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2011

# Homemaker to Seductress: A Content Analysis of Gender Stereotypes in Online Embedded Advertisements

Danica L. Stith
*Minnesota State University - Mankato*

Homemaker to Seductress: A Content Analysis of Gender Stereotypes in Online Embedded

Advertisements


By

Danica Stith



A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

Master of Arts

In

Technical Communication



Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, Minnesota



May 2011

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This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the thesis committee.


Dr. Gretchen Perbix, Advisor

_____

Dr. Nancy MacKenzie

_____

Dr. Kristen Treinen

_____

DATE:  April 8, 2011

This report is submitted as part of the required work in the course (Technical Communication, English 699, 4 credits, Thesis) at Minnesota State University, Mankato, and has been supervised, examined, and accepted by the professor.

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Abstract

Homemaker to Seductress:

A Content Analysis of Gender Stereotypes in Online Embedded Advertisements

Danica Lee Stith

Master of Art—Technical Communication

2011

Mankato State University

Mankato, Minnesota

Countless studies have documented and analyzed the presence of gender stereotypes in print and television advertisements, but very few have been performed on online advertisements. While the World Wide Web is no longer an exciting new domain for us, researchers are only beginning to analyze the vast number of gender stereotypes that are presented to viewers on a daily basis. The proliferation of gender stereotypes (specifically female stereotypes) is obvious in print advertisements and television advertisements, but do they also abound in online advertisements? In my research, I performed a content analysis of online embedded advertisements, specifically in three types of informational websites (fitness, health, and parenting). The coding was performed using the representations set forth by Hyun Jung Yun et al (2007). I found that online embedded advertisements seem to follow the same stereotypical trends that print and television advertisements use. The majority of the advertisements portrayed women in traditional roles and decorative roles. There were a few advertisements that portrayed women in non-traditional roles, as well as one advertisement that presented a woman in a neutral way, with no apparent stereotypes.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

We are all aware of the insidious quality of gender stereotypes. Countless studies have documented and analyzed the presence of gender stereotypes in print and television advertisements, but very few have been performed on online advertisements. While the World Wide Web is no longer an exciting new domain for us, researchers are only beginning to analyze the vast number of gender stereotypes that are presented to viewers on a daily basis. The proliferation of gender stereotypes (specifically female stereotypes) is obvious in print advertisements and television advertisements, but do they also abound in online advertisements? It seems that more research is needed in this area, as I could find no studies that analyzed embedded advertisements in popular informational websites. It was my hope that by performing a content analysis of embedded online advertisements I could shed some light on the issue.

## My Project

In this project, I have researched the pertinent work on gender stereotypes in magazine advertisements, television commercial advertisements, and other online advertisements. I will discuss the presence of stereotypes in those areas, and the findings from previous studies. Many of these studies show how traditional stereotypes have been portrayed in magazine, television, and online advertisements for years. We are only starting to see a trend moving toward women being represented in non-traditional ways and in neutral advertisements.

I will then discuss the negative societal effects that these stereotypes can have. I then discuss my own research methods and data collection, including which websites were used in each category, and how many advertisements were used from each website. I prepared careful

coding descriptions of the various stereotypes, followed by my content analysis of the online embedded advertisements. I will discuss my findings and the implications of them, as well as some ideas of what we can do to fight against these stereotypical representations of women.

In my own research, I have found that online embedded advertisements seem to follow the same stereotypical trends that print and television advertisements use. The majority of the advertisements portrayed women in traditional roles and decorative roles. There were a few advertisements that portrayed women in non-traditional roles, as well as one advertisement that presented a woman in a neutral way, with no apparent stereotypes.

## My Motivation

My motivation for pursuing this topic stems from my interest in gender stereotypes and my experience fighting with them. I have fought against traditional expectations of what women should do ("Stay home, and take care of your family…") from my community and from my own relatives and in-laws. I have a young daughter of my own and I don't want her to have to fight against these stereotypes like I have. I want her to know that she can achieve great things on her own and that I will always be there to cheer her on. She is my brave little impetus for this project.

So, my goal is to make a small contribution in this area of research and to help make people more aware of the gender stereotypes that are used in many online embedded advertisements. We all need to be aware of the pervasiveness of stereotypical representations on online advertisements. If more people are aware of these stereotypes and the dangerous consequences that they hold, then we can start to change the way they affect us, and hopefully change the way that advertisers depict women.

## Chapter 2

## Literature Review

I reviewed the pertinent literature to examine the research of stereotypical representations of women in online advertising. However, since there have not been many studies conducted on this particular topic, I will also be reviewing the literature on other forms of media and their analyses of advertisement-based stereotypical representations. I will be discussing the areas of gender stereotypes in magazines, gender stereotypes in prime time television commercials, gender stereotypes online, and the negative effects of these stereotypes portrayed in the media.

What are advertisements? John Alan Cohan (2001) defines advertising:

Advertising is:

(1) Pervasive, appearing in many modes and media; (2) repetitive, reinforcing the same or similar ideas relentlessly; (3) professionally developed, with all of the attendant research sophistications to improve the probabilities of attention, comprehension, retention, and/or behavioral impact; and (4) delivered to an audience that is increasingly detached from traditional sources of cultural influence like families, churches or schools (325).

So, advertising is certainly widespread, especially with many different media forms available to us everywhere we go, from our computers and televisions to our cell phones. The advertisements that we are exposed to are meant to be persuasive and are targeted for very specific audiences. If these advertisements are sending stereotypical messages through their images and we are constantly bombarded by them, what effects will they have on us? How pervasive are gender stereotypes in television, magazine, and online advertisements?

## Gender Stereotypes in Magazine Advertisements

### Female Subordination

Numerous studies have documented the ubiquitous presence of female stereotypes in magazine advertisements, which were the first form of advertisements. Erving Goffman's groundbreaking work *Gender Advertisements* (1979) is often referred to as the first book to systematically analyze gender advertisements in magazines. He discusses that the advertisements we see are not focused on how males and females actually behave, but how we think they behave or are supposed to behave. Goffman (1979) argues that we should focus on how the advertisements are put together to portray a "social situation" and how they are constructed to achieve a certain meaning (27). He noted that the most common theme in those advertisements was of "female subordination." Bell and Milic (2002) sum up:

> Goffman theorized that the subordination ultimately connoted the 'infantalization' of women, and distinguished between six dimensions by means of which this symbolic infantalization could be classified: Relative size, the feminine touch, function ranking, the family, the ritualization of subordination, and licensed withdrawal (204-205).

Goffman methodically analyzed 508 magazine advertisements, carefully placing them into the six categories he described. "Relative size" described the propensity for males to be pictured as larger or taller, therefore more important. The "feminine touch" was described as the way that women were depicted as touching/caressing objects. The "function ranking" described the role (primary and secondary) that males and females played when in collaboration. The "family dimension" described how family members were positioned in relation to one another. The "ritualization of subordination" dimension described the tendency for women to be pictured in

submissive or lower poses. Finally, the "licensed withdrawal" dimension typically portrayed women withdrawing from the scene or hiding behind a male. The viewer can easily see, after looking at the various advertisements Goffman provided, how prevalent the visualization of female subordination is, and how many facets are included in it.

In Bell and Milic's article, "Goffman's Gender Advertisements revisited: combining content analysis with semiotic analysis," Bell and Milic discussed the "Systemic Functional Analysis" that can be used to identify the basis for gender stereotypes, which are semiotic resources (a focus on objective formal relationships). The authors analyzed 827 advertisements from a sample of Australian magazines. They used Erving Goffman's work, *Gender Advertisements*, (1979) as the basis for how male and female participants would be classified. The authors also implemented the image semiotic categories created by Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen in *Reading Images* (1996). The authors hoped that by using both forms of analyses they would then be able to frame hypotheses about the gender stereotypes in current advertisements. Kress and Van Leeuwen present three dimensions of "visual semiosis in relation to the image:"

(1) The representational dimension, which can be divided into the representation of narrative processes ('goings on') and conceptual processes ('ideas') within the frame of the image… (2) The interaction between the viewer and the image… (3) Layout or composition. (208-211).

The representational dimension refers to the way the participants in the photographs are linked in relation to each other. This dimension can create symbolic meaning simply from the relationship in the picture. Secondly, the interaction dimension has to do with how the participant is gazing at

the camera/audience, the distance, and the angle of the shot. These images can encourage interaction with the audience or can create meaning by how the participant is gazing. Of course the actual layout of the photograph is an important part of the meaning of the advertisement because it sets the scene.

