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Female Stereotypes in Print Advertising: A Retrospective Analysis

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Abstract

The depiction of females in advertising has received considerable academic attention, fuelled by the feminist movement and the evolution of women's roles in the society. Early studies revealed the prevalence of traditional portrayals such as housewives, women dependent on a man's protection and depictions of sexual objectification. Even though a decrease in female stereotyping would be reasonable considering the contemporary structure of society that prescribes multiple gender roles, this does not seem to be the case: The literature is replete with studies documenting that female stereotyping is alive and well, even if it manifests itself with different types and patterns than it did some decades ago. This study strives to adopt a holistic outlook to the phenomenon of female stereotypes in print advertisements, tracing its origins, analyzing the interplay of stereotypes and advertising, undertaking an exhaustive perusal of the particular stream of literature, addressing methodological issues and proposing directions for further research.

1. Introduction

The investigation of gender stereotypes in advertising is counting five decades of research, resulting in a significant body of knowledge. The particular stream of literature was inflamed by several social and historical contingencies: The rise of the womens' movement in the 1960s contested equal opportunities for males and females and propelled a gradual change in occupational settings and domestic structures as well (Zotos and Lysonski 1994; Plakoyiannaki and Zotos 2009; Tsichla and Zotos 2013a). The tendency of more and more women to acquire higher education, their growing participation in the work force and the claim for highest and executive positions previously dominated by their male counterparts, brought about compelling changes. Not only did women acquire a financial independence that allowed for an increased disposable income, but more importantly, their social and educational status has significantly evolved. As a result, ethical considerations and concerns regarding their portrayal in cultural vehicles such as advertising were instigated.

According to several feminist theorists, the Western thought has been constructed on a systematic repression of the feminine (Jones 1993; Whitford 1991). The resurgence of the feminism argued that advertising in popular media can be viewed as a primary means for introducing and promoting female role stereotypes and sexism, articulating a call for academic research endeavors. Particularly, feminist theorists mainly centered on the following images: portrayals that were unrealistic and limited; pictures of women as sex objects, "happy housewives" themes of females as incompetent, portrayals of womens' dependency upon men; and underrepresentation of working women (Wasson 1973; Courtney and Whipple 1983). This criticism may have influenced female portrayals, since later on, some evidence was found indicating a shift towards fewer depictions of dependency and sexualization (Lysonski, 1983; Mager and Helgeson, 2011). However, during the 1980s and

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1990s, feminist ideas were somewhat weakened (Williamson, 2003) and attitudes regarding women's' sexual freedom were clouded. Although media seemed to advocate pictures and stories of female empowerment and personal independence, a fertile ground was again provided for the incorporation and promotion of female sexualized images in advertising pictorials (Mager and Helgeson, 2011). However, attitudes toward female sexism were not similar to the pre feminist period: In the 1990s, female sexual imagery was regarded as radical rather than unfair and exploitative (Plakoyiannaki and Zotos 2009).

Interestingly, although the role of women in society began to shift since the 1960s, the pertinent literature seems to indicate that female portrayals in advertising have been slow to adjust to their evolving status. Particularly, the depiction of women in professional roles and voices of authority at the expense of housewife roles and dependency representations, reports a significant time lag before its depiction in advertising imagery (Gilly, 1988). Even today, recent studies postulate that advertisements do not reflect contemporary gender roles (Plakoyiannaki and Zotos 2009; Tsichla and Zotos 2013a) posing concerns that advertisers incorporate stereotypical images that no longer exist (DeYoung and Crane, 1992). Possible reasons could be traced to cultural effects and the role of social institutions that may continue to diffuse non-egalitarian attitudes and hierarchical patterns in the relationship between males and females. On the other hand, it could be speculated that advertisers may consciously promote female traditional roles and sex object representations in order to satisfy the male gaze, provoke, and stimulate hype.

