson, Kreshel and Tinkham (1990) also examined the relationship between product classifications and role portrayals and noted that the advertised product is promoted primarily via its association with people who presumably are evaluated favorably by members of the target audience (Shimp, Urbany and Camlin, 1988).

Indeed, research and practice indicate that people will respond most favorably to advertising which captures their interests, attitudes and behaviors (Barry et al., 1985). It is beneficial for advertisers to receive a favorable response from the target audience because favorable responses can lead to an increase in sales and will lead to an increase in favorable recognition for the company.
Problems in Previous Research

The majority of previous studies has not taken into consideration that an advertisement can include many different facets of role portrayals. One reason why studies have contradictory findings is that they differ in their definition of the categories of role portrayals. Indeed, women in a given advertisement can possess contradictory characteristics simultaneously. As such, advertisements should be considered as a possible constellation of characteristics and not categorized based only on the most dominant one. In the past, content analyses have been less than appealing to many researchers due to the undefined “gray” areas created by absolute dichotomies.

The content analysis applied in this study is intended to capture these "gray areas" by including a degree of variability in the analysis. Unipolar measurements of terms and 7-point scales have been used in the codebook to add richness to the study. This method identifies what characteristics are present as well as the strength or magnitude of each characteristic. The study will not just measure the most prominent characteristic, it will attempt to measure an array of characteristics present in the advertisement to provide a more detailed account of what the image in the advertisement represents.

Stereotypes in Advertising

Although advertising may not create stereotypes, advertisements help perpetuate them. Representations of stereotypes are bought, sold, traded, checked
out, and otherwise shared by millions of people across boundaries of distance and
time untraveled by ordinary interpersonal communication (Macrae, 1996). The
stereotype is important both to the people stereotyping and the person being
stereotyped. A stereotype gives people a framework to build a method of interaction
with the world, how to decide what is socially proper and what is not acceptable in
society.

Vivian Gornick (1978) posits that advertisements depict for us not necessarily
how we actually behave as men and women but how we think men and women
behave (Goffman, 1979). Society uses advertisements and stereotypes as tools of
checks and balances in the comparison of social norms and current trends in
different groups of people. The depiction of stereotypes serves the social purpose of
convincing us that this is how men and women are, or want to be, or should be, not
only in relation to themselves but in relation to each other (Goffman, 1979).

While advertisements appear to be photographing male and female human
beings, what advertisers are actually capturing are images of masculinity and
femininity that are fitted or matched in such a way as to make them function socially
(Goffman, 1979). Although some advertisements display depictions contradictory to
stereotypes and societal norms, audience members do not necessarily embrace
these depictions. Depictions can help sustain current values held by society, and
they can also aid in the evolution of values and stereotypes. Men and women take
their cues about “gender behavior” from the image of that behavior that advertising
throws back at them, and they may contrive to become the “people” in those
advertisements (Goffman, 1979).
Social Influence

Although many writers have pointed out that magazines reflect historical change, few examine how magazines determine historical change as well (Wolf, 1991). Magazines for over a century have been one of the most powerful agents for changing women's roles, and throughout that time, they have consistently glamorized women regardless of what the economy, their advertisers, and the government needed at that moment from women (Wolf, 1991). A medium that has the power to change women's roles in dramatic proportions has a responsibility to reflect accurate, if not positive, depictions of its audience. Magazines and their advertisements are not obligated to promote societal change by portraying women in a futuristic light, but by not presenting realistic images, they could indirectly cause changes in the woman’s role for better or for worse.

The power of magazines to influence may not receive the full recognition it deserves. Magazines are part of a highly interactive medium, and audience members sustain a high level of recall of the information the magazines provide. Photographs also aid in the levels of understanding and recall. The advertisements of this medium are equally powerful with their verbal and photographic qualities. Advertisements produce an especially visible manifestation, good and bad, of the American way of life (Barthel, 1988). Though the magazines are trivialized, they represent women's mass culture; general culture takes a male point of view where women’s magazines are mostly written by women for women (Wolf, 1991).

Advertising is not just about the advertised object's appearance but about personal appearances—how we look to others (Barthel, 1988). Simmel believed that
people value goods in order not to worship them or surrender power to them, but to express their identity in and through goods (Barthel, 1988). Consumers buy things not only out of necessity or enjoyment of the product; they buy things to associate themselves with a social class. People buy the brands and products that are accepted by their peers.

It is important to study how women are depicted in advertisements because marketers need to appeal to the type of people who will buy their products. At this moment in time, the career choices women have to choose from is at a peak. Not all women are working outside the home, not all women are staying in the home to raise a family, and many women are doing both simultaneously, giving advertisers a difficult time building creative strategies in audience segmentation. Women have been limited to specific role depictions and certain types of products in past advertising. The portrayal of women in advertisements and the types of products marketed toward women have changed, but it is not clear where the current trends stand or how they compare to real life.