Bell and Milic found that gender stereotyping was still significant in the sample of magazines they analyzed, even more than two decades after Goffman's research. They found that, as hypothesized, men were more likely to be portrayed as the person doing the action, while women were more likely to be expressing emotion or reacting (215). However, they were surprised to find that females were portrayed gazing at the audience more frequently than males (216). Traditionally, males were portrayed more often looking at the audience, while females gazed off into the distance or at someone else. This is significant, because when a participant in a scene is pictured gazing away from the camera, it is referred to as "licensed withdrawal" by Goffman. Goffman theorized that in this portrayal a female can feel free to lose herself in thought because a male is present to protect her and she is dependent upon him.

### Sex Objectification

Not only have magazine advertisements typically shown women to be subordinate to men, but women have also frequently been portrayed as sex objects. In their ground-breaking article "Objectification Theory," Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) proposed the theory as a theoretical framework for analyzing experiences of women in our culture. The sexual objectification of women can be defined as

the reduction of women to their sexual appeal in terms of their outer appearance and a focus on their body (parts). It also entails a strong concern with women's sexual activities as the main criterion of their attractiveness and the depiction of women as sexual playthings waiting to please men's sexual desires (Peter and Valkenberg, 383).

So, not only does sexual objectification turn women's bodies into objects, but it completely focuses on their ability to please men visually. Discussing women in terms of their body parts is another example of sexual objectification. Some examples of referring to women by body parts include "a nice piece of ass," "chasing tail," and so on. It is obvious how hurtful and demeaning these phrases can be to women.

Monk-Turner et al (2008) found that female characters were portrayed as sex objects more often than male characters to sell a product, and the advertisements that portrayed women in this way were usually for male audiences, rather than female or gender-neutral audiences. The authors' study consisted of 287 advertisements that were analyzed to ascertain if sex had been used to sell the product. The authors noted some disparities: only 2% of lone male characters are objectified, while 33% of lone female characters are objectified (207). While the idea of sexuality can be defined in many different ways, here I refer to sexuality as defined by Coltrane and Adams (1997) who stated three ways sex could be used in advertising: "A female (or male) could be the *object* of another's gaze or self-gaze… might express *alluring behavior*… or be wearing provocative *clothing*" (E. Monk-Turner et al, 202). The idea of sexuality as shown by images is blatantly focused on gaze, behavior or position, and clothing or lack thereof.

Coltrane and Adams' (1997) study provided support for Laura Mulvey's (1975) theory of the male gaze, as male audiences are the ones who most often view women in sex-object form.

Mulvey (1975) was the first to examine films using Freudian and Lacanian psycholanalysis, where she "explores the psychodynamic relationship between spectator and text" (Macdonald 2005, 27). Mulvey argues that gazing at women has been defined as an appropriate male activity, which justifies objectification of women. E. Monk-Turner et al (2008) ask, "If we learn from what we see, what messages do men take away after looking at magazine advertisements? Are marketers helping maintain objectification by virtue of the roles they allow to appear in product advertisements?"(207).

Even more frightening is the influence that sex objectification could have on children. Cuneen and Sidwell (1998) noted how receptive children are to images and how that influences their knowledge of gender roles. Cuneen and Sidwell (1998) studied how women are portrayed in *Sports Illustrated for Kids.* The authors discussed that females were not portrayed nearly as often as males and when females were actually portrayed, "both female child-age and adult-age models were likely to be depicted as sex-objects, 'nurturing,' or otherwise 'gender-appropriate'" (46). The authors warn that "if girls and boys are portrayed differently in advertisements, and if advertising defines some of the ways the genders are perceived both by themselves and greater society, then advertising directors need to be aware of the power they possess in shaping societal roles and values" (48). Children are not aware of the messages that their own magazines might be sending and how it can influence their ideas of appropriate gender roles.

## Gender Stereotypes in Commercials

As more and more families began to own television sets in the 1950's (Duke University Libraries), the amount of television commercials skyrocketed, bringing not only new opportunities for advertisers to reach their audiences, but also opportunities to portray males and females in a certain way. Television commercials are usually short but are aimed to be very persuasive for their target audience. As many studies have shown (Yoder, Christopher, and Holmes 2008, Ganahl et al 2003, and Coltrane and Adams 1997), commercials with female stereotypes still abound. Goffman (1979) described how we understand our world by using cognitive filters or frames. Television commercials are often used to create meaning of the constructs of work, family, gender, and our roles within them. In fact, research by Snow and Benford (1988) has shown that these media frames can help people solve issues or problems and make decisions. If people are using television commercials to subconsciously help them make decisions or solve problems, what stereotypical messages are they receiving and internalizing?

### Traditional Stereotypes

Many commercials still portray women in traditional stereotypical characterizations (secondary characters to men or as homemakers). As Ganahl et al (2003) state, "Commercials must be relevant to a potential consumer's everyday lifestyle to be effective, and a good way to be relevant is to show television commercial characters interacting with the product that are similar to the target market prospects" (550). However, in the same study they also noted that female character representations were completely out of date and that women and girls were portrayed inaccurately. The females were still portrayed using traditional stereotypes. To be more specific, Coltrane and Adams (1997) state,

> Women are still significantly more likely than men to be shown in families, are shown much less frequently in occupational roles than men, and when portrayed as workers,

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tend to be shown in stereotypical 'women's' jobs with less prestige and less authority over other workers" (342).

Stereotypical "women's" jobs can include anything that is considered to be "lower-status," or as Coltrane and Adams (1997) describe, any kind of job that provides care to the sick, elderly, or children. Repeated exposure to these media representations reinforce traditional stereotypes that women are unable to function in anything other than a traditional "women's" job. It can influence television watchers' mindsets, so that they unknowingly believe what they are seeing is normal and natural.

Corresponding to traditional stereotypes, Coltrane and Adams' (1997) study also demonstrates that the ideals of separate spheres, where women are assumed to belong naturally in the home and men in the workplace, are still, disappointingly, often portrayed in commercials. The authors state that these portrayals only serve to perpetuate gender stereotypes and "as long as these patterns of symbolic gender differences are endemic in our culture, it will be hard for people to evaluate their life options and career choices objectively" (345). How are men (and women) to take women in the workplace seriously when they are so often depicted as only housewives and mothers?

While Coltrane and Adams (1997) did discuss that women are now being portrayed more often in television commercials, it is not typically a positive portrayal. In fact, no matter how the women are portrayed, what they are doing, or whomever the intended audience is, "they still tend to be shown as sex objects" (Coltrane and Adams, 342). This, in turn, allows women to be objectified by men, and self-objectified by themselves. Disturbingly, a study conducted by Courtney and Whipple (1983) found that young women were portrayed as rewards if the male

characters in the commercials used the advertised product. The repercussions of sex objectification and self-objectification are discussed in the section "Negative Effects of Gender Stereotypes in the Media".

### Goals and Aspirations Toward Leadership Positions

A more recent study by Yoder, Christopher, and Holmes (2008) sought to find the influence that these stereotypical images had on their male and female viewers. They were concerned that these images would affect not only women's body image and satisfaction, but also their aspirations and goals towards leadership positions or career goals. The authors noted that, "although women's achievement scripts now appear more similar to men's, as well as more resistant to sexist exposure, there are signs in the present data and related research that women's aspirations are not fully impervious to sexism in the media" (303). It was also suggested by Yoder, Christopher, and Holmes (2008) that viewing television commercials can not only affect women's career goals, but also affect "how competent traditionally portrayed women are perceived" (310). In fact, Rakow and Kranich (1991) noted that even when women were depicted as spokespersons, authorities, or other figures in a leadership position, they were still presented as passive and as having a connection with home/family.

### Gender Stereotypes Online

The newest medium for advertisements is the internet. In an article by Louise Story in the New York Times, it is estimated that the average American sees 5,000 advertisements a day. The

article was published in 2007, so I can only assume that the number has increased since then. Surprisingly enough, there have been few studies that analyze online advertisements and gender stereotypes. Do they follow the same patterns that print advertisements and commercial advertisements follow? Or are online advertisements beginning to recognize the work and aspirations of women as equal to men?

