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Anne Fairchild McVey

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**The Portrayal of Women in 1996 General Appeal Magazine Advertisements**

**A Thesis**

Presented to the  
Department of Communication  
and the  
Faculty of the Graduate College  
University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

**Anne Fairchild McVey**

**December, 1998**

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# The Portrayal of Women in 1996 General Appeal Magazine Advertisements

Anne Fairchild McVey

University of Nebraska, 1999

Advisor: Dr. Lesley Turner

This thesis looked at the portrayal of women in advertising in general appeal magazines, particularly *Life Magazine*, *Reader's Digest*, and *Vanity Fair*. This study's objective was to see if women were still being portrayed similarly to past portrayals, which tended to depict women stereotypically.

The literature review states that women are commonly portrayed as sex objects, concerned with looks, decorative, and domestic. In more recent ads, women are also being portrayed as nontraditionally and as working. This study is a content analysis and looked at all the ads, that contained at least one woman, and quantitatively analyzed their portrayal.

The findings suggest that there have been some improvements as far as the portrayal of women in advertising, but there have also been some setbacks. This study found that women in 1996 general appeal magazine advertisements are still being portrayed stereotypically, but that this is decreasing.

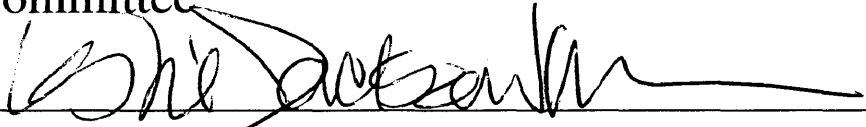
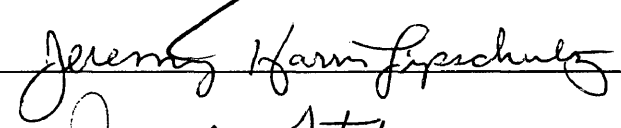
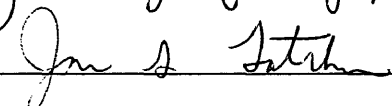
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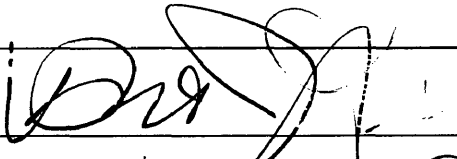
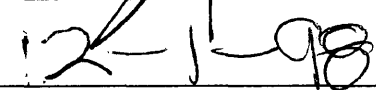
# THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,  
University of Nebraska at Omaha, in partial fulfillment of the  
requirement for the degree, Master's in Communication,  
University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Committee

  
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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

Ceulemans and Fauconnier (1979) found that women are commonly portrayed in advertising because they are considered the major consumers. Advertisements mainly portray women in stereotypical roles. Lazer-Smith (1989) found that advertising directed toward women commonly contains stereotypes. Lazer-Smith also discovered that studies have shown that stereotypical advertising affects consumers' views regarding gender. NOW (National Organization for Women) asserts this stereotypical portrayal reinforces cultural norms and values of the woman's role in society. It also hampers change, and affects socialization of the young (Turner, 1980). Toeplitz (1980) reported that the portrayal of women in the media is a major impediment in stopping discrimination against women. These stereotypical depictions also reinforce and sustain traditional sexist attitudes towards them.

Women are mainly portrayed in stereotypical roles such as: happy housewives, mothers, sex objects, etc. (Ceulemans and Fauconnier, 1979; Turner, 1980; Lazer-Smith, 1989, Toeplitz, 1980; Goldmank, Health and Smith, 1991; Ellis, 1990; Brown, 1990, Lipsitz, 1995) McDermott (1995) found that the media's portrayal of women shows little understanding of their lives or on improving the conditions in which they live. The media is very important in the way it influences public opinion and public policy. How the media chooses to portray issues and people gives the public the information to form opinions and make decisions. Ceulemans and Fauconnier (1979) found that the problem with depicting women as mostly domestic suggests that the women's place is only in the home. There is also a problem with the domestic portrayal. This portrayal commonly shows the woman as stupid, incapable

and dependent on men. Goldman, Health and Smith (1991) discovered that the majority of advertisements showed women as sex objects, glamorous, flawless and concerned with their looks. Men were commonly present in the ads, but they were almost always gazing at the women and in a dominant position. Ceulemans and Fauconnier (1979) also found that portraying women as sex objects "diminishes women's self-esteem and ignores other aspects of women's personality and their human potential." (1979, pp. 9)