2. Advertising and Stereotypes

Perkins (1997) considered a stereotype as a group concept that reflects inferior judgment and gives rise to a simple structure, implying a high probability that stereotypes are predominantly evaluative. Barker (1999) argues that a stereotype involves the reduction of persons to a set of exaggerated, usually negative, character traits and stressed that stereotyping reduces, naturalizes, and fixes differences. Stereotypes do not necessarily bare negative connotations, though may lead to oversimplified conceptions and expectations that devaluate and restrict potential opportunities of subjects of a social category (Eisend, 2010; Tsichla and Zotos, 2013a,b). Gender stereotypes in particular, are defined as beliefs that certain attributes differentiate women and men (Ashmore and Del Boca 1981). According to Deaux and Lewis (1984), gender stereotypes have four different and independent components: trait descriptors (e.g., self-assertion, concern for others), physical characteristics (e.g. hair length, body height), role behaviors (e.g., leader, taking care of children), and occupational status (e.g. truck driver, housewife). Every integral part is associated with a masculine and feminine version, which is strongly related to males and females, respectively. Each gender stereotyping component may lead to negative consequences particularly for women, such as body dissatisfaction, reduced self-confidence and confinement of professional opportunities. Hence, it is no surprise that the European Parliament (2008) gave careful consideration on the avoidance of gender stereotypes, raising public policy concerns toward marketing activities that promote them. According to Tuchman (1979) such 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. Gender stereotypes in the media, and the mass media in particular, have a long-recognized capacity to define "socially-acceptable" ways of being or relating to others, as well as to give, or withhold, public approval (and status) to, or from, certain groups (Carter and Steiner, 2004).

The "Mirror" versus the "Mold" Argument

The nature of the relationship between gender-related values of society and gender stereotyping in advertising is the focus of a long-standing debate. Two opposing arguments have been articulated, the "mirror" versus the "mold" argument (Holbrook 1987; Pollay, 1986, 1987). According to the "mirror" argument, advertising reflects values that already prevail in a cultural context (Holbrook 1987; Eisend 2010). The rationale behind this argument lies in the existence of multiple interrelated factors in the contemporary socioeconomic and political environment that influence the value system of a society. Therefore, the impact of advertising seems insignificant. In this light, men and women featured in advertisements generally have been typecast to adhere to the dominant concepts held regarding gender roles (Holbrook, 1987). Conversely, the "mold" argument postulates that advertising molds and impacts on the values of its target audience (Pollay 1986, 1987). This view considers advertisements a reflection of society, and its prevailing cultural values (Manstead and McCulloch, 1981). According to Cultivation theory (Gerbner and Gross, 1973), peoples' view of social reality is shaped by the media. They tend to incorporate stereotypes presented by the media in their own concepts of reality so as to match the particular promoted images. Ultimately, this process contours individual behaviors in a way that even the relationships of human beings with themselves, their bodies and their partners are influenced by advertising (Giddens, 1991).

However, gender identities are socially constructed (Wolf, 1991) and advertising proposes lifestyles and forms of self-presentation that individuals use to define their roles in the society (Plakoyiannaki et al. 2008). The majority of ad campaigns invoke gender identity, drawing their imagery primarily from the stereotyped iconography of masculinity and femininity (Schroeder and Zwick, 2004). According to Goffman (1979), advertisements picturing men and women in interaction offer "gender displays" that educate the viewer about conventional modes of gender interaction and sex roles. Taking all the above into consideration, it could be suggested that the truth lies somewhere in the continuum between the "mirror" and the "mold"

argument. Since advertising, as a system of visual representation, creates meaning within the "circuit" of culture, it seems that it both reflects and contributes to culture (Hall, 1980; Albers-Miller and Gelb, 1996). According to Kilbourne (1999, pp. 57-58): *"Advertising is our environment. We swim in it as fish swim in the water. We cannot escape it…advertising messages are inside our intimate relationships, our home, our hearts, our heads."*