### More Traditional Stereotypes

In a content analysis performed by Plakoyiannaki et al (2008), the authors analyzed 1,050 web pages, specifically analyzing rectangular web banner advertisements. They included only those that advertised a global product and was written in English. Plakoyiannaki et al (2008) were disheartened to find "that 'traditional' or 'decorative' [physically attractive or sexual] stereotypes are largely evident in all three audience types, although some 'non-traditional roles' may occur" (101). The three audience types Plakoyiannaki et al (2008) referred to are male, female, and gender-neutral. I thought the findings were surprising, as this new technology seemed to be using very traditional types of representation.

Unfortunately, these traditional representations simply add to the large amount of research documenting hostile and benevolent sexism (Glick and Fiske 1997), which discusses the role of sexism in traditional media. Glick and Fiske (1997) note that sexism is either hostile or benevolent. They define benevolent sexism as

encompass[ing] subjectively positive (for the sexist) attitudes toward women in traditional roles: protective paternalism, idealization of women, and desire for intimate relations. Hostile sexism encompasses the negative equivalents on each dimension: dominative paternalism, derogatory beliefs, and heterosexual hostility (119).

Both kinds of sexism share the belief that traditional gender roles are correct and normal and should be kept intact. Plakoyiannaki et al (2008) classified female stereotypes under four categories based on hostile and benevolent sexism: traditional roles, decorative roles, non-traditional roles, and neutral roles (103). The study sought to find evidence of how women are portrayed in online advertising by analyzing banner advertisements. The study shows that women were "primarily portrayed in decorative roles, notably those 'concerned with physical attractiveness' (33.00%) and as 'sex objects' (17.50%)" (106). It is interesting that Plakoyiannaki et al (2008) did note that there has been some progress made in the portrayal of women in non-traditional roles in online advertisements. The authors noticed an association between the male-audience web pages and the depictions of women in non-traditional activities/professional activities, although there were also many male-audience web pages that presented women in sexist/decorative roles. In fact, the data suggested that women are "primarily portrayed in decorative roles, notably those 'concerned with physical attractiveness'… and as 'sex objects' In total, these images…refer to slightly more than half of the sample of advertisements" (Plakoyiannaki et al 2008, 106). Also, the "housewife" stereotype was widespread and supported sexism. The authors also stated that the frequency of women portrayed in traditional roles in online advertisements is "higher than the respective percentages in print media" (Plakoyiannaki et al 2008, 107). So, while it seems that some progress has been made in portraying women as equals, online advertisements are still promoting sexism (hostile and benevolent).

Hyun Jung Yun et al (2007) had hoped that "unrestricted by space and time, the Internet eliminates the gatekeeping problem affecting media coverage of women" (934). The authors discussed that the coverage of women is the first to get dropped over any other news story. The authors hoped that their study would show new media increasing equality and diversity in

different countries.  The authors analyzed online magazine articles, including the headlines,

subheads, body copy, images, and captions, and used samples of online magazines from the US,

Great Britain, South Korea, and Mexico. The authors chose these four countries as they were

"representative of the cultures in different geographic regions around the world ruled by

democratic political systems that ensure unrestricted access to free media and promote gender

equality as a desirable goal" (936).  The authors used the following image presentations: "career-

oriented, family-oriented, homemaker, gold-digger, seductress, victim, heroine, entrepreneur,

appearance-focused, experiencing weight problems, difficult/demanding, emotional, weak,

inferior, and unfit for business" (938). To be more specific, Hyun Jung Yun et al used the

following pairs of attributes to measure images of females: "personal-professional,

unsophisticated-sophisticated, unsuccessful-successful, unattractive-attractive, calm-excitable,

weak-strong, unqualified-qualified, dishonest-honest, unbelievable-believable, unfriendly-

friendly, negative-positive, inactive-active" (944). Hyun Jung Yun et al (2007) found that

women were "still less-frequent topics than men and that their stories tend to be personal

features" (943). The presentations of women were actually balanced between being portrayed

stereotypically and non-stereotypically, and women were presented more positively than men. It

seems as though the internet has managed to make some advances in portraying women in a

respectful way. Even though this study focused on news stories of women, they also focused on

images and pictures of women as an integral part of their unit of analysis.

## Negative Effects of Gender Stereotypes in the Media

Advertising is a pervasive force in our society. We are constantly bombarded by

persuasive images and words, on television, radio, magazines, posters, billboards, and now on

the internet. As stated earlier, the average American is exposed to 5,000 advertisements per day. What are the effects of this inescapable barrage of information and persuasion?

Many advertisers use females in stereotypical portrayals to sell their products. These stereotypical representations can have many negative effects on our society. The number of images that inundate popular culture can provide an important framework for how males and females view themselves and each other, as well as how they are supposed to act. As Coltrane and Adams (1997) warn, "Seen in this light, the media's linking of men with jobs and women with sex or family carries potentially negative social consequences" (342).

Cohan (2001) suggests three ethical issues in representations of women in advertising:

1. Many ads present sex stereotypes to do with weakness roles of women- showing women as submissive, and suggesting that women are constantly in a need of alteration or improvement, or are to feel ashamed of themselves, and dissatisfied in life… 2. Women's advertising *redefines* attractiveness from something natural to an unattainable ideal… 3. A third ethical concern is the *kind* of sexual images women are bombarded with. Advertising often portrays women as things or as mere sex objects by use of stunningly disordered models, fragmented body parts, or women displayed as dolls or animals, a woman's face as a mask, and her body as an object (327).

It is important to understand the problems that can occur with these stereotypical representations. Not only do these ads show women as weak or needing to constantly work to improve themselves, but most will never be able to reach the ideal depiction of beauty. Even if a woman were somehow able to reach that ideal, she would only be treated as a toy or an object of sex,

completely devoid of her own humanity. Why would women even want to be treated that way? Because they have been taught to believe that their value lies in their sexuality.

## Sexual Objectification

The main effect that is seen when a woman/girl is objectified is that "the cultural milieu of objectification functions to socialize girls and women to, at some level, treat themselves as objects to be looked at and evaluated" (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997, 177). This process is called "self-objectification." The possible consequences of sexual objectification can include: shame, anxiety, a loss of "peak motivational states," and a loss of the awareness of internal bodily messages (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). Shame is described as a negative emotion that "results from a fusion of negative self-evaluation with the potential for social exposure" (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997, 181). Fredrickson and Roberts also add that "the habitual body monitoring encouraged by a culture that sexually objectifies the female body can lead women to experience shame that is recurrent, difficult to alleviate, and constructed as a matter of morality" (182). The second consequence, anxiety, is a negative emotion as well. The two types of anxiety that seem to stem from sex objectification are "appearance anxiety" and "safety anxiety" (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). When a woman is objectified, she can easily become anxious about her physical appearance as well as her own physical safety. A "peak motivational state" can be reached when a person is joyfully enjoying life. If a female feels objectified, she will be unable to reach a peak motivational state, thereby reducing her quality of life (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). The final consequence of sexual objectification is that of ignoring inner bodily messages. Research shows that dieting and self-starvation use the repression of hunger cues, but that over time it could lead to a general indifference to inner messages from the body. So, by internalizing an observer's perspective as a primary view of physical self, women may lose access to their own inner physical experiences" (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997, 185). Obviously,

ignoring inner body cues can be detrimental to one's health. Interestingly enough, Choma et al (2010) note that "women who strongly endorse stereotypical feminine gender roles might be particularly likely to engage in self-objectification and, therefore, may be at greatest risk for negative outcomes, including a compromised sense of self-worth" (647). So, encouraging women to be more feminine may actually be detrimental to their health.

### *Psychological Disorders from Sexual Objectification*

There are also potential negative psychological disorders that can result as a consequence of sexual objectification: depression, sexual problems, and eating disorders (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). The authors stated that there was an indirect and direct route that sexual objectification can follow to cause "poor mental health" (185). The indirect route is described as follows: "The potential for objectification fosters habitual body monitoring, leaving women with surpluses of shame and anxiety, a shortage of peak motivational states, and scant awareness of internal bodily states" (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997, 186). The authors argue that the collection of any of these could cause psychological disorders. The direct route consists of: "actual sexual victimization, whether through rape, incest, battering, or even sexual harassment" (186). Sexual violence towards women can be extremely debilitating to their physical and psychological health.