**The Theoretical Basis: The Cultivation of Gender Stereotypes**

People are obviously not two-dimensional beings, they are very complex and multifaceted as are their personalities, characteristics and other components of their identities. People are perhaps the most complex stimuli, in part because they simultaneously belong to multiple social categories of age, ethnicity and gender. Any one of these competing categorizations, moreover, can come to dominate people's
evaluations of others (Brewer, 1988; Fiske and Neuberg, 1990; Hamilton and Sherman, 1994; Macrae et al., 1995).

The primary virtue ascribed to stereotypes is their ability to simplify and structure social perceptions (Allport, 1954; Macrae et al., 1995). Stereotypes are one method of classifying and describing individuals in a universal manner that others can understand. Consciously or otherwise, people often use stereotypes to build a mental picture when communicating with other members of society. Stereotypes permit a basis for forming expectations and evaluations of the target (Hamilton and Sherman, 1994; Macrae et al., 1995).

Active stereotyping focuses on the most dominant trait of the individual as a means of classification, identification and understanding. By focusing on the most dominant trait, other traits are suppressed and easily ignored. The suppressed traits could shape the individual in such a manner that they no longer fit the mold of the stereotype, leading to a misrepresentation of the person being classified. Selective perception affects the senders of messages just as it affects the individuals who perceive them, and these selected bits of information are based upon and reinforce stereotypical thinking (Lester, 1996).

The theory of selective perception goes hand in hand with the use of stereotypes. There is a functional necessity of selectivity in all forms of information processing (Broadbent, 1958; James, 1890; Kahneman and Triesman, 1984; Norman and Shallice, 1986; Posner and Peterson, 1990; Shallice, 1972; Macrae et al, 1995), but this selectivity neglects other stimuli which are denied access to awareness or a higher level of cognitive processing (Macrae et al, 1995).
The situational model of selective perception states that participants bring to a situation certain dispositions, or traits, but they also select the situations and manipulate them to allow for the expression of their dispositions (Shea, 1993).

People evaluate new information by comparing it with perceptions they already have — perceptions that they accept as true, as having stood the tests of previous comparisons (Lester, 1996). People often ignore stimuli to which they cannot relate or classify with existing information. Previous experiences, morals and social background influence the use of information and the way people communicate. Occasionally, individuals allow new information to change their perceptions, but more frequently they accept, reject, or reshape the new information in such a way as to preserve existing perceptions, perceptions that could be called “world view” or “prejudice” (Lester, 1996).

By taking away the stereotypes, which are used as a shortcut in communication, people are obligated to provide a more accurate description of the individual to which they are referring. Through the active inhibition of distracting mental representations, perceivers are better able to disentangle signal from noise in their dealings with the world (Macrae et al, 1995). Without stereotypes, both sender and receiver must work harder in the act of communication. The stereotype provides a simple picture because less thought is necessary to encode and decode the message. Without this shortcut, the audience must focus on several different factors to assess the situation. This distracts from the perception of the overall message.

Stereotypes of women in advertising have been changing at a much slower rate than the changes women are experiencing in society. As the literature review
demonstrates, the portrayal of women in traditional roles in advertisements is still dominant, even though more than half of the female population is already a part of the workforce. Although the percentage of advertisements depicting women in career roles has increased, this change has not matched the trends evident in demographic shifts.

In previous studies researchers have concluded that more advertisements are depicting women as sex objects, a development that runs contrary to the goals of the women’s movement, and devalues the importance of the increasing number of women in career roles.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Study Design and Sampling

To investigate the depiction and the multiplicity of roles for adult women in print advertising, a content analysis of eight different magazines was conducted over a one year period. The magazines selected were all large circulation publications and represented eight different magazine categories.

The magazines selected for the study are Redbook, Cosmopolitan, Reader's Digest, Prevention, Better Homes and Gardens, Playboy, Time, and Sports Illustrated. These magazines were selected as representatives of particular magazine types as defined by the Standard Rate and Data Service and their circulation (see Table 1). To be considered for selection, magazines had to have a paid circulation of more than two million readers, with the exception of the business magazines, the biggest of which post circulation figures of under two million.

Although Redbook and Cosmopolitan are both magazines targeted toward female audiences, they are classified differently by the Standard Rate and Data Service. Redbook's main purpose is to provide information about home, family and life as the subjects relate to women. Cosmopolitan's primary topics are related to women's current fashion and beauty trends. Although the two magazines sometimes overlap in some topic areas, they are not targeted toward the same audience of women.
Table 1. Magazines used in the content analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magazine Title</th>
<th>Type of Magazine</th>
<th>Paid Circulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Redbook</td>
<td>Women's</td>
<td>2,559,853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cosmopolitan</td>
<td>Fashion, Beauty and Grooming</td>
<td>2,486,393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader's Digest</td>
<td>General Editorial</td>
<td>15,150,822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>3,251,851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Homes and Gardens</td>
<td>Home Service and Home</td>
<td>7,616,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playboy</td>
<td>Men's</td>
<td>3,223,170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>News Weekly</td>
<td>4,131,676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Illustrated</td>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>3,384,328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>1,993,119</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹Definitions provided by the Standard Rate and Data Service, 1996.