Advertising and Sexism

The literature (Lysonski, 1985; Kilbourne, 1999; Cortese, 1999; Lazar, 2006) generally agrees that advertising clearly contributes to gender inequality by promoting "sexism" and distorted body image ideals as valid and acceptable. Sexism refers to the portrayals of women in an inferior way relative to their capabilities and potential, and is manifested in the depiction of clichéd traditional and decorative roles in advertising (Lysonski, 1985; Pollay, 1986; Plakoyiannaki and Zotos, 2009). Even though exposure to sexually objectifying advertisements is found to produce anti-women attitudes (Lanis and Covell, 1995; MacKay and Covell, 1997), the sexual victimization of women is glamorized in advertisements (Kilbourne, 1999) and is suggested to provide a backlash against women's increasing power in society (Stankiewicz and Rosselli, 2008).

The Ambivalent Sexism Theory (Glick and Fiske, 1997) contends that in most societies, two different components of sexism are evident: Hostility and benevolence. Hostile sexism is explicitly antagonistic toward women who are considered to be challenging men's power and seeking to gain control over them. In other words, it attributes negative criticism to women who do not ascribe to traditional roles. It presents women as unfit to make important decisions, depicting them as easily manipulated, vulnerable, and weak. On the other hand, benevolent sexism is a subjectively positive attitude toward women who are seen as warmer but less competent than men. This form of sexism is more subtle and it evokes feelings of protectiveness and sympathy toward females, on the grounds of their inferiority. Benevolent sexism is suggested to promote traditional subservient female roles and is related to the depiction of women in decorative roles in advertising (Glick and Fiske, 1996, 1997; Plakoyiannaki et al. 2008). Both hostile and benevolent sexism are evident in categories of female role stereotypes in advertising (Glick and Fiske, 1996, 1997).

It is interesting to observe that modern media seem to portray female bodies through the use of "retro-sexist" imagery of women in advertising (Gill and Arthurs, 2006; Plakoyiannaki and Zotos, 2009). Retro-sexism is defined as a social and stylistic phenomenon, based on the communication of culturally sanctioned aspects of femininity related to notions of dependency, attractiveness, and adherence to household tasks (Whelehan, 2000; Williamson, 2003). Whereas some researchers suggest that retro-sexism in advertising appears to empower women, others contend this phenomenon can be seen as a backlash against feminism (Gill and Herdieckerhoff, 2006). The main difference between retro-sexism and earlier female sexualualized images lies in the assimilation of feminist criticism against sexist advertising, so as to produce "commercial femininities" in the service of commodity consumption (Lazar, 2006, p. 505).

3. The Relevant Literature

A sound literature on female portrayals in advertising has been developed, using content analysis as an instrument for the elucidation of stereotypical depictions. Print advertisement in particular has been excessively investigated, as magazine advertisements provide a "frozen frame" that facilitates thorough visual examination and the application of a code scheme (Mager and Helgeson, 2011). Even though research in female stereotyping counts more than fifty years of research applied in various cultural contexts, the relevant studies reveal that empirical findings regarding the frequency and type of female stereotyping are far from similar. A summary of key studies' context and major results is illustrated in Table 1.

Early studies examining female advertising portrayals argued in favor of stereotypical depictions that mostly evolved around domestic settings and traditional, concerned with physical attractiveness or sex object portrayals. Courtney and Lockeretz (1971) argued that advertising shows that a woman's place is at home, that women are dependent on a man's protection and that women appear incapable of making important decisions. They also postulated that females are presented as sexual objects and are not regarded as whole people. In a similar vein, in a longitudinal study of female role stereotypes in print media from 1958 to 1970 and 1972, Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976) demonstrated that women are primarily portrayed in

Table 1. Literature overview in female role portrayals in magazine advertisements

Authors	Period/context	Key Findings
Courtney and Lockeretz (1971)	1970/USA	Stereotypes of dependency, housewife, sex object and women making unimportant decisions
Wagner and Banos (1973)	1972/USA	Moderation of stereotypes identified by Courtney and Lockertz
Venkatesan and Losco (1975)	1959-1971/ USA	The portrayal of women as sex objects has decreased
Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976)	1958; 1970;1972/USA	Stereotypes of dependency, sex objects and women making unimportant decisions; some moderation in housewife or mother stereotype