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) describe how self-objectification can increase the risks for depression: "learned helplessness theory… can explain how recurrent and uncontrollable experiences of shame and anxiety could lead to depression" (188). The shame and anxiety often are caused from a feeling of helplessness when it comes to an inability to control their (women's) bodies. The articles also note that if women have few of the "peak motivational states" it can

create "the motivational deficit characteristic of depression" (188). Thirdly, the level of sexual harassment and victimization that women receive can also contribute to depression.

Many women suffer from sexual dysfunction and dissatisfaction. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) explain that

> First…chronic attentiveness to one's own visual image may consume mental energy that might otherwise be spent on more satisfying and rewarding activity… Second, the shame and anxieties many women have about their bodies quite likely carry over into their experiences with sex… Third, sex researchers contend that orgasm (which we do not view as synonymous with subjective sexual pleasure) often requires attention and responsiveness to internal bodily signals of arousal (190).

If women are excessively focused on their appearance, even during sex, it can be difficult to relax and enjoy their sexual experiences. Also, if women have been steadily ignoring inner bodily messages, it will be difficult for them to have an orgasm. All of these factors can contribute to women's dissatisfaction with sex.

### Violence

Cohan (2001) states that when women are depicted as sex objects, it not only affects women, but can influence how men endeavor to find the perfect woman, who is non-existent. Not only does this cause men to become frustrated with normal/non-perfect women, but many studies note that depicting women as sex objects encourages violence against women. Cohan (2001) notes that, "[V]iolence stems from the perception of *possessability*, that is, the desire to control" (328). These findings are disturbing, as they can perpetuate female stereotypes internationally and can affect societies' values because so many online advertisements can be

accessed worldwide. Eisend (2010) sums up that gender stereotyping can lead to a loss of opportunities for women: "Stereotyping of physical characteristics (e.g. beauty ideals for women) can lead to reduced self-dignity and body dissatisfaction, stereotyping of role behaviors (e.g. women taking care of children) may lead to restricted opportunities of self-development, and stereotyping of occupational roles can lead to disadvantages in women's careers" (419).

# Chapter 3

# Methods

### Introduction

This chapter discusses the methods I used to analyze online embedded advertisements from information-based websites. My plan was to complete a content analysis of embedded online advertisements. I chose three types of information websites: parenting, fitness, and medical websites. I used specific search terms to access these websites, and analyzed the images from the websites using the image representations set forth by Yun et al (2007).

I then planned to code them and analyze the advertisements to see which stereotypes were portrayed. I was interested to find how prevalent gender stereotypes were in online advertisements, specifically in information-based websites. I was impressed by the previous studies of online advertisements, but I felt that several areas of research were missing. There were no studies that I found that analyzed embedded advertisements in popular informational websites. These websites are targeted for general audiences (male and female) and have the potential to reach many people from various backgrounds and parts of the world.

### The Websites

I analyzed three different kinds of websites: fitness, medical, and parenting sites. These are three of the nine categories established in *Time* Magazine's 50 Best Websites of 2010. According to a website called webdevelopersnotes.com (2011), information websites are very popular and "these are the types of web sites [that] are dedicated to the purpose of providing information - whether free or paid. These information web sites might be catering to a niche

industry or be wider in their scope because of which they can be labeled as 'news portals'"
(paragraph 5). I believe that these three types of websites (fitness, medical, and parenting sites)
are used fairly often by a wide variety of audiences to find important information. When internet
users are navigating those particular websites they are usually looking to find specific
information and are not as focused on the advertisements on the web pages.

I would have liked to have included all of the other categories of websites, but I found
that the other categories were Music and Video, which mainly had advertisements for actual
albums or artists; Sports, which typically had only advertisements for upcoming sporting events;
Financial and Productivity sites, which had mostly news-related advertising; Games sites, which
mostly just had links to other games; and Education sites, which typically only had
advertisements for schools and universities. The fitness, medical, and parenting websites are all
informational in design, and are usually designed to interest a general audience who might be
seeking information.

I decided to focus specifically on integrated/embedded advertisements, or picture
advertisements that are a part of a web page. In summary, each website I chose to include in my
data set had to convey information about fitness, medicine/health, or parenting issues, and had to
contain an embedded advertisement featuring a female.

## Data Collection
I used the search engine Google to find the most popular sites in each of the three
categories. The search terms I used were, "Family Information" and "Parenting Information,"
"Fitness" and "Fitness Information," "Medical Information" and "Health Information." I used
the first page of search results and narrowed them down depending upon how well the embedded
advertisements followed the requirements. I found and accessed all of the websites during the

latter part of November of 2010. I accessed each website only once. I captured each advertisement as a screen capture and saved it to my computer files. I decided to look only at the homepage of each website, because each website had many different links and pages. It would be impossible to see which links would be the most popular with their audiences, but I assumed that each audience member would see the homepage and the embedded advertisements in it.

Under the medical websites I found:

- AMA.org (one ad)

- Healthline.com (three ads)

- WebMD.com (three ads)

- Wrong Diagnosis.com (one ad)

- Mayoclinic.org (one ad)

- Medical-clinic.org (one ad)

- Medicalinformation.org (three ads)

Under the fitness websites I found:

- Fitnessonline.com (two ads)

- Fitnessmag.com (five ads)

- Thatsfit.com (two ads)

- Fitnesspartners.net (one ad)

- Prevention.com (three ads)

Under the parenting/family websites I found:

- Parenting.com (two ads)

- Parent.net (one ad)

- Parentfurther.org (two ads)

- Pregnancyandparenting.com (two ads)

- Parentsconnect.com (one ad)

Please note that I did access seven websites on medical information, while only five each of parenting/family and health/fitness. This was simply because I wanted to effectively analyze a good representation of the plethora of medical websites that are available, and there were more medical websites than parenting and fitness websites. Also, some websites had more applicable advertisements that could be analyzed, while others only had one. In total, I analyzed thirty-three embedded advertisements.

## Coding

To code the advertisements I used the following representations, as introduced by Hyun Jung Yun et al (2007): career-oriented/entrepreneur, family-oriented, homemaker, gold-digger, sex object/seductress, victim, heroine, appearance-focused, experiencing weight problems, emotional/weak, inferior, and unfit for business. It was my hope that these representations would fully cover all possible stereotypes and representations of women that would be found in my content analysis. According to Hyun Jung Yun (2011), the following are the descriptions of each image representation along with my visual markers of each representation:

*Career oriented/entrepreneur*: sacrifices personal life to succeed in profession. A visual representation of this category would be a woman who is shown in a work environment, is dressed professionally or holding tools of the trade (a clipboard, a machine, computer, at a desk, etc.), or a woman who is shown with a briefcase, but with her family in the background.

*Family oriented*: mom, stay-at-home, cares for children. A visual representation of this category would be a woman who is shown caring for her children, and/or depicted in the home with children.

*Homemaker*: works from home; doesn't work, is supported by family members/husband. A visual representation is a woman who is pictured in the home, or is pictured cleaning and cooking for her family.

*Gold-digger*: marries someone for money. A visual representation is a woman who is flirting with a man who has a large house or an expensive car, or other visual cues of wealth.

*Sex object/Seductress*: flirts, seduces men, heartbreaker. A visual marker would be a woman who dresses or poses seductively, flirts with men.

*Victim*: of domestic violence, abuse, rape, sexual harassment. A visual marker would be a woman who is shown with bruises on her face or other parts of her body, cowering from a man, or looking embarrassed by sexual attention from men.

*Heroine*: did something extraordinary, proving unusual courage, initiative, intelligence, strong personal qualities. A visual marker would be a woman who is shown to have triumphed over something, or who is pictured saving or helping another person. She could be pictured receiving a prize or commendation for her work.

*Appearance focused:* is completely focused on outward appearance. A visual marker would be a woman who is pictured to only be focused on her appearance, like her clothing, make-up, hairstyle, or other pursuits of beauty. She does not seem to notice anything else.

*Experiencing weight problems/weight focused*: shows complete focus on weight. A visual marker would be a woman who is pictured as struggling with her weight and looks discouraged by it. This woman could also be portrayed at a healthy weight, but still seems to be very focused on losing a few pounds, dieting, or shown exercising.

*Entrepreneurial*: shows initiative in business, organizes or conducts an enterprise. A visual marker would be a woman who is pictured to have built up her own business or to be successfully running a business. She could be pictured in a large office or running a business meeting.

