

A Study of Gender Advertisements. A Statistical Measuring of the Prevalence of Genders' Patterns in the Images of Print Advertisements [†]

Nicoletta Signoretti

Free University of Bozen, Faculty of Education, Regensburger Allee 16, 39042 Brixen-Bressanone, Italy; nicoletta.signoretti@unibz.it

[†] Presented at the International and Interdisciplinary Conference IMMAGINI? Image and Imagination between Representation, Communication, Education and Psychology, Brixen, Italy, 27–28 November 2017.

Published: 16 November 2017.

Abstract: This study extends a previous Goffmann's work. He categorized gender stereotypes in advertising pictures in USA in the 1970s, in six main groups: relative size, feminine touch, function ranking, family, ritualization of subordination, licensed withdraw. This work is a tentative of a statistical measure of the prevalence of gender's patterns in print advertisements, in Italy, in 2006. The Hypotheses: strongest gender's stereotypes survive, some changed, others disappeared. The results show that main gender's stereotypes are hard to die even though the society has significantly changed, creating "modern" stereotypes. The line between masculinity and femininity seems to be thinner today.

Keywords: gender's stereotypes; advertisement's images; social statistics; research method

1. Introduction

This study extends the previous work of the sociologist Erving Goffman (he was born in Canada in 1922 and died in Philadelphia in 1982) called "Gender Advertisements" (Goffman, E. 1978) *Gender Advertisements*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, USA). In his study, Goffman observes how the images of gender are represented in the advertising pictures in the 1970s, in the USA. By looking at over 500 different photo advertisements and analyzing the human's different poses, positioning of the body, clothing, and so on, he categorized gender stereotypes in six main group called, relatively: relative size, feminine touch, function ranking, the family, the ritualization of subordination, and licensed withdraw.

Along the lines of the Goffman's study, this work is a tentative of a statistical measure of the prevalence of gender's patterns in print advertisements, in Italy, in 2006. The aim is to observe which changes occurred in the gender's stereotypes shown in advertisements' pictures, in western countries after 30 years.

Goffman makes a clear distinction among "private" pictures, "public" pictures and "commercial" pictures. The first ones are the pictures taken in a family or in a friendship circles and featuring persons from these pictures. The public pictures are addressed to a broader audience. So the distinction between private and public pictures mostly "lies in the differing audiences to which the pictures are aimed and the uses to which they are put" (Michael Hviid Jacobsen Paperback, 2010, *The Contemporary Goffman*, Routledge Studies in Social and Political Thought). Regarding with the commercial ones Goffman says that "there are ways in which commercial realism provides us something that is fuller and richer than the real glimpses". In fact, we know that "images intentionally alter the perceived reality (e.g., through photographic manipulations)". The images in the

advertisements have the aim to be attractive for the public they are addressed to. The degree of stereotyping in advertisement is pretty high.

2. Hypotheses

- (1) The strongest gender's stereotypes, identified from Goffman, still survive in the modern advertisements.
- (2) Some patterns of gender's images in print advertisements have changed since Goffman's study. Some stereotypes are disappeared.

3. Materials and Methods

This study wants to be an empirical study that treats photographic materials as data that are worthy of analysis. A survey has been selected in order to obtain the material of analysis.

3.1. The Survey

Five phases of selection of advertisements pictures.

- (1) the population size: 686 magazines (sold in Italy between November 2015 to January 2006) divided in 7 homogeneous categories (called stratum);
- (2) Survey's technique: a technique of proportionate stratification has been employed;
- (3) First stadium of the stratification: random selection (*The syntax for the RANDBETWEEN function in Microsoft Excel is: RANDBETWEEN(bottom, top)*) of 2 magazines for each category, there were 941 advertisement's pictures, of which 580 featured human subjects;
- (4) Second stadium of the stratification: 100 pictures were randomly selected from the sample of the previous 580 pictures that has been selected in the first stadium;

The final sample is represented by 100 selected pictures that were considered as "individuals", as an object of study. Every picture was literally interviewed with a questionnaire.

The idea has been this: treating pictures as they were individuals. As individuals they have structural characteristics. Some main structural characteristics are, for example, the category of magazine they belong to or the target of the advertisement or the price of the magazine or the percentage of pages dedicated to advertisements, etc., etc.

Others characteristics of pictures, following the Goffman's method, are variables that can show the presence or absence of certain features individuated from Goffman (e.g., bashful knee bend woman's position or feminine touch, etc., etc.).