Goffman (1976)	1972-1989/ USA	Women depicted in subordination to male models and in licensed withdrawal from the physical scene of the advertisement
Poe (1976)	1928, 1956, 1972/ USA	Women depicted less in competitive sports and more in recreational situations from 1928 to 1972
Klassen et al. (1983)	1972-1989/ USA	Disproportionately high number of advertisements that portrayed women in traditional roles; yet there is progress toward depiction of women
Lysonski (1983)	1974-1975; 1979-80/USA	Women shown less frequently as dependent upon men and more frequently as career-oriented
Lysonski (1985)	1976; 1982-1983/UK	Women are depicted concerned with physical attractiveness; yet there is progress toward depiction of women
Ruggiero and Weston (1985)	1971-1980/ USA	Women less frequently portrayed as having responsibility and power; women are frequently depicted in traditional occupations
Sexton and Haberman (1988)	1950-51; 1960-61;1970-71/USA	No significant changes in stereotyping of women; women primarily depicted in decorative roles
Sullivan and O' Connor (1988)	1958-1983 USA	There is progress in the depiction of women in occupational roles and a decrease in traditional roles. Decorative and sex roles are on the rise.
Ferguson et al. (1990)	1973-1987/ USA	Women increasingly portrayed as sex objects
Mitchell and Taylor (1990)	1988/UK	Women depicted concerned with physical attractiveness and as housewives
Zotos and Lysonski (1994)	1992-1993/ Greece	Women shown in non-active and decorative roles
Wiles et al. (1995)	Early 1990s/ The Netherlands, Sweden, USA	Women depicted primarily in decorative roles in Dutch and US Magazines
		Women depicted in recreational and domestic roles in Sweden
Piron and Young (1996)	1986,1989 and 1992/ Germany and USA	Role portrayal of women in both countries has become more subdued
Zotos et al. (1996)	1982-1983 and 1987-1988/Italy	Women depicted concerned with physical attractiveness
Kang (1997)	1979-1991 / USA	Few changes were found in women's images over time. Withdrawal postures and body display reported an increase.
Lindner (2004)	1955-2002 / USA	Only a slight decrease of female stereotyping was found over time. Women are frequently depicted as objectified, subordinate to men and positions of withdrawal
Döring and Pöschl (2006)	2001-2003/ Germany	Women depicted in dependency postures, withdrawal positions and display more naked skin than males. Women portrayed in feminine settings as relaxing and decorative
Plakoyiannaki and Zotos (2009)	2004-2005/ UK	Women portrayed primarily in decorative roles
Mager and Helgeson (2011)	1950-2000/ U.S.A	There is progress in traditional and domestic portrayals, but females are still portrayed as dependent upon men. Sex object portrayals have even increased
Tsichla and Zotos (2013)	2011-2012/ Cyprus	Women are mostly depicted in decorative roles. When females are portrayed together with males, they are portrayed more traditional roles than when displayed alone

traditional and decorative roles, failing to mirror the changing role of women in society. This kind of stereotyping was corroborated by following studies conducted even in the mid-eighties (Sexton and Haberman, 1974; Poe, 1976; Lysonski, 1983; Ruggiero and Weston, 1985). For instance, Sexton and Haberman (1974) postulated that advertising imagery portrays females in housewife roles and concerned with physical attractiveness, situated in predictable environments such as household settings. In a similar vein, in a study of female role portrayals in the UK, Lysonski (1985) demonstrated that women are predominantly shown as concerned with their physical attractiveness, as housewives and as objects of sexual gratification.