*Emotiona/weak*: sensitive, romantic. A visual marker would be a woman who is crying, or showing emotions like depression. She can be shown as weak, or unable to accomplish something. She could also be portrayed as someone who is impressed by gestures of romanticism or easily swept off her feet by a man.

*Dependent/inferior*: a woman who relies upon a man or is dependent upon him. A visual marker would be a woman who is shown positioned behind a man or shown leaning on a man for support. She may rely upon him for help or he may be shown trying to teach her something.

*Unfit for Business*: a woman who is not suitable for the work environment. A visual marker would be a woman who is not dressed in a professional manner in a work setting, like an office.

However, I felt that the representations used by Yun et al needed to be categorized for clarity and to be completely useful for analysis. So, I decided to put the representations into the categories put forth by Plakoyiannaki et al. The four categories that they used were: women in traditional roles, women in decorative roles, women in non-traditional roles, and women portrayed as equal to men. The following is Plakoyiannaki et al's description of each category:

*Women in traditional roles*

1. Dependency- Dependent on male's protection; In need of reassurance; Making unimportant decisions
2. Housewife- Women's place is at home; Primary role is to be a good wife; Concerned with the 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 unrelated to product

*Women in non-traditional roles*

5. Women in non-traditional activities- Engaged in activities outside home (e.g. extreme sports) or in masculine activities such as house construction

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 (104).

So, we can see how the representations fit into each category from the descriptions provided by Yun (2011). Some of the examples were the same from both articles, like housewife, career-oriented, and concerned with physical attractiveness. I decided from the descriptions of the categories that each representation could fit clearly into one of four the categories. The following is the juxtaposition of the representations from Yun et al and the categories of Plakoyiannaki et al:

| Traditional Roles | Decorative Roles | Non-traditional Roles | Equal Roles |
|---|---|---|---|
| Dependent/inferior | Appearance focused | Non-traditional activities | Neutral |
| Victim | Sex Object/ Seductress | Heroine | |
| Housewife | Gold digger | Career-oriented/entrepreneur | |
| Family-oriented | Weight problems | Voice of authority | |
| Emotional/weak | | | |
| Unfit for Business | | | |

Each of the image representations under the traditional roles category had to do with traditional roles that women have been expected to fulfill, like being a housewife, or dependent/inferior to a man, or emotional/weak. The decorative roles all focused on women as objects of decoration and on how physically attractive they are. The non-traditional roles focused on the opposite of traditional roles where women were doing non-traditional activities or in a position of authority. The neutral roles were of course, presenting women as neutral or equal to men.

It was my hope that these various image representations would be able to carefully code any representations of women that occurred in the advertisements. It is possible that one ad may fit into more than one of the categories at the same time.

To address the research questions I chose to use a content analysis with a qualitative research design. I performed the coding myself. I had Dr. Gretchen Perbix conduct a spot check

to compare and note any differences. This spot check ensured the reliability of the content

analysis.

# Chapter 4

## Results

The results from my study of the various websites were largely varied. Unfortunately, there was evidence of a large number of stereotypes in the imbedded advertisements. However, there were several specific stereotypes that were not present at all in the advertisements.
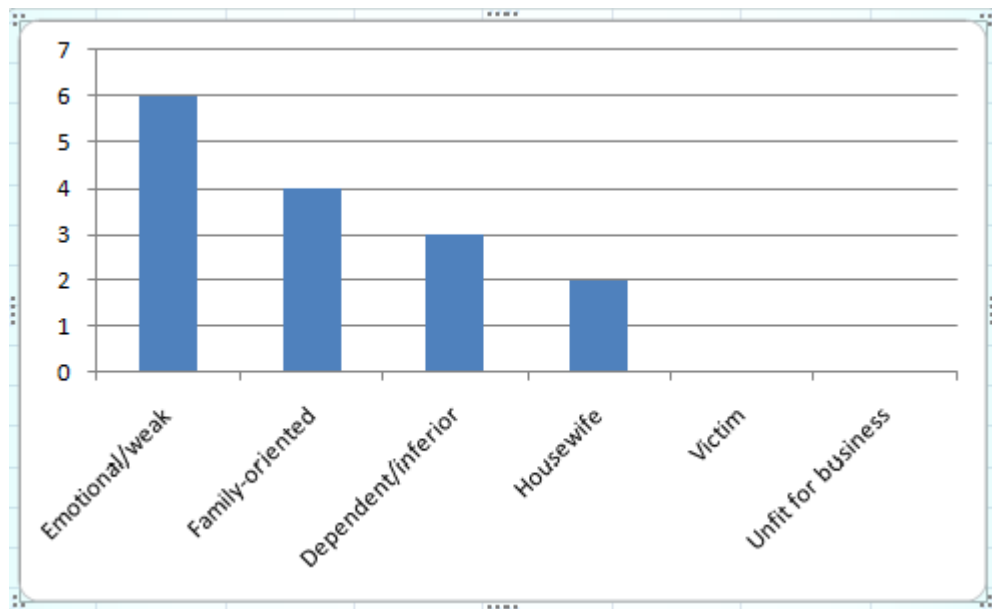
### Traditional Roles



Figure 1: Traditional Roles

As shown in the graph (Figure 1), the stereotypes of victim, and unfit for business were not present in the advertisements I analyzed. It was encouraging to see an absence of those portrayals. There were two incidents of women portrayed as housewives and three who were dependent/inferior to a man. There were four incidents of women as family-oriented and six portrayals of women as emotional/weak.

The advertisement in Figure 2 is an example of a woman as a homemaker from WebMD. The advertisement depicts a woman in her home, smiling as she is checking on her Thanksgiving Turkey. The assumption is that she is the one who is responsible for the cooking in the household.



Figure 2: Homemaker

As mentioned above, there were four representations of women as family-oriented. The following example in Figure 3 is from Parent.net. Even though the website is for parents, there is only a mother depicted with her child in the advertisement. She is depicted caring for her child in the home by giving her a bath. It does beg the question: where are the fathers? Why is there only a mother depicted? See Figure 3.



Figure 3: Family-oriented

In six advertisements women were shown to be weak or emotional. The example below was from healthline.com, shown in Figure 4. The woman is depicted in her bed, with a hot water bottle on her head, a tissue in one hand, looking worriedly at the thermometer in her other hand. It seems that she is too weak to fight off the flu germs.



Figure 4: Weak

Another example is from Parenting and Pregnancy.org (Figure 5). It depicts a mother, holding her fingers at her temples, like she may have a headache. She has a frown on her face and her jaw seems to be clenched. She looks very frustrated and the caption tells us that she is stressed-out. There is also a little girl portrayed in the background, who looks like she is running around. The message is that she is weak or having a difficult time dealing with the stresses of motherhood.



Figure 5: Weak

There were three examples of women depicted as dependent/inferior. This example was taken from parentfurther.org (Figure 6). The male and female are supposedly parents, as we assume from the context on the information on the website, but the male is pointing something out to the female. She is depicted as leaning back into him and smiling at the computer screen that he is pointing at. She seems to be dependent upon him for information. He seems to be in charge and is also physically supporting her.
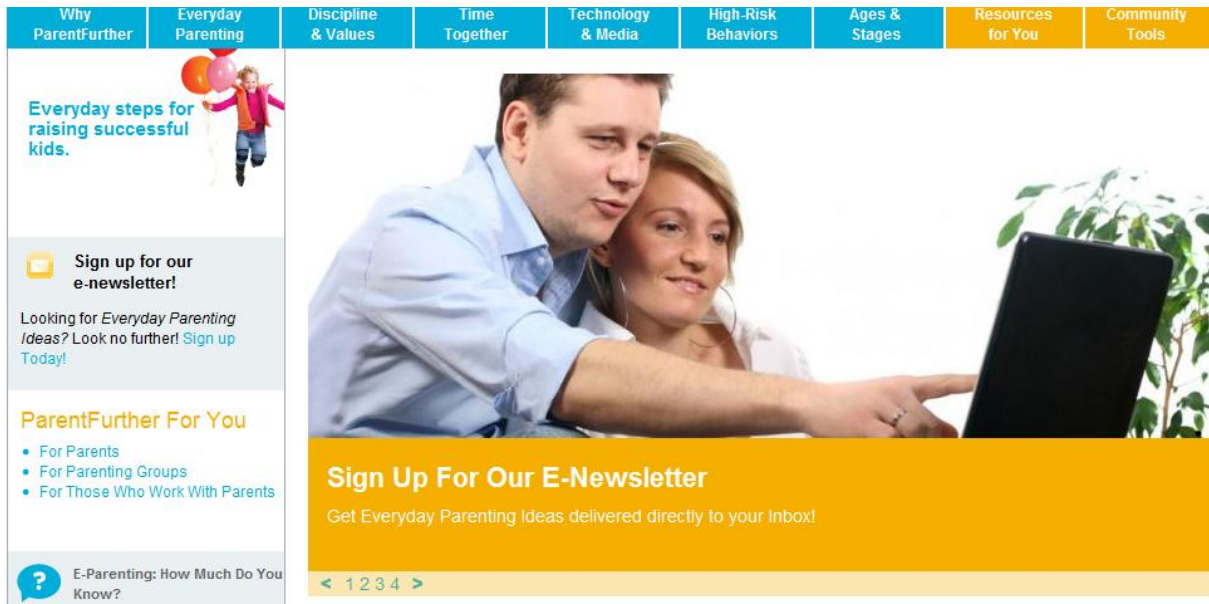