Once the database has been fulfilled with the data, some descriptive analyses (made with the software SPSS) show the preliminary results. Then also a Multiple Correspondence Analysis, with the software SPAD, was implemented to show some important outputs.

3.2. Questionnaire

A set of questions have been "asked" these pictures in order to build a database with all the information for the analyses. The structural characteristics of pictures, identified from the questions of the questionnaire, are, for example, the belonging to a certain category of magazine, the target of the advertisement, price of the magazine, the percentage of dedicated pages to advertisements, etc., etc. all the characteristics of pictures were treated as data for the analyses. Following the Goffman's method, the identified variables are, for example: bashful knee bend woman's position or feminine touch, etc., etc.

3.3. Analyses

The Software SPSS investigated some preliminary results in order to describe the frequencies of the variables. After that, a *Cluster Analysis* have shown the main groups of stereotypes and it allowed testing the hypotheses. The *Cluster Analysis* has been realized with the software SPAD.

4. Results

For each Hypothesis there is one picture of Goffman's study and one picture from the selected pictures of this study.

4.1. Verifying Hypothesis (1)

"The strongest gender's stereotypes, identified from Goffman, still survive in the modern advertisements".

Relative Size: it means that the women are generally shown shorter or smaller in comparison to men, unless women are upper-class. When a woman is upper in terms of the social status, she can be taller than men. In Figure 1 we see a picture of Goffman's study in comparison with a picture selected for the present study. According to Goffman, relative size can be defined as "one way in which social weight–power, authority, rank, office, renown- is echoed expressively in social situations through relative size, especially height". "With relative size, women are generally shown smaller or lower than men in terms of girth and height. Although men tend to be biologically taller or larger than females, Goffman suggests that this size difference is manipulated in man-made advertisements to convey difference in status or power in certain social situations. The concept that relative size conveys social status remains relevant even when women are portrayed as the taller or larger individual on screen or in print." (Goffman, 1979) "Goffman states that on the few occasions when women are pictured taller than men, the men seem almost always to be subordinated in social class status and/or depicted as inferior." ("The portrayal of women's images in magazine advertisements: Goffman's gender analysis revisited").



Figure 1. Goffman's picture and selected picture, when man is shorter than woman.

It is clear that the women presented in those pictures are upper-class than men. That explains why they are taller.

Feminine Touch: "It is when a woman touches a man or an object in a way that is very loose, and not gripping the object tightly" (Goffman, 1979). In Figure 2 we see a picture of Goffman's study in comparison with a picture selected for the present study. Women often touch themselves. This is a kind of situation that does not deal with men. Goffman argues that "females in advertising are frequently posing while using their fingers and hands to trace the outlines of an object, or to cradle it

or to caress its surface". This type of touch encourages the idea that women are sexually available, weak, and vulnerable in relation to men.



Figure 2. Goffman's picture and selected picture, self touch.

The "self touching" situation is still a feminine characteristic.

Function Ranking: when men and women collaborate to complete a task, the man takes the 'executive role'. In Figure 3 we see a picture of Goffman's study in comparison with a picture selected for the present study. Goffman explains function ranking as when men and women collaborate to complete a task, the man takes the 'executive role'. Goffman exemplifies this advertising phenomena as illustrated in the workplace, at home, in public, and with children. "Two of Goffman's categories-Relative Size and Function Ranking-were not prevalent depictions in magazine advertisements. Overall, many advertisements showed only females or males rather than the two genders together or a family scene. This might mean that advertisements are frequently targeting more specific audiences.". "What Erving Goffman shares with contemporary feminists is the felt conviction that beneath the surface of ordinary social behavior innumerable small murders of the mind and spirit take place daily."

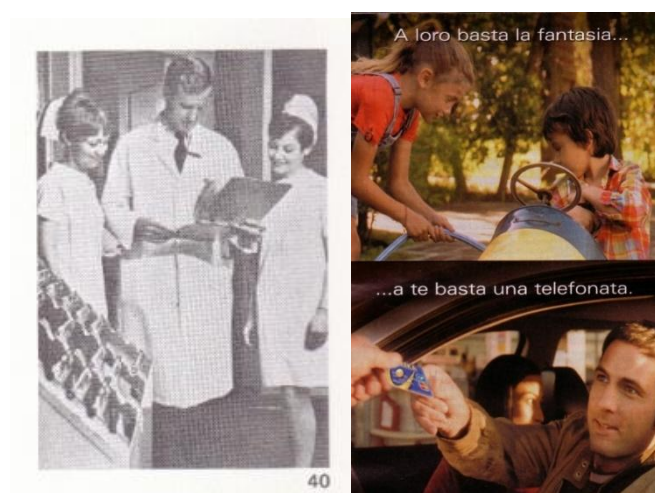


Figure 3. Goffman's picture and selected picture, The executive role of man.