The time frame for the study included issues printed from January 1 to December 31, 1996. Four issues of each magazine were selected using random sampling allowing for equal representation of each season. In the case of weekly magazines, the first week of the first month, the second week of the second month, the third week of the third month, and the fourth week of the fourth month were used in the sample.
Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study is every full page advertisement in each magazine in which a female character occupies a space covering at least one-fourth of the page. At least one-half of the woman's body must be photographed in the advertisement.

Cartoons and illustrations were not included in the sample. The accompanying text or copy was also taken into consideration to get an idea of the woman's social status and employment or job characteristic. Other features (such as men, children, accessories and location) of the advertisement were also taken into consideration in the analysis of their relationship to the female role portrayal within the advertisement. All of the above considerations resulted in a sample of 283 advertisement pieces.

Conceptual and Operational Definition of Variables

The products in the advertisements were classified under 16 different categories. These product classes included (1) apparel and accessories, (2) electronics, (3) cosmetics and beauty products, (4) pharmaceuticals, (5) household products, (6) furnishings, (7) entertainment, (8) financial services, (9) products for the opposite sex, (10) food, (11) cigarettes, (12) alcohol, (13) vehicles, and (14) feminine hygiene. A (15) mixed category was used when the product fell into two categories simultaneously, and another category was used for residual products that (16) did not fit in the other 15 categories.
The variables product class and magazine class were used together with the following other variables as specified in the hypotheses:

**H1. Regardless of products or services being advertised, women in magazine advertisements will be portrayed in roles that overlap — professional and domestic, authoritative and decorative, and so on — or any combination of these characteristics.**

To tap the dimensions of traditional and non-traditional role portrayals, this study measured role characteristics that previous researchers have identified as typifying traditional and non-traditional women's roles. These role characteristics were measured using unipolar Likert scales, ranging from 1 to 7. A rating of 1 meant that the ad demonstrated neutrality when it comes to the specific characteristic being assessed; a rating of 4 meant that the characteristic was moderately present in the ad, and a rating of 7 indicated that the characteristic was very strongly present or was an overwhelming characteristic of the advertisement.

The *domestic* portrayal in this study is one in which the woman is pictured doing things for the home, such as shopping, cooking, caring for children, cleaning and doing the laundry. Typically, this woman would carry a purse rather than a briefcase and would wear more casual clothing, not power suits.

*Professional* portrayals picture women in work settings, conducting business through meetings with co-workers, using computers or reading reports in offices. The professional woman would typically carry a briefcase and would wear professional clothing, such as a suit.

Women are defined as *sexy* if they appear alluring or seductive. Bare skin,
beautiful hair and make-up, evening gowns or lingerie are associated with sexy portrayals. These ads would normally feature females with voluptuous figures and/or posing provocatively.

A *submissive* woman is one who is obedient. She does what others tell her. She surrenders to the needs of others. Her actions do not solely serve her own needs as she is often depicted as serving others. A mother serving dinner to her family or a secretary performing a task for her boss would be examples of submissive women.

A woman who is *business-like* is performing a business-related task. She is usually shown in a business setting, talking on the phone, using a computer or giving a presentation. A business-like woman is often depicted wearing a suit.

*Physically attractive* women are defined by their physical appearance. If facial features, hair and body-type can best be characterized as pleasing, the woman is categorized as physically attractive. More than being sexy, these models will appear to be pretty or beautiful.

*Aggressive* women are depicted as being bold and often taking the initiative when interacting with others. These women appear to have a driving energy and are used to getting what they want.

For the purposes of this study the following constitute dimensions of traditional portrayals: domestic, sexy, submissive, and physically attractive (Table 2). The Likert scale choices for each of these variables will be summed and divided by four to create a *traditional role index*.

The characteristics business-like, aggressive, and professional, on the other
Table 2. Dimensions of traditional and non-traditional roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Non-traditional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physically attractive</td>
<td>Aggressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexy</td>
<td>Professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submissive</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

hand, can be considered as dimensions of non-traditional portrayals. Their scale ratings will be added and divided by three to create a non-traditional role index.

H2. Women’s product involvement in magazine advertisements will vary across product categories.

The models’ product involvement in the advertisements is the extent to which the models are seen as integral to the success of the advertising message because of their knowledge about and relation to the product being advertised. The models in each advertisement were evaluated in terms of the levels of their functional, decorative and authoritative involvement with the product advertised.