Figure 6: Dependent/Inferior
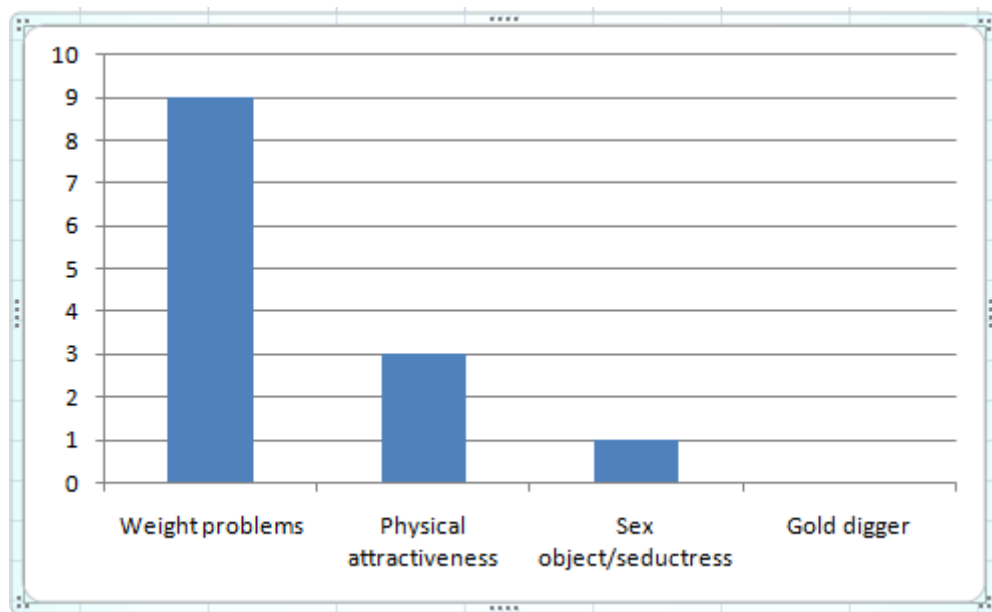
## Decorative Roles



Figure 7: Decorative roles

As shown in the chart for Decorative Roles (Figure 7), nine advertisements depicted women as experiencing weight problems, three as concerned with physical attractiveness, and one as a sex object/seductress. There were no representations of women as gold diggers.

An excellent example of the representation of a woman as a sex object/seductress is shown in Figure 8, which was taken from Fitness Online. The woman is shown in a seductive pose (hands on hips), looking straight at the audience. She is wearing a low-cut shirt and has an almost challenging look on her face. If her clothing and general attitude weren't indication enough, the caption next to the photograph leaves no doubt that she is meant to be a seductress. It plainly states that she is "TV's hottest mom" and that she "makes us laugh- and fantasize." She is only there for comic relief and so that fans can spend their days fantasizing about her body. I ask, what does this have to do with fitness? Nothing. She is portrayed as a sex object/seductress.



Figure 8: Sex Object/Seductress

With the Decorative Roles category, advertisements portrayed women as appearance-focused. A good example would be the advertisement found in Fitnessmagazine.com (Figure 9). The woman is dressed in a revealing two piece swimsuit and is smiling at the camera. She is very attractive and looks to be in good physical condition. She is pictured next to the words, "Fresh Natural Beauty," even though the magazine is about fitness and not a beauty magazine. I also found it interesting that the largest caption on the magazine cover is: "Blast More Fat!" The eye is drawn to it immediately, because of its size on the page. So, the model obviously isn't currently experiencing weight problems, but she seems to be held as a paragon of womanly fitness and beauty.



Figure 9: Appearance focused

I found another example that seemed completely focused on the woman's appearance (see Figure 10 below). It was found on Fitnessmagazine.com. The woman is portrayed smiling as she holds out a barbell in her hand. She seems to be having fun while exercising and is focused on improving the appearance of her arms. The caption also lets us know that the model is trying to achieve a "fierce upper body."



Figure 10: Appearance Focused/Physical Attractiveness

A woman who is experiencing weight problems can be described as a woman who is not at her ideal weight and may be shown to be struggling with weight loss or who is simply overweight. It may also be a woman who is focused on her weight. Obviously, this is a recurring theme in fitness magazines, but needs to be handled delicately. An excellent example would be from that'sfit.com, Figure 11.The woman is pictured on some sort of exercise equipment, and the caption tells us that she is just beginning an exercise program. She also does not fit the media's ideal "thin" body type image. Even though she is pictured smiling, she is looking with her eyes downcast and away from the camera.
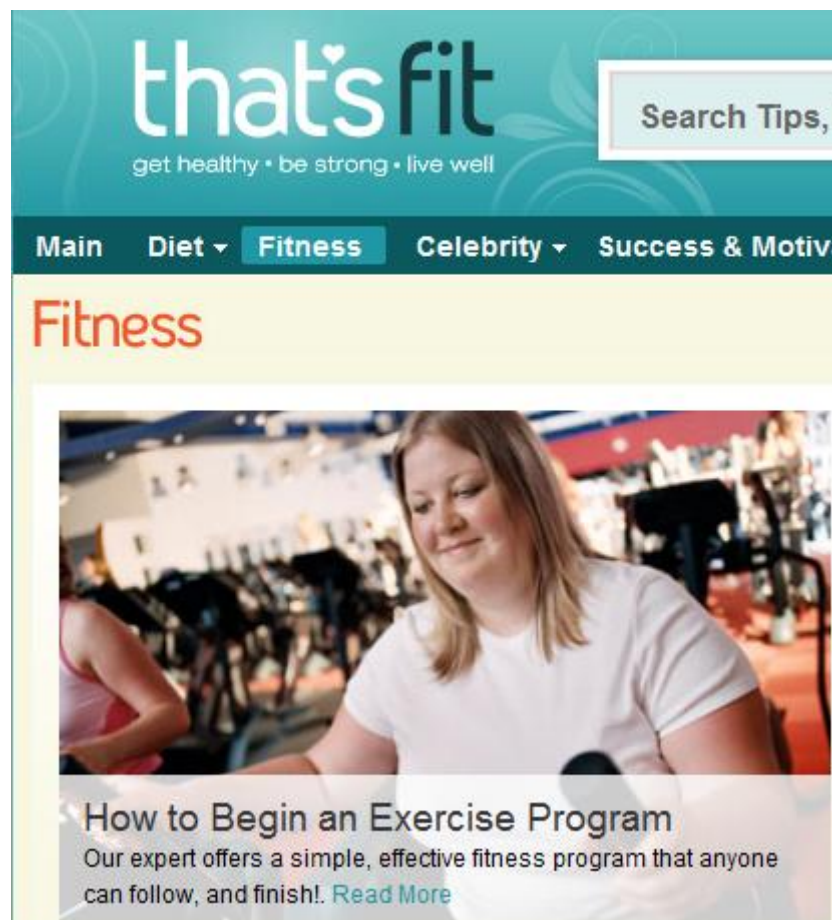