Also when pictures' protagonists are children the executive role seems to belong to the "man".

The Family: When Parents are closer to their children, the father tends to maintain distance between him and his family's members. Besides there is almost always a close relationship between mother and daughter and between father and son (other pictures of this category in Appendix A, Figures A1–A3). When families are depicted in advertising, parents are shown to be closer to their children of the same gender and in some instances men are shown separate from the rest of the family, in a protective manner.

In Figure 4 we see a picture of Goffman's study in comparison with a picture selected for the present study.



Figure 4. Goffman's picture and selected picture, Family.

In the selected picture of this study, the meaning of "maintaining distance between him and his family's members" is clear. The father seems to be more distant from the other family's members. This act shows protectiveness according to Goffman.

Ritualization of Subordination: it serves to demonstrate the women's role through body positioning techniques such as **physical lowering**, **body without head**, **bashful knee bend**, **smiles**, and more (other pictures of this category in Appendix A, Figures A4–A7). In Figure 5 we see a picture of Goffman's study in comparison with a picture selected for the present study.

Physical lowering: woman is physically lower than man.



Figure 5. Goffman's picture and selected picture, Physical lowering.

Licensed withdrawal: women often are not fully within the action or the scene. That means: man behaves, woman appears.

Women often is pictured in advertisement as looking at men. They seems removed from the scene itself. With licensed withdrawal shown in many different types of advertisements, they are seen almost everywhere with many people being exposed to them. In Figure 6, we see a picture of Goffman's study in comparison with a picture selected for the present study. (another picture of this category in Appendix A, Figure A8)



Figure 6. Goffman and selected picture, men behave, women appear.

In the previous pictures, the man is playing and the woman is just observing him.

4.2. Verifying Hypothesis (2)

Some patterns of gender's images in print advertisements have changed since Goffman's study. They are "modern woman" and "modern man". An example in Figure 7 (other pictures of this category in Appendix A, Figures A9–A14).

Modern women and modern man:

Woman in career and feminine man



Figure 7. Own selected picture women in career and feminine man.

Two of the main "new stereotypes" of gender found in this study, are the inversion of gender roles. Here we can see a woman in career and a man who seem very feminine.

4.3. Verifying Hypothesis (3)

Some stereotypes are disappeared they are: women in clowning, emotional women and women in background. In Figure 8 some pictures of Goffman's study, that represent this "lost" category.



Figure 8. Goffman's picture, women in clowning, emotional women and women in background.

After the analyses, no picture represents this kind of category.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

In advertisements' pictures in Italy, most of the same "classic" stereotypes", found from Goffman in the USA of 1976 are still there in 2006. The main gender's stereotypes are hard to die even though the society has significantly changed. These changes have had an influence "modern" stereotypes are born that tell us that the line between masculinity and femininity seems to be thinner today. Besides, some feminine stereotypes from 1976 seem to be completely disappeared, because they don't represent the modern woman anymore.

The statistical analyses told us that the most beautiful women are shown in advertisements that are addressed to women and the most successful men are shown in advertisements that are addressed to men. We would expected the opposite: beautiful women in advertisements for men and vice versa. But actually one of the most important subliminal message of advertisement is to convince people to emulate the stereotypes they see in those images they absorb in their everyday life.

The influence exerted by the proposed stereotypes of media can (more or less consciously) change attitudes, behaviors, and personal needs. Women and men should be brought up to a critical reading of subliminal messages and tacit messages of advertising images, in order to be able to decode the whole worlds, real or imaginary, that the images are able to create in the space of a glance.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Appendix A (Further images)

The Family:



Figure A1. Goffman's picture, man and son, woman and daughter.



Figure A2. Own selected picture, man and son.

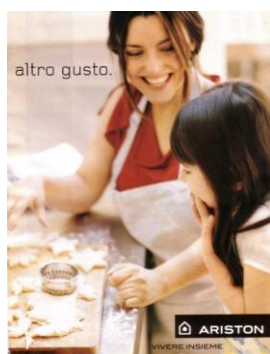


Figure A3. Own selected picture, woman and daughter.