Functional involvement was conceptually defined as the degree to which women were depicted as using the product and showing how the product works. Operationally, it was exemplified by images that showed women actually using the products. The woman’s main purpose in the advertisement was to show how to use the product or to show how well the product works. If the model, for example, is shown wearing a cosmetic or clothing line, she was classified as having a functional involvement with the product. A woman washing windows in an advertisement for a
window cleaner would be another example of a model in a functional role.

*Decorative* models have no relationship to the product in the advertisement. These models were not demonstrating the use of the product, nor did they seem to possess any knowledge of it. In these advertisements, the model does not have a relationship with the product other than the fact that they are both in the advertisement. A woman wearing a bikini while sitting on top of a car in an automobile ad is an example of a decorative model.

A depiction of an *authority* figure would be one in which a female professional attests to the performance of the product advertised. The authoritative involvement category involves advertisements that display women who know something about the product, but do not demonstrate how the product works. An automobile engineer with a car, a doctor with a prescribed medication, or a financial advisor with an investment product would be examples of product authorities. These people appear to have an educational background in a field related to the product area and possess knowledge of how the product works as opposed to how well the product works. Women who design cars were authorities; women who drive cars were not.

Each of these model involvement categories was measured on a scale from 1 to 7 where 7 meant the level of involvement was very strong in that particular category.

**H3. The depiction of women in advertising across magazine categories will show a greater focus on non-traditional roles than on traditional roles.**

Non-traditional and traditional roles were identified by grouping together the
variables associated with each role as shown in Table 2. Because of the uneven characteristic distribution for both roles, the ratings were summed and then averaged to form indices. The magazine categories used for this hypothesis are those outlined previously in Table 1.

**RQ1. Will the ratio of traditional to non-traditional role depictions echo women’s roles based on current population statistics?**

To answer this research question, the ratio of traditional to non-traditional portrayals was matched against Census statistics pertaining to the actual numbers relating to women’s participation in the work force in real life.

**RQ2. Are women already visible in business magazine ads? Are women depicted in the business magazine, Money?**

Heeding Kilbourne’s (1986) admonition about the "invisible female authority figures," this question will be answered by determining whether women now appear in the sole magazine falling under the business category. Kilbourne suggests that the mere presence of women in these publications is already an indication of progress in the attainment of gender parity in ads. Frequencies and proportions will be cited to answer this question.

**Pretesting the Coding Scheme**

To refine operational definitions and ensure consistent coder interpretations, a pretest was conducted to measure inter-coder reliability. Holsti’s (1969) formula was used to compute the inter-coder reliability:
\[
\text{Reliability} = \frac{2M}{N_1+N_2}
\]

In this formula, reliability is calculated by multiplying the mean (M) by the number of coders and dividing the product by the sum of the responses. Intercoder reliability is the level at which the coders classify the same categories in the same manner and in the same degree of measurement. In this study, the minimum level of agreement must be equal to or above 90 percent (Stemple, 1989). Agreement on the 7-point, unipolar scales used to measure each variable has been arbitrarily set at ±1 unit.

An inter-coder reliability pretest using 20 advertisements randomly selected from each of the nine magazines was conducted before the coding scheme was finalized. The pretest results showed agreement on two variables (traditional and sexy) were below the 90 percent standard. The coders discussed their interpretations and agreed upon new definitions of the two variables. The preliminary coding scheme was then revised to improve the precision of the operationalization of each of the variables.

As in the Ms. study (Ferguson, Kreshel and Tinkham, 1990), two coders were used here. One coder was a mature adult mother and housewife. The author was the second coder. Both coders in this study were white females of European descent. Women were used as coders because Bruner (1957) found that it was best to select coders from the medium's natural audience (Ferguson et al. 1990), and evidence indicates that women are more aware than men of stereotyped female portrayals in advertising (Whipple and Courtney, 1985).
The coders were given the written rules and procedures after an oral training session. To ensure reliability, the coders executed the coding process independently.

The overall inter-coder reliability was 96.7%. This overall reliability figure was calculated by dividing the number of times the coders did not agree by the overall number of coding decisions. The results of the inter-coder reliability regarding the variables of interest are shown in Table 3. All of them are acceptable by communication research standards.

Table 3. Results of inter-coder reliability testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women's roles</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Product involvement</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>Decorative</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>Functional</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexy</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submissive</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business-like</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically attractive</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of the study is to test the multiplicity of roles women portray in magazine advertisements and to compare the trends in women portrayals with real-life directions concerning the role of women in society. This chapter presents the descriptive statistics, the results of hypotheses testing, and the answers to the research questions posed.

Descriptive Results

The sample in this study included 283 advertisements from the pre-identified nine magazine categories (Table 4). As expected, the largest number of advertisements featuring women were found in the more female-oriented publications such as *Cosmopolitan* (45%), *Better Homes and Gardens* (16%) and *Redbook* (12%). One would also expect that the sports magazine *Sports Illustrated* would carry fewer ads with women models (4%, the smallest percentage of all magazine types), but there was a negligible number of such ads in the general current events-oriented publication, *Time* (6%).