Women are also being portrayed in a nontraditional role, which is usually negative. Ceulemans and Fauconnier (1979) discovered that women were rarely portrayed in high status jobs. They are normally portrayed in "pink collar" occupations. When women are portrayed as career oriented, they are commonly depicted as aggressive, unmarried, and unfulfilled. This depiction misrepresents the working woman, who is usually married with children. (Ellis, 1990). When ads refer to the working mother and wife, most ads refer to her diminished beauty from stress and hard work which portrays the woman as ultimately concerned with her looks (Goldman, Heath, Smith, 1991).

This interdisciplinary study examined 1996 general appeal magazine advertisements and how they portray women. This study did not look at society's interpretations or advertising's effects on viewers which requires interviews and laboratory experiments. There have been numerous studies on the portrayal of women in advertising and many significant findings. But out of all these studies, none have been extremely current or after 1993. This study looks at how women are portrayed in today's advertisements. Specifically, this research study determines if the dominant themes found in previous research (Sex Object/Glamorous, Concerned with Looks, Decorative, Domestic/Mother/Traditional Leisure, Working Woman, and Nontraditional Leisure) are still present in 1996 advertisements. These dominant



themes came from several different studies: Vankatesan and Losco (1975), Lewis and Neville (1995), Courtney and Lockeretz (1971) and Busby and Leichty (1993). This study uses several (4) different anchor studies because none were sufficient for a 1996 study. The researcher combined the categories from the above studies to create an exhaustive list of categories for the present study.

## **Chapter II**

### Literature Review

The mass media have been a common focus for researchers. Wright (1959, p. 15) defined mass communication by three characteristics: 1) directed towards relatively large, heterogeneous, and anonymous audiences, 2) with publically transmitted messages, often timed to reach most audience members simultaneously and transient in character, and 3) the communicator tends to be, or to operate within, a complex organization that may involve great expense. Severin and Tankard define the mass media by how it functions: "the mass media reach large audiences rapidly, spread information, and change weakly held attitudes." (1988, p. 200)

Many scholars and women's groups have been outraged at the portrayal of women in the mass media. This outrage is caused by stereotypes, negative portrayals, and the effect on viewers and attitudes towards women. This attention has caused "Gender and the media" to become a popular research subject, with particular attention being directed towards advertisements and how they depict women. Warlaumont's 1993 study found that numerous women's activist groups say the portrayal of women in advertising is not representative of the general population. One popular view is that advertising gives an unequal portrayal of gender and depict women as sex objects, inferior, and dependent on men (Warlaumont, 1993). Ford and LaTour (1993) learned that the advertising industry is promoting the continuation of these improper stereotypes. And studies (Warlaumont, 1993; Ford, LaTour, 1993) have found that stereotypes in advertisements affect viewer's ideas regarding gender. Some feminists who resent the unfair portrayals even refuse to buy products from

companies that unfairly represent women in their advertisements (Ford, LaTour, 1993).

Some researchers (Stemple, Tyler, 1974) think the analysis of advertisements can show women's societal role because advertisers reflect the society in which we live. The successful interpretation of society is important in order to accurately represent society. Advertisers cannot appeal to society if their interpretations and representations are incorrect. A consumer must be able to identify with an advertisement and its products in order for it to cause an action or purchase. Therefore, advertisers cannot be blamed for the portrayal of women in their ads because they are only reflecting the society in which we live. Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976) found that "The impact of advertising as a carrier of value and belief systems is a potent force. The primary effect and main tendency of mass media are to support existing conditions. The media do not lead but, instead, reflect our society." (p. 169) Lazarsfeld and Merton (1948) found that "advertising is typically directed to the canalizing of preexisting behavior patterns or attitudes. It seldom seeks to create significantly new behavior patterns." (p. 169, in Belkaoui and Belkaoui, 1976) In order to change the portrayal of women in advertisements, the values and perceptions created by our culture need to change.