Conversely, numerous studies seem to paint a different picture that challenges the proliferation of female stereotypical images in magazine advertisements (Wagner and Banos, 1973; Venkateshan and Losco, 1975; Lysonski, 1983; Klassen Jasper and Schwartz, 1993). Klassen Jasper and Schwartz (1993) suggested that since the early 1980s, traditional depictions of women have been decreasing. Similarly, a cross-cultural study of Piron and Young (1996) between Germany and the US, documented that role portrayals of women in both countries have become more subdued. A shift in the type of stereotyping seems to occur, since traditional depictions of females in housewife and dependency roles –though still disproportionally used compared to "equality portrayals"- appear to decrease in favor of decorative images (Mitchell and Taylor, 1990; Zotos and Lysonski, 1994; Wiles, Wiles and Tjernlund, 1995; Piron and Young, 1996; Zotos and al. 1996; Lindner, 2004; Plakoyiannaki and Zotos, 2009). For instance, Mitchell and Taylor (1990), reported a declining tendency of female displays in domestic and sex object roles, yet images of women in decorative roles prevail in female oriented magazine advertisements. Research by

Zotos and Lysonski (1994) in Greece further support this tendency, showing both a remarkable decrease in the appearance of women in household roles and as dependent on men, and an increasing display of females in non-active and decorative roles. Conversely, female depictions in professional settings and carrier roles are rarely promoted, and even in case they appear, women tend to be portrayed in clerical, sales and service type of jobs and not as executive professionals, decision makers and entrepreneurs. (Lysonski, 1985; Ruggiero and Weston, 1985; Zotos and Lysonski, 1994; Wiles, Wiles and Tjernlund, 1995; Zotos et al. 1996; Plakoyiannaki and Zotos, 2009).

Evidence regarding female sexualized images in magazine advertisements is conflicting. Venkatesan and Losco (1975) studied the role of women in print advertisements in the U.S. for the period 1959-1971 and argued that the depiction of women as sex objects has considerably decreased since 1961. On the other hand, According to Kang (1997) the overall amount of sexism in magazine advertisements in the U.S. remained the same from 1979 to 1991. In a comparative study of magazine advertisements from 1983 to those from 1958 and 1970, Sullivan and O'Connor (1988) documented that portrayals of women in decorative and sexualized roles have increased by 60% between 1958 and 1983. Carpenter and Edison (2005) demonstrate an increase in the sexual representation of women, as female models are far more likely to be depicted as sexual beings than males. In a similar vein, Lindner (2004) postulates that over the period from 1955 to 2002, women have been more frequently shown in sexualized ways or as adopting body postures that suggest the need for protection.

Recent research evidence seems to support the idea that female stereotyping is currently more subtle and indirect, aligning with the notion of benevolent sexism. Döring and Pöschl (2006) conducted a study focusing in magazine advertisements for mobile communication systems, indicating that although traditional patterns such as family and housewife representations were rarely found, women are depicted in settings other than professional, mainly as relaxing and decorative. Furthermore, they display withdrawal positions and appear in nude or body revealing images more often than men. Mager and Helgeson, (2011) in a review of 50 years of magazine advertising in the United States, demonstrate that early female portrayals that placed women almost entirely in domestic settings and unable to make important decisions do no longer stand. Nevertheless, contemporary advertising pictorials continue to present women as dependent upon men's protection. What's more, the display of females as objects of sexual desire may have become even more prominent.

4. Methodological Issues

The vast majority of research studies conducted within the realm of gender stereotypes implemented quantitative content analysis so as to detect the specific types of stereotypical portrayals. Content analysis is chosen as it constitutes a *"summarizing, quantitative analysis of messages that relies on the scientific method, including attention to objectivity/ intersubjectivity, a priori design, reliability, validity, generalizability, replicability, and hypothesis testing"* (Neuendorf 2002, p.10). Further, content analysis is relevant in the particular context since it presents gender researchers with a set of useful tools for studying messages containing information about sex and gender roles (e.g. Argamon et al. 2003; Fields et al. 2010; Neuendorf, 2011). A useful instrument for the investigation of female role stereotypes should reflect a variety of women's roles. Such an instrument is based in categories suggested and adopted by numerous studies in the field (e.g. Belkaoui and Belkaoui 1976; Mitchell and Taylor 1990; Lysonski 1985; Zotos and Lysonski, 1994; Plakoyiannaki and Zotos 2009) and is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Coding instrument: Categories for female role stereotypes.