Ritualization of subordination: Body without head



Figure A4. Goffman's picture and selected picture, body without head.

Bashful knee bend



Figure A5. Goffman's picture and selected picture, knee bend.

Smiles



Figure A6. Goffman's picture women smiles more than men.



Figure A7. Own selected picture women smiles more than men.

Licensed withdrawal

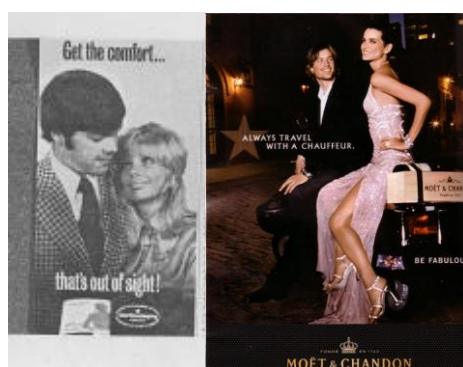


Figure A8. Goffman's picture and selected picture, the man looks at the woman.

Modern women:
Sexy women



Figure A9. Own selected picture sexy woman.

Ordinary woman



Figure A10. Own selected picture, "ordinary woman".

Exotic woman



Figure A11. Own selected picture, Exotic woman.

Masculine woman



Figure A12. Own selected picture, masculine woman.

Modern man:

Fatal man



Figure A13. Own selected picture, Fatal man.

Ridiculous man



Figure A14. Own selected picture, ridiculous man.

References

1. Acevedo, C.R.; de Arruda, A.L.; Nohara, J.J. A Content Analysis of the Roles Portrayed by Women in Television Advertisements: 1973–2000. XXIX EnANPAD—Encontro da ANPAD (2005) pp. 1–15 Published by ANPAD; 2005.
2. Baxter, L.A.; Babbie, E.R. The Basics of Communication Research; Wadsworth: Canada, 2003.
3. Belkaoui, A.; Belkaoui, J. A Comparative Analysis of the Roles Portrayed by Women in Print Advertisements. *J. Mark. Res.* **1976**, doi:10.1007/s13398-014-0173-7.2.
4. Brown, J.D. *Sexuality and the Mass Media*; Siecus Report; 1996; Volume 24; pp. 3–9.
5. Chi, C.W.; Baldwin, C. Gender and class stereotypes: A comparison of U.S. and Taiwanese magazine advertisements. *Race Gend. Class* **2004**, 11, 156–165.
6. Coltrane, S.; Messineo, M. The perpetuation of subtle prejudice: Race and gender imagery in 1990s television advertising. *Sex Roles* **2000**, 42, 363–388.
7. Conradie, M. The commercial value of history: A relevance theoretical analysis of historical signs in print advertisements. *Lang. Matters* **2013**, doi:10.1080/10228195.2011.649778.
8. Courtney, A.; Lockeretz, S.W. A woman's place: An analysis of the roles portrayed by women in magazine advertisements. *J. Mark. Res.* **1971**, doi:10.2307/3149733.
9. Dion, K.L. The social-psychology of female male relations—A critical analysis of central concepts. *Contemp. Psychol.* **1987**, 32, 35–37.
10. Duker, J.M.; Tucker, L.R., Jr. Women's lib-ers versus independent women: A study of preferences for women's roles in advertisements. *J. Mark. Res.* **1977**, 14, 469–475.
11. Faludi, S. *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women*; Crown: New York, NY, USA, 1991.