### General Themes

There are six general themes that have emerged in the portrayal of women in advertising in American history: 1) Sex Object/Glamorous, 2) Concerned with Looks, 3) Decorative, 4) Domestic/Mother/Traditional Leisure, 5) Working Woman, and 6) Nontraditional Leisure. Studies have revealed that some of these themes are consistent throughout American history and others are specific to certain eras. Stemple and Tyler (1974) learned women were consistently portrayed as "the cook,

mother, and keeper of the home." (p. 271) from 1910 through 1974; they also discovered that men were consistently portrayed as the breadwinner from 1915 on. Venkatesan and Losco (1975) found women to be portrayed as sex objects, physically beautiful and dependent on men consistently from 1959 through 1971. Sexton and Haberman (1974) encountered women to be consistently portrayed as alluring, decorative and traditional from 1961 through 1971. Elliot (1995) discovered several themes in the portrayal of women in advertising; He found women to be portrayed as sex kittens, homemakers, independent and as a superwoman from 1890 through 1990.

Many studies have found that advertisements portray women as inferior to men and dependent on men (Vankatesan and Losco, 1975; Warlaumont, 1993; Stemple and Tyler, 1974). Research findings verified that many advertisements portray women in a negative light, and in many stereotypical roles. Other examinations discovered that many advertisements are condescending towards women (Sexton and Haberman, 1974; Courtney and Lockeretz, 1971; Dominick and Rauch, 1972; Klassen and Jasper, 1993; Elliot, 1995). Elliot (1995) discusses an advertisement and the advertiser, Coty Emeraude perfume, from the 1960s. This advertisement was very condescending towards women. The headline reads "Want him to be more of a man? Try being more of a woman." (Elliot, 1995, pg. D18) Fawcett analyzed an advertisement for United Airlines, which "featured a close-up of a young flight attendant under the headline "Old Maid". (Fawcett, 1993, S-1)

Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976) studied advertisements in 1958, one of which shows a women in a record album advertisement. " A female figure was shown standing among the merchandise performing no discernible function except to display a low-cut dress." (p. 170) Another advertisement for a copy machine company clearly portrays women as subservient to their male office counterparts. "One such ad showed a female worker awaiting the male workers' decision on the merits of a

particular copy machine.” (p. 170) Courtney and Lockeretz (1971) encountered an advertisement "Where an attractive and elaborately dressed woman was used to display an automobile.” (1971, p. 93) Courtney and Lockertz (1971) discuss an advertisement featuring a woman in the background watching a male doctor examining her child.

Other studies (Ford & LaTour, 1993; Warlaumont, 1993; Klassen & Jasper, 1993; Ewen and Ewen, 1982) have found that this negative portrayal affects viewers' perceptions regarding gender. Another theory suggests that portraying women negatively or stereotypically reinforces social norms and values that influenced and created these advertisements (Sexton and Haberman, 1974; Klassen and Jasper, 1993). Klassen and Jasper (1993) state "Clearly, the subtle and sometimes blatant messages communicated by advertisements contribute to the definition of what is considered appropriate behavior for men and women in the United States.” (p. 30). Ewen and Ewen (1982) discovered that "the image, the commercial, reaches out to sell more than a service or product; it sells a way of understanding the world.” (p. 30) This topic is also very popular because it is important to understand the portrayal of women in advertisements in order to correct and change these negative portrayals.

Warlaumont (1993) found that women in Western society were still being portrayed as less powerful than men in 1993 advertisements. He also felt these ads reflect the current cultural norms and values of our society. Fawcett (1993) uncovered several themes in the portrayal of