Category	Description
Women in traditional Roles	
1. Dependency	Dependent on male's protection; in need of reassurance; making unimportant decisions
2. Housewife	Woman's place is at home; primary role is to be a good wife; concerned with tasks of housekeeping
Women in Decorative roles	
3. Women concerned with physical attractiveness	Women in pursuit of beauty and physical attractiveness (e.g. youthful)
4. Women as sex objects	Sex is related to product; sex is related to product
5. Women in non-traditional roles	
5. Women in non-traditional activities	Engaged in activities outside the home (e.g. golf, football)
6. Career-oriented women	Professional occupations; entertainer; non-professional; blue-collar
7. Voice of authority	The expert
Women portrayed as equal to men	
8. Neutral	Women shown as equal to men

5. Is the instrument still valid today?

Since the stereotype categories of the above coding scheme were developed some decades ago, considerable skepticism regarding its validity in the current, more complex and fluid socioeconomic context could be warranted. The advent of the internet that broke new grounds in marketing by the introduction of new platforms as advertising vehicles, the postmodern characteristics that are more than evident in the contemporary society, and the growing need to target the long neglected market segments of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender consumers, paint a multilateral picture that bears little similarity to the 60s when the interest in gender stereotyping began to flourish. The remainder of this section addresses each of the aforementioned aspects thoroughly.

The internet revolution of the last few years propelled the widespread use of web applications, new electronic media, social networks, and the development of customized, interactive and digital opportunities that altered the traditional pattern of mass advertising decoded by a passive audience. Online advertising is excessively used today, and similar to print advertising relies on visual images to convey messages to the audience. Hence, the applicability of the coding scheme in online advertising is an interesting area where a dearth of academic research is evident. A first step to fill this gap was made by Plakoyiannaki et al. (2008) who used the instrument to content analyze 600 online advertisements collected from high-traffic web pages. The findings highlighted the portrayal of females mainly in traditional and decorative roles. On the other hand, some progress was recorded in the use of non-traditional and egalitarian cues in female portrayals. Hence, the particular study suggests that the applicability of the coding scheme can be extended away from the realm of print advertising to virtual contexts as well.

The cultural, philosophic, social and scientific movement of postmodernism that is suggested to prevail in today's society (Venkatesh, Sherry and Firat 1993) bears important implications for marketing practice as well. A significant premise of postmodernism is the blurring of boundaries and the rejection of absolute truths: *"postmodernism is when we get to know that questions do not lead to definite answers"* (Bouchet 1994, p.405). In this light, marketing practice should accept the supremacy of subjectivity acknowledging that *"the target may be moving, that the target composition may be changing, and thus that target positioning may be inconstant"* (Proctor and Kitchen, 2002 p. 149). Critical aspects of postmodernism such as fragmentation, decentering of the subject and juxtaposition of opposites provide a specific lens under which contemporary advertising can be examined. Fragmentation, the breaking up into parts and erasing of the whole (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995) is evident more than ever in advertising pictorials, especially in female body depictions. The coding of fragmented body parts with the existing coding categories is problematic, as the apperception of clear female roles in such representations is questionable. Similarly, the decentering of the subject implies that individuals experience a lack of unified orientation and move between different roles and characters. Therefore, advertising imagery is likely to reflect a blurring of distinct roles and stereotypes, posing challenges to a concise labeling and coding as well. Finally, the juxtaposition of opposites, the simultaneous co-existence of contrasted and differentiated poles, implies that an advertising pictorial may display female characters in various roles posing serious problems in the content analysis procedure that requires the identification of one

dominant stereotype per advertisement. However, recent studies that implemented the existing coding instrument (e.g. Plakoyiannaki and Zotos 2009; Tsichla and Zotos, 2013a,b) produced results that can be interpreted by a postmodern viewpoint: The remarkable rise of female decorative portrayals seems indicative of the postmodern society that deifies images and symbols, diffuses narcissistic ideals and propels consumers to continually attend to their image and express their identity through consumption.