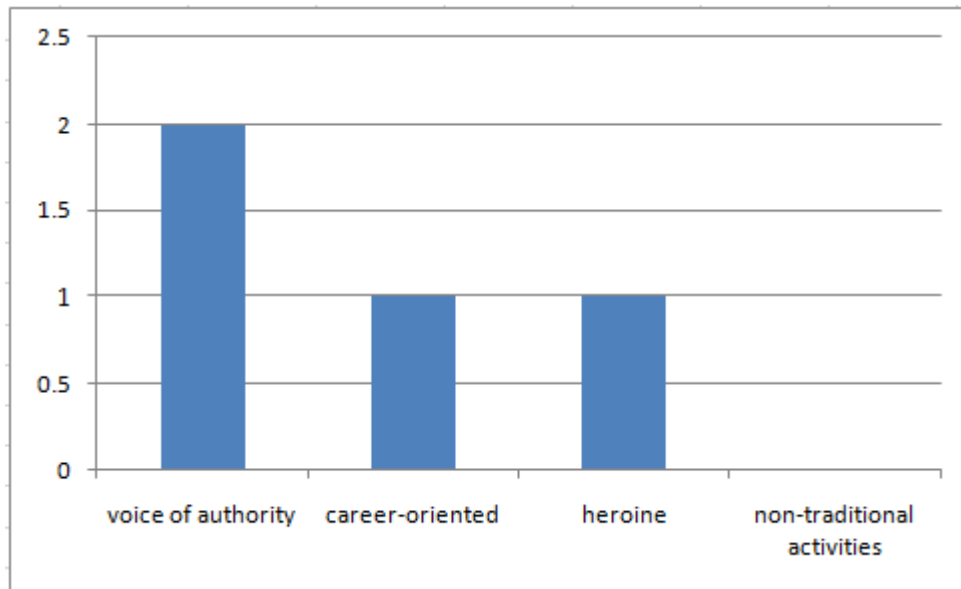Figure 11: Experiencing weight problems

## Non-traditional Roles



Figure 12: Non-traditional Roles

Interestingly enough, there were two examples of women portrayed as voices of authority, and one each of women as career-oriented and a heroine. There were no women depicted engaged in non-traditional activities or jobs.

Medical-clinic.org portrayed two career-oriented women in Figure 13. However, it is fascinating to note how the women in the advertisement are positioned in relation to the man. The woman on the right seems to be the male's equal (although he is the only one holding a clipboard) and seems to be a doctor as well. They both had a stethoscope around their necks, which also connotes a doctoral position. The woman in the middle of the advertisement seems to be a nurse because of her scrubs and is positioned further back. Also, both women's images seem to be more transparent than the man's. So, while one woman is presented as career-oriented, another woman is simultaneously being presented as inferior.



Figure 13: Career-oriented and Inferior

The woman in the following advertisement is an example of a woman portrayed as a voice of authority (Figure 14). The ad was taken from medicalinformation.org. She is dressed in a doctor's lab coat and is holding a clipboard. She looks professional and calm. The caption also lets us know that she is a person of authority who can answer questions, and provide people with medical information.



Figure 14: Voice of Authority

I was pleased to find an advertisement of a female who was depicted as a heroine. It was from the Mayo Clinic website and pictured a young woman standing next to her horse, smiling. The caption lets us know that with the help she received from the Mayo Clinic, she was able to fight a rare brain tumor. It seems to be an excellent example of a young woman showing courage during a hard time, and surviving the odds. She has triumphed over her severe illness. Please see Figure 15.



Figure 15: Heroine

## Equal Roles

There was only one advertisement that I found in the websites that portrayed a female in a neutral manner. I did find it interesting that I had only one advertisement that did not seem to fit in with any of the coding categories. It was from the website Fitnesspartners.com, and it featured a woman sitting in a Yoga-like pose, wearing plain white. She was the only person pictured, and was simply smiling. She isn't posing in a sexual manner, but seems relaxed and happy. She also does not seem to be dependent upon anyone else, but also is not doing anything that might suggest a non-traditional role. I decided to code this under "neutral." See Figure 16.
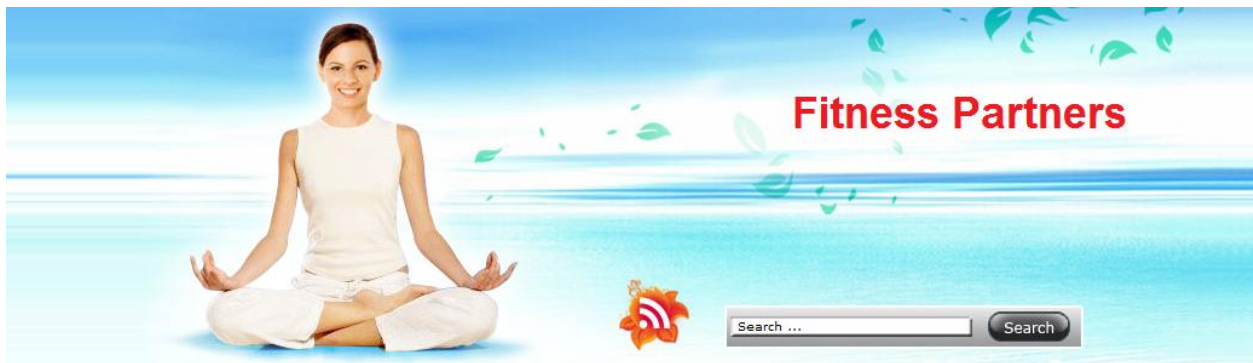


Figure 16: Neutral

# Chapter 5

## Discussion

It was my hope that the embedded advertisements I analyzed would not exhibit as many stereotypical portrayals as studies have shown are in print advertisements. Unfortunately, my content analysis showed a large number of traditional and decorative stereotypical portrayals. Only four advertisements portrayed women in non-traditional roles and only two portrayed women in a neutral, non-stereotypical way. These findings were very disheartening. Out of 33 advertisements, 28 were made up of traditional or decorative stereotypes. The largest numbers of stereotypes were in the decorative role category, with depictions of women experiencing weight problems or being weight focused at the top. Obviously, this was in part of the focus of the websites. Fitness websites will often encourage their viewers to become more fit by losing weight. However, it is discouraging to see how many stereotypes focus only on women's outward appearances and emphasize the "need" to lose weight and constantly work to improve how they look. These stereotypes are sending harmful messages to men and women who have access to the internet.

I was pleased to find that by combining Yun et al's representations with Plakoyiannaki et al's categories I was able to carefully and systematically analyze each advertisement. Even though Yun et al's representations were originally used for not only pictures and graphics, but text as well, I felt that the representations were appropriate because of the many options they gave. There are obviously many stereotypes of women and I wanted to be able to cover as many of them as possible. By combining both the representations and the categories I was able to code and identify many different roles and representations of women.

In terms of the different types of websites, the results varied. The medical and health information websites contained a mixture of the first three categories: traditional (8), decorative (4), and non-traditional (4). It was interesting to find that the only portrayals of women in non-traditional roles were found in the medical and health websites. They seemed to encourage women to participate in medical careers and to be in a position of authority. The parenting websites contained only traditional stereotypes and actually portrayed very few men at all. It was discouraging to see that there were no fathers portrayed as good parents to balance out the overabundance of women as mothers. I was surprised to see that there were no advertisements that depicted mothers in non-traditional ways. There are so many mothers today who balance work, family, education, and many other things. The traditional representation of the completely family-oriented mother is so outdated she is barely recognizable. Why aren't these advertisements up to date? The fitness websites were almost completely focused on decorative roles of women, which is what I expected. Overwhelmingly, the majority of those fitness advertisements focused on decorative roles as either attaining physical attractiveness, experiencing weight problems, or as a sex object/seductress. It is important for fitness websites to encourage their viewers to lead healthy lifestyles, but it is unnecessary to constantly portray women in need of change. There is so much focus on weight loss and preventing weight gain that it can make women overly focused on their outward appearances. Instead of being healthy, they are trying to be perfect, to reach the ideal body type that is constantly presented to them. Also, one of the advertisements from a fitness magazine (Figure 8) is portrayed as a sex object or seductress. It has nothing to do with fitness or being healthy at all.

An issue that I came across was the overlapping of a few of the representations. There was a medical information website (Figure 13) that portrayed one woman as career-oriented and

the other woman as inferior to the man in the picture. It could be argued that both women were posed as inferior to the man in the picture, especially when we take into consideration that both women are pictured somewhat transparently, while the man's picture is solid. It also seems as though the male is more important because he is holding a clipboard in his hands, and the women are simply standing there. I chose to code the advertisement as picturing the women as career-oriented; while one was pictured as a doctor and one was a nurse, both had smiles on their faces and seemed confident.