In terms of product class, a large number of advertisements was trumpeting cosmetic and beauty products (89=32%), apparel and accessories (37=14%), pharmaceuticals (29=10%) and food (23=8%). Table 5 lists very few advertisements that show women endorsing electronics (3%), entertainment products (9%), home
Table 4. Number of advertisement pieces taken from each magazine

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magazine Title</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Redbook</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cosmopolitan</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader’s Digest</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevention</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Homes and Gardens</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playboy</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports Illustrated</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>283</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Number of advertisements by product category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product Category</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apparel and Accessories</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cosmetics and Beauty Products</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharmaceuticals</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Products</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furnishings</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Services</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposite Sex</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cigarettes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcoholic Beverages</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicles</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>283</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
furnishings (4%), alcoholic beverages (3%) and vehicles (4%). The table indicates that, following behavioral modeling and learning theories, advertisers are still bound by audience segmentation rules that match a product with models of consumers that are likely to use the product.

Hypothesis Testing

H1. Regardless of products or services being advertised, women in magazine advertisements will be portrayed in roles that overlap-professional and domestic, authoritative and decorative, and so on — or any combination of these characteristics.

As seen in Table 6, almost half (47%) of the characteristics measured were rated as neutral or not at all present in the advertisement. Of the total 1,981 responses, 195 (10%) showed the various characteristics measured to be moderately present. Only 110 (6%) of the responses represented very, or highly, present characteristics.

A breakdown of actual role portrayals indicate that only close to 17% of the advertisements were women portrayed as business-oriented figures and slightly above 30% of the ads portrayed them as professional-looking models (Table 7). Indeed, an overwhelming majority of ads still show women in the more traditional submissive, physically attractive and sexy roles. However, compared to previous studies on role portrayals, there are considerably fewer domestic product endorsements identified in this study (roughly 30%).

A total of 277 advertisements (98%) analyzed depicted women in overlapping roles. Of the overlapping role combinations, 146 advertisements (52% of all
Table 6. Frequency of response ratings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response rating</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>939</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Number of advertisements rated 2 to 7 in the traditional versus non-traditional role scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Number of ads rated 2 to 7 in the characteristic scale</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submissive</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>75.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>29.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically attractive</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>97.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexy</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>82.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-traditional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>32.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>30.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business-oriented</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>16.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 A rating of 2 indicates a slight trace of the role characteristic. A rating of 7 indicates strong portrayal of the characteristic.
advertisements studied) contained a combination of only "traditional" type roles (domestic, sexy, submissive or physically attractive) with ratings of 2 or higher. A combination of "non-traditional" type roles (professional, business-like or aggressive) and "traditional" roles was present in 131 advertisements (46% of all advertisements). As seen in Table 8, less than 3% of all advertisements contained one role, a combination of only "non-traditional roles," or received neutral ratings in all categories measured. Because the majority of the advertisements in this study depicted women in overlapping roles, the first hypothesis is supported.

Table 8. Number of advertisements in each type of role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of role combinations</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional roles</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional and non-traditional roles</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-traditional roles</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>283</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

H2. Women's model involvement in magazine advertisements will vary across product categories.

Because some product categories indicate less than five cases, the product classes were collapsed into "traditional products" (products traditionally purchased by women) and "non-traditional products" (products traditionally purchased by men). These new product categories were compared individually with each of the ordinally measured model involvement dimensions using independent t-tests. As outlined in
Table 9, less than 8% of the ads depicted women as authority figures, with a huge majority (91%) still showing them as being placed next to the product as mere "decorations" or visual devices to attract attention.

As detailed in Table 10, the mean authoritative rating for non-traditional products (1.7679) was higher than that of the traditional products (1.1374). This indicates that there is a significant difference between traditional and non-traditional product portrayals in terms of authority involvements. Non-traditional product ads show more women in authority roles than those portrayed in ads espousing the virtues of traditionally female-oriented products.

Table 9. Number of advertisements rated 2 to 7 in the three product involvement roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Number of ads rated 2 to 7 in the involvement scale(^1)</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decorative</td>
<td>258</td>
<td>91.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>65.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritative</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) A rating of 2 indicates a slight trace of the involvement characteristics. A rating of 7 indicates strong portrayal of the involvement characteristic.

There was no difference found, however, between the two product classes in the level of decorative and functional involvement shown by female models.

Overall, non-traditional products are more likely to have a female authority figure present in advertisements; traditional products are more likely to have
Table 10. T-test results showing the differences between traditional and non-traditional female portrayals in terms of product involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Involvement</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard dev.</th>
<th>t-value for unequal variances</th>
<th>Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Functional</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional products</td>
<td>3.4834</td>
<td>2.157</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.669</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-traditional</td>
<td>3.3214</td>
<td>2.601</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authority figures</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-2.65*</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional products</td>
<td>1.1374</td>
<td>0.825</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-traditional</td>
<td>1.7679</td>
<td>1.727</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decorative</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional products</td>
<td>4.8863</td>
<td>1.904</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-traditional</td>
<td>4.6607</td>
<td>2.384</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Product class was divided into 1 = traditionally female-oriented products (n=211) and 2 = traditionally male-oriented products (n=56).