Quite recently, companies seem to direct considerable attention to the previously largely ignored lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) consumers in an effort to broaden their customer base by the identification of new lucrative market niches (e.g. IKEA, Calvin Klein, Benetton or the tobacco industry). Advertising strategies to LGBT consumers can be overt by the expression of explicit messages, showing for instance, a gay male couple. Conversely, advertisers often create covert strategies using implicit messages. For instance, through the use of coded representations which appear innocuous to heterosexual readers, but possibly interpreted as "gay" by bisexual, lesbian and gay readers (Sender, 1999) they may effectively communicate with their target audience. This strategy is known as *"gay window advertising"* (Bronski, 1984, p. 187) and its development stems from advertisers' fear of alienating heterosexual consumers (Greenlee 2004; Oakenfull 2004). According to Kahn (1994), such advertising messages include the use of a single person instead of an opposite sexed couple, the display of attractive and stylish crowd scenes with no obvious heterosexual couples and the representation of androgynous body parts. It is apparent that neither such ambiguous portrayals nor overt LGBT role portrayals could be effectively captured using the existing coding instrument.

6. New directions for research

Even though female stereotypes in advertising is a topic that received considerable academic scrutiny, interested researchers could still follow interesting research avenues that may enrich existing knowledge. The interplay of Hofstede's (1980, 1991) masculinity dimension with female role portrayals is a direction where a paucity of research is apparent (Odekerken-Schröder, De Wulf, Hofstee, 2002). In a seminal study in the field of cross-cultural differences, Hofstede suggested a social structure with the following five dimensions that encapsulate societal differences: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, short-term/long term orientation and masculinity/femininity. The latter dimension measures the extent to which social gender roles are clearly distinct. Masculine countries are inclined towards distinct expectations of the roles males and females are supposed to play in a society: Males are regarded as assertive, tough, money-earners with little concern for others, while females are supposed to be more tender, family oriented and modest. On the other hand, in feminine countries, gender roles are not clearly defined (Hofstede, 1980; Usunier, 1993). Wiles, and Tjernlund (1991) demonstrated that in a masculine country (U.S.) women were more frequently displayed in decorative roles compared to a feminine country (Sweden). In a similar vein, Odekerken-Schröder, De Wulf and Hofstede (2002) found that females are depicted more often as sex objects and less in professional roles in a masculine country (UK) compared to a feminine country. However, conflicting evidence regarding other female portrayals poses the necessity for further research in the topic.

Although the coding scheme for female role portrayals facilitated the conduction of numerous studies proving for the most part to be suitable and valid, its improvement so as to effectively capture aspects that pertain to LGBT and postmodern advertising seems a promising direction that could breathe new life in the investigation of female role stereotypes. New coding categories should be considered, able to account for explicit homosexual models as well as implicit androgynous displays. In a similar vein, in order to ensure that postmodern advertising imagery can be accurately coded in a content analysis, attention should be directed to the classification of fragmented body parts versus whole people. The volatility of roles in postmodern advertising could also suggest that a coding instrument should not confine the identification of a single role stereotype in an advertisement, but the labeling of multiple roles could be possible. Such a coding scheme may highlight the elucidation of mixed patterns of role portrayals.

Finally, gender stereotypes can be conveyed quite implicitly, using subtle cues such as body position, use of hands and facial expressions. Erving Goffman (1979) developed coding categories that capture such cues, and his work propelled a significant stream of research. Future studies could focus on the combination of the coding scheme of female role portrayals with Goffman's categories intending to unveil whether the use of indirect stereotyping differs across i.e. traditional, decorative, professional or neutral female displays.

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