Although I only found one ad that I classified as "neutral," I felt comfortable coding it as such. It is important to have a category that holds the possibility for a woman to be portrayed as completely neutral or equal to a man. I felt that ad was very effective (Figure 17). The woman was portrayed in simple, white clothing, and was sitting happily in a yoga pose. It spoke volumes of what the fitness website felt about women and portraying fit women.

I am very grateful for the work of Hyun Jung Yun et al, and their list of stereotypical representations of women. I felt that the representations covered many possible stereotypes, but still left room for interpretation and discussion. While I originally had some trouble defining each of the representations clearly, I was able to contact Hyun Jung Yun, who kindly gave me some of the information straight from her original code book. It was incredibly helpful and detailed.

The findings from this study suggest that while some progress has been made to portray women in non-stereotypical representations, many health, fitness, and parenting websites abound with stereotypical representations. I realize that these particular websites can usually be expected to portray decorative and traditional representations, but that is no excuse. I didn't choose these

websites hoping to find a large number of stereotypical representations. I had hoped that the advertisers and marketers who are creating these ads for these particular types of websites would realize how outdated and hurtful these representations are. The stereotypes follow the same pattern that print and television advertisements follow, including benevolent and hostile sexism. The effects of these representations are far-reaching, as more and more people around the world have access to computers and the internet. These information sites can be very helpful to users, but can be very damaging at the same time. Women can suffer from the effects of objectification and self-objectification, and men may assume that it is appropriate to treat women as objects.

### Portrayal Options

I would like to note that using stereotypical representations can be completely avoided. For example, in parenting websites, women and men can both be portrayed as caring parents, but can also be portrayed as working parents. The ideas of the traditional or nuclear family have changed and parenting websites should be prepared to present the modern family as they truly are, to include single mothers, fathers, same sex couples, as well as male/female couples.

Fitness websites can focus on overall health and well being without portraying women as sex objects or being completely focused on their weight. Models in advertisements can be portrayed eating an apple or a salad, instead of standing on a beach in a skimpy bikini. Or, a family could be portrayed taking a walk or a bike ride together. If fitness advertisements were more focused on how fun it is to be fit and healthy, they could be more effective.

While the health websites portrayed women in non-traditional ways, they also had many portrayals of women as weak or emotional. In every case I found, if a person was depicted as sick or depressed, it was a woman. Women and men need to be equally portrayed.

## Comparing web-based advertisements and print advertisements

My findings reflect a similarity with those in print and television advertisements. There are still many representations of women in traditional roles, which follows Coltrane and Adams' (1997) study which discussed the idea of separate spheres, and that women belonged in the home. Even in 1997 the authors discussed how outdated these traditional roles are, but they still persist in 2010 on the web. As mentioned earlier, many studies have shown (Yoder, Christopher, and Holmes 2008, Ganahl et al 2003, and Coltrane and Adams 1997) that television commercials with female stereotypes still abound.

Monk-Turner et al (2008) found that female characters were portrayed as sex objects more often than male characters to sell a product, which seems to corroborate with my findings of females as a sex object/seductress. Even though theirs was a recent study as well, those decorative roles still persist in magazine advertisements as well as online.

While researching other online advertisements (of global products), Plakoyiannaki et al (2008) were disheartened to find that many decorative and traditional stereotypes occurred in these advertisements, but they were able to find some advertisements that depicted women in non-traditional roles. While most of my analysis found traditional and decorative roles as well, it was encouraging to see four advertisements of women in non-traditional roles. While it has been a long time coming, it is important to note that advertisements are starting to change the way that they portray women.

Unfortunately, the web does not present an equal playing field for males and females, because women are still often portrayed in stereotypical representations. Portraying women in traditional and decorative roles in online advertisements can hurt the credibility and life goals of

women all over the world. Until women are represented as equal to men, they will not have the same opportunities as men.

## Future Research

In the future, it might be helpful to take a more longitudinal approach content analysis, by analyzing advertisements from these types of websites over the period of a year. Perhaps certain websites could be accessed every other month. It would be interesting to see the changes in the representations of women during that time. I would also like to expand my search to include more advertisements. It would be interesting to perform an analysis of other types of websites on *Time* Magazine's list to see how prevalent the various stereotypical portrayals are.

To expand upon the stereotypes of women, it would be meaningful to study the implications of stereotypes of certain minorities. For example, one could analyze how Asian, Hispanic, or African American women are portrayed, and if certain stereotypes correspond with each race. Is one race usually portrayed as an authority figure as opposed to a sex object? For example, in Figure 7, a Hispanic actress is portrayed as a sex object or seductress. It would be helpful to see how prevalent that stereotype is in portrayals of Hispanic women, what the negative effects of those stereotypes are, and how they can affect how people view women of other cultures.

Another area of interest to me is the absence of males in parenting magazines and websites. It is a subject that needs further research so that males can be treated as equal parents who are also involved in their children's lives. It is possible that males are not pictured as frequently as females because many males are not present or active in their children's lives, but

excluding them from parenting advertisements only adds to the view that only women can be good parents. It's almost as though the two stereotypes (dead-beat dad and the do-everything mother) feed off of each other.

Social networking sites are also of great interest to me. They are wildly popular and users often visit their sites many times each day. Many of their advertisements are manipulated through assumptions that they make about the users. Facebook is one example of a social networking site that uses these types of advertisements. Facebook tries to target its possible audience members by location, gender, age, keywords used, workplaces, relationship status, and sexual persuasion. Once advertisers have that information they can target their ads, using predetermined assumptions. For example, an advertiser on Facebook will usually assume that a woman who is in a relationship and is in her 20's or 30's is interested in having babies and will bombard her Facebook page with advertisements about expecting mothers, free diaper bags, etc.

# Chapter 6

## What We Can Do

We can't force the media to stop portraying women stereotypically. So what can we do? A study by Posavac et al (1998) noted that women who were generally satisfied with their own bodies were not greatly influenced by the beauty standards depicted in the media. The authors cite two reasons that women may have low body dissatisfaction: "First, a woman may have low body dissatisfaction because her body shape is similar to that of the standard depicted in the media… A second possibility is that even if a woman is substantially heavier than the media standard, she may possess low body dissatisfaction because body image issues are not important to her, because, for example, she is confident in her skills and abilities in other areas" (198). It seems to me that the key is confidence. If we can instill in women and girls confidence in their skills and abilities they will be less susceptible to the negative consequences of the media's stereotypical exposure of women. The findings by Yoder, Christopher, and Holmes (2008) seem to corroborate, stating: "Our findings show that self-esteem plays a role in the achievement motive to avoid failure that is similar for women and men" (309).

Another option that extends the idea of self-confidence was suggested by Grabe et al (2007):

In particular, social intervention, such as programs that teach young girls of the marketing strategies that strategically sexually objectify women's bodies (Stice, Mazotti, Weibel, & Agras, 2000), may be effective in preventing girls from internalizing an observer's perspective of their own bodies. Perhaps more importantly, the data suggest

that activism aimed at reducing the societal objectification of women's bodies may be beneficial in enhancing the psychological well-being of women (172).

We cannot underestimate the power of teaching young women how to deal with these stereotypical images. If we can prevent young women from accepting these stereotypical representations and teach them to speak out, the representations will have no power over women. We also need to encourage women to speak out against these kinds of advertisements and to spread the word when they find stereotypical advertisements.

Finally, I encourage you not to underestimate the power of our voices. Cohan (2001) reminds us that

> Consumer revolt is an American tradition, fueled by our vibrant First Amendment rights. Consumers can refuse to purchase products whose advertisements depict women in offensive ways… Consumers can become more vigilant in recognizing the subtle messages presented in advertising, and teach our children to understand that advertising is not reality (330).

Perhaps one voice will not make much of a difference, but if we make our friends and family members aware of marketing campaigns that portray women stereotypically, we can make an impact on their products' sales, write letters of complaint, and become enough of a nuisance to create a change. Even teaching your own children can start a big change. Your children will tell their friends, and they will tell more friends, and those children will be able to view advertising more critically and it won't hold as much persuasive power over them. Please join me in speaking out against stereotypical representations everywhere!

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