Women in advertisements were generally depicted as being highly decorative with ratings above 5 (65%). About 54% of the advertisements showed highly physically attractive women, based on the number of ratings above 5. Most of the advertisements in this study did not use women as authority figures or product users, but most were attractive or beautiful regardless of the level of product involvement.

Because there is a significant difference in the model's level of authority involvement between the product classes, this hypothesis was supported by the results.
H3. *The depiction of women in advertising across magazine categories will show a greater focus on non-traditional roles than on traditional roles.*

As previously discussed in the first hypothesis, the percentage of advertisements containing only "non-traditional" type roles was 1%. The percentage of advertisements with only "traditional" type roles was 53%. A total of 131 advertisements fell into both role categories. In a comparison of the total number of occurrences of each role category, traditional roles out-numbered non-traditional roles. (Table 11).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Number of occurrences</th>
<th>% of advertisements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional roles</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-traditional roles</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To test if there is a difference in role portrayals by magazine category, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted. The tests showed significant differences across magazine classes only in terms of traditional role portrayals, but the differences go against the hypothesized direction. The ANOVA shown in Table 12 verifies the frequency distribution which shows that traditional role portrayals are predominant in what have been historically described as women's magazines. Therefore, this hypothesis was not supported.
Table 12. One-way analysis of variance tests showing differences in traditional and non-traditional role depictions by magazine class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>D.F.</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Mean Squares</th>
<th>F Ratio</th>
<th>F Prob.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional roles</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>99.0071</td>
<td>24.7518</td>
<td>5.7738*</td>
<td>.0002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>1191.7703</td>
<td>4.2869</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>1290.7774</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-traditional roles</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>46.0019</td>
<td>9.2004</td>
<td>2.0474</td>
<td>.0723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>1244.7755</td>
<td>4.4938</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>1290.7774</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*RQ1. Will the ratio of traditional to non-traditional role depictions echo women’s roles based on 1995 population statistics?*

Of the population of adult women in the United States, 59% were recorded as active participants in the labor force in 1995. This does not match the percentage of non-traditional role depictions found in this study, which is 47%. Although the percentages are not too far apart, one can say that, on the whole, advertisements do not exactly mirror the current trends of female participation in the larger economic sphere.

*RQ2. Are women already visible in business magazine ads? Are women depicted in the business magazine, Money?*

The four issues of the business magazine, *Money*, contained 251 full-page advertisements. Of this, only 15 met the criteria for selection in this study. Because
less than one percent of the full-page advertisements in the business magazine contained a depiction of a woman meeting the criteria of the study, one can say that women are not very visible in this magazine type.

In advertisements for financial services, 20% of the women depicted were professional. On the other hand, 71% of women in the financial service advertisements were depicted as nontraditional (meaning the combination of professional, business-like and aggressive characteristics were present).

In short, in most cases, the way women are depicted is related to the type of product being advertised. Very few advertisements showed women in some product categories. Advertisements for mutual funds, financial advisors, and investment brokerages, for example, not only seemed to lack depictions of women; several of these advertisements did not show human models altogether. In many cases women are also often portrayed in a neutral role that does not appear to be related to the product at all.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study measured the multiplicity of women's role portrayals in magazine advertisements. Although the study provides some interesting insights on the way women are portrayed in magazine advertising, these results should be tempered with the following study limitations.

Limitations

The data for this study were collected from magazines published only in 1996. Because magazine issues were only collected from a one-year time period, future efforts point to longitudinal designs to observe trends in the ways women are portrayed in magazine advertising.

Another important limitation is that the coding was done by two Caucasian females of European descent. Had the coders been of a different nationality, race or gender, the outcome may have been different. Since age and occupation were also important aspects taken into consideration, difficulties existed in finding appropriate coders who met all of the demographic needs of the study.

The third limitation involves the selection of magazines. The magazines used in the study were selected due to their large circulation and the way they were classified by the Standard Rate and Data Service. Each of the magazines was classified under at least one of the main general categories. Smaller magazines focusing on specific gender or ethnicity may have provided different outcomes. For
example, advertisements in business publications written for women may show more women as having strong characteristics in the nontraditional and professional variables.

The majority of the advertisements coded for this study came from *Cosmopolitan*. Although the purpose of this study was to analyze the advertisements that reach the largest population of magazine readers, the type of advertisements found in *Cosmopolitan* may have directly influenced the results of this study. By observing a proportional number of advertisements from the various magazine types, the study may have resulted in much different findings.