12. Fortunado, J.A. *Making Media Content: The Influence of Constituency Groups in Mass Media*; Erlbaum: Mahwah, NJ, USA, 2005.
13. Frith, K.T.; Cheng, H.; Shaw, P. Race and beauty: A comparison of Asian and western models in women's magazine advertisements. *Sex Roles* **2004**, *50*, 5361.
14. Gauntlett, D. *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction*; Routledge: London, UK, 2002.
15. Goffman, E. *Gender Advertisements*; Harper & Row: New York, NY, USA, 1979.
16. Gronhaug, K.; Heide, M. Stereotyping in country advertising: An experimental study. *Eur. J. Mark.* **1992**, *26*, 56–67.
17. Johar, G.V.; Moreau, P.; Schwarz, N. Gender typed advertisements and impression formation: The role of chronic and temporary accessibility. *J. Consum. Psychol.* **2003**, *13*, 220–229.
18. Kang, M.-E. The portrayal of women's images in magazine advertisements: Goffman's gender analysis revisited. *Sex Roles* **1997**, *37*, 979–996.
19. Kilbourne, J. Still killing us softly: Advertising and the obsession with thinness. In *Feminist Perspectives on Eating Disorders*; Fallon, P., Katzman, M.A., Wooley, S.C., Eds.; Guilford Press: New York, NY, USA, 1994; pp. 395–415.
20. Kim, J.L.; Ward, L.M. Pleasure reading: Associations between young women's sexual attitudes and their reading of contemporary women's magazines. *Psychol. Women Q.* **2004**, *28*, 48–58.
21. Lafky, S.; Duffy, M.; Steinmaus, M.; Berkowitz, D. Looking through gendered lenses: Female stereotyping in advertisements and gender role expectations. *J. Mass Commun. Q.* **1996**, *73*, 379–388.
22. Lazier-Smith, L. No respect. In *Women in Business*; United States, 1990; p. 4.
23. Lindner, K. Images of women in general interest and fashion magazine advertisements from 1955 to 2002. *Sex Roles* **2004**, *51*, 409–421.
24. MacKay, N.J.; Covell, K. The impact of women in advertisements on attitudes toward women. *Sex Roles* **1997**, *36*, 573–583.
25. McGarty, C.; Yzerbyt, Y. *Vincent & Spears, Russell Stereotypes as Explanations: The Formation of Meaningful Beliefs about Social Groups*; Cambridge University Press: New York, NY, USA, 2002.
26. Thomas, M.E.; Treiber, L.A. Race, Gender, and Status: A Content Analysis of Print Advertisements in Four Popular Magazines. *Sociol. Spectr.* **2000**, doi:10.1080/027321700405090
27. Pious, S.; Neptune, D. Racial and gender biases in magazine advertising—A content-analytic study. *Psychol. Women Q.* **1997**, *21*, 627–644.
28. Posavac, H.D.; Posavac, S.S.; Posavac, E.J. Exposure to media images of female attractiveness and concern with body weight among young women. *Sex Roles* **1998**, *38*, 187–201.
29. Putrevu, S. Communicating with the Sexes: Male and Female Responses to Print Advertisements. *J. Advert.* **2004**, doi:10.1080/00913367.2004.10639168.
30. Radach, R.; Lemmer, S.; Vorstius, C.; Heller, D.; Radach, K. Eye Movements in the Processing of Print Advertisements. In *The Mind's Eye: Cognitive and Applied Aspects of Eye Movement Research*; Amsterdam 2003; doi:10.1016/B978-044451020-4/50032-3.
31. Sexton, D.E.; Haberman, P. Women in magazine advertisements. *J. Advert. Res.* **1974**, *14*, 41–46.
32. Ardyth, B.S.; Jan, L.W.; Stephen, L.; George, S. *Media Management: A Casebook Approach*; Lawrence Erlbaum Associates: Mahway, NJ, USA, 1999.
33. Stephenson, T.; Stover, W.J.; Villamor, M. Sell me some prestige: American advertising, gender studies. The portrayal of women in business-related ads. *J. Pop. Cult.* **1997**, *30*, 255–271.
34. Sullivan, G.L.; O'Connor, P.J. Women's role portrayals in magazine advertising: 1958–1983. *Sex Roles* **1988**, *18*, 181–188.
35. Umiker-Sebeok, J. Power and the construction of gendered spaces. *Int. Rev. Sociol.* **1996**, *6*, 389–403.
36. Wagner, L.; Banos, J. A woman's place: A follow-up analysis of the roles portrayed by women in magazine advertisements. *J. Mark. Res.* **1973**, *70*, 213–214.
37. Wilson, C.C., II; Gutierrez, F.; Chao, L. *Racism, Sexism, and the Media: The Rise of Class Communication in Multicultural America*; Sage Publications Ltd.: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2003.
38. Wolin, L.D. Gender issues in advertising—An oversight synthesis of research: 1970–2002. *J. Advert. Res.* **2003**, *43*, 111–129

39. Yi, Y. Cognitive and affective priming effects of the context for print advertisements. *J. Advert.* **1990**, doi:10.2307/4188762
40. Yi, Y. The Effects of Contextual Priming in Print Advertisements. *J. Consum. Res.* **1990**, doi:10.1086/208551.



© 2017 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).