Two magazines primarily focusing on female audiences (*Redbook* and *Cosmopolitan*) were used for this study. Only one magazine targeting male audiences (*Playboy*) was included. Another limitation may have been created by the lack of another counterpart men's magazine.

Due to the nature of the content in *Playboy*, a different advertising technique may be present in this magazine compared with other men's magazines that do not contain nudity. Although *Playboy* met the minimum circulation requirements for this particular study, it was the only magazine used with a well-known reputation for nude content. The goal of this study was to measure the types of messages received by the majority of magazine readers, but it was limited in equal representation of magazine types for both sexes. To achieve equality, a men's magazine without nudity should have countered *Redbook*, a men's magazine dedicated to fashion and beauty to compare with *Cosmopolitan*, and a women's
magazine containing male nudity to balance *Playboy* should have been incorporated into the study.

This study failed to compare the advertisements reviewed with the total number of advertisements in the magazines selected. The study would also have been enhanced by comparing the advertisements selected with the number of advertisements with depictions of men. By doing so, the study would have reflected the overall percentages of advertisements without human models, those containing men and those containing women.

Another way the study was limited was in the variables that were selected. A broader range of variables may have provided more insight in the way women are portrayed in magazine advertisements.

The seven-point, unipolar scale may have also confounded the findings as the majority of the variables were assessed to be on the ends of the continuum, either strongly present or not present at all.

The unipolar scales, however, did prove to be useful because many of the advertisements did not focus on a specific role portrayal. It was difficult to assign advertisements neatly into categories; classifying them under “other” would not explain what was exactly missing, or what was present, in the depiction.

Women are mostly portrayed as decorative objects in advertisements for many products. Although their presence may be unnecessary, including women in the advertisement may enhance the product.

Among product classes, household products, pharmaceuticals and furnishings were most representative of objects used for home and family and were
the subjects of 48% of the advertisements. The percentage of advertisements for home and family products depicting women in traditional roles was 56%.

Most of the women depicted in the advertisements were physically attractive. In those rare instances when they were not, they possessed a striking or unusual quality which the advertiser may wish readers to associate with the product.

Even in advertisements that are predominantly business-oriented in their portrayal of women, most models were also physically attractive or sexy. Physical attraction and sexiness were deemed traditional characteristics in this study, but they seem to be goals many women, traditional and non-traditional alike, constantly strive to attain.

Although the findings lend support to previous studies showing that women are generally portrayed as sex objects and as having a decorative relationship to the product advertised, this study's conclusions differ in a number of ways. For one, it demonstrates that the portrayal of women in 1996 magazine advertisements does not reflect the actual roles of women in the real world. Even though women are not necessarily being portrayed as being overly domestic or traditional, there are few portrayals of women in the business or professional setting. The neutral role women exhibit in advertisements could be seen as a "balancing act" by advertisers to satisfy women in both domestic and professional roles, but the number of women associated with traditionally male-oriented product categories is still overwhelmingly low.

Other reasons may exist for the low numbers of women in advertisements for non-traditional products. It is possible that there are few magazine advertisements
for these types of products because other media may prove more successful in selling these products. Men may also continue to be the primary purchasers of these items.

Women were not portrayed as highly authoritative figures in the vast majority of the advertisements in magazines. As for the functional aspect of model involvement, it is difficult to demonstrate how a product works in a still photo. It is possible advertisers may choose to forfeit a demonstration approach in a medium that creates difficulties in presenting action.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study brings attention to several facets of role depictions that have been left unexplored. Although the unipolar scale approach of this study provided new insights into the ways women are portrayed in magazine advertisements, this study points to several suggestions for future study.

To determine if advertisements for automobiles, financial services and electronics are depicting women differently from men, the portrayal of both genders needs to be studied concurrently. A more gender-comparative analysis should thresh out the nature and magnitude of these differences. For instance, it is quite possible that the roles of men have been evolving along with the roles of women. To explore this question to the fullest, researchers must ask if men are also used as decorations in most advertisements, and if many of the men depicted are physically attractive. Advertisers may be trying to move away from the stereotypical portrayals
of men and women as they move toward neutral depictions, or even toward the absence of human models entirely.

The total number of advertisements for non-traditional products across magazine categories would also be an interesting area of study. The results of this type of study may provide clarification to previous research regarding women's depictions in non-traditional product areas. Magazines may not be the primary medium used to advertise these kinds of products.

According to the posted circulation rates, men's magazines do not reach large audiences. Although the size of the audience is not large, a study of advertisements in men's magazines may provide interesting results. A study which includes an array of men's magazines containing nudity could also prove insightful since Playboy did not seem to focus on traditional portrayals of women.

Another aspect deserving of exploration involves ethnicity which may substantially affect role portrayals of women. The lack of different ethnic representations in the advertisements has been observed in this study. A study involving publications focusing on specific ethnic groups may provide more detail into the current depictions of women, along with the current depictions of people who are not Caucasian. A study that compares ethnicity and race with women's role depictions in magazines from the United States and other cultures will further strengthen the body of literature on gender portrayals.

The findings also indicate that advertisers still do not know their public. While it is difficult to meet the demands of a public who wants to be portrayed in a realistic
light, formative research must be conducted to keep up with demographic change as well as changes in people's media exposure and attention habits.

**Conclusion**

This research has shown the usefulness of unipolar scales in measuring the multidimensional aspects of women's role portrayals. The findings indicate women are not often depicted in one all encompassing role within a single advertisement, they are comprised of several different characteristics which combine both traditional and non-traditional ideals simultaneously.

Depictions of women continue to be missing from the majority of non-traditional female purchases, but the advertisements may be mirroring societal trends. Advertisers will want to continue to follow the rules of audience segmentation by matching product models with the consumers who are most likely to make the purchase.

The current research has shown that there are fewer domestic product endorsements than were formerly identified by other researchers in prior years. Although the domestic product endorsements have decreased, images of business-like women have not increased significantly.

Advertisers appear to be stepping toward more neutral depictions of women, as opposed to choosing traditional over non-traditional themes for female models. Advertisers may be attempting to appeal to an audience that is increasingly difficult to segment into one specific category. In the past, researchers have stated women are a target constantly changing (Bartos, 1982). Advertisers may find it difficult to not
only portray their audience accurately, but the possibility exists there may be difficulties in not offending the market with certain role depictions.

Stereotypes will continue to be present in advertisements. People use stereotypes as a quick reference in communication to express an idea quickly and effectively. Advertising does play a role in perpetuating the stereotypes used by the public. As the stereotypical person is continually evolving, advertisers will also want to depict this evolution in their advertisements. Accurate depictions of the target audience will help sell products while performing a civic duty.

The main goal of advertising is to make money. A side-affect of advertising is the way it shapes societal views. People use advertisements as a point of reference for comparison. If people begin to believe the social norm is depicted in the advertisements, inaccurate depictions may inadvertently shape the future of society.

Women are frequently found as decorative objects in advertisements for many products. The medium creates challenges in demonstrative advertising as one single photo is often used to show the product in an advertisement. A woman shown leisurely reading a book in an advertisement for a food product may not be demonstrating how the product works, she may be demonstrating the benefits created (in this case time to herself) by using the product.

The majority of advertisements aimed at women are hawking products related to beauty and fashion. The market for these categories of products appears to be ever-growing and changing. Producers must advertise heavily to compete in their market and provide reasoning why their product stands above the countless number of similar items in their class.
Physical attraction and sexiness commonly appear in the female role portrayals of advertising. Paired with advertisements for fashion and beauty, the idea many women, regardless of their traditional or non-traditional ideals, may strive to obtain beauty in their lives.

Society seems to appreciate beauty on many levels- in art, home decor, the landscape- it would seem logical advertisements would continue a theme of beauty on all levels, including the type of human models used to endorse the product. Advertisers have a responsibility to portray the public accurately. Even though it is difficult to keep up with the changing roles of women, advertisers seem to move cautiously into new role portrayals. Their desire to sell products is their motivation for continually updating the roles depicted in future magazines.
APPENDIX A. CODING INSTRUCTIONS

1. Case number

2. Magazine name the advertisement is from
   (1) Redbook
   (2) Cosmopolitan
   (3) Reader’s Digest
   (4) Prevention
   (5) Better Homes and Gardens
   (6) Playboy
   (7) Time
   (8) Sports Illustrated
   (9) Money

3. Product Class The product advertised fits in the class of
   (1) apparel and accessories
   (2) electronics
   (3) cosmetics/beauty products
   (4) pharmaceuticals
   (5) household products
   (6) furnishings
   (7) entertainment
   (8) financial services
   (9) products for opposite sex
   (10) food
   (11) cigarettes
   (12) alcohol
   (13) vehicles
   (14) mixed category
   (15) other
   (16) feminine hygiene

4. Woman’s role Rate each quality as it applies on a seven-point scale
   neutral moderately very
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   (1) domestic Homemaker/caregiver/mother
   (2) professional Member of the workforce
   (3) sexy Provocative/alluring/sensual
   (4) submissive Obedient/overpowered by another
   (5) business-like Member of the business world
   (6) physically attractive Beautiful by social standards
   (7) aggressive Bold/in pursuit of something

5. Model involvement Rate the extent of the model’s purpose in the advertisement
   neutral moderately very
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7
   (1) functional Model clearly demonstrates product
   (2) decorative Model is solely a decoration
   (3) authority Product expert by profession (Doctor/medicine)
# APPENDIX B. CODING SHEET

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Case number</th>
<th>Magazine name</th>
<th>Product type</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Woman's role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Domestic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sexy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Submissive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Business-like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Physically attractive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Aggressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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My husband, and all of my friends, provided a wonderful support system for me. I owe them my sanity; and for this, I am forever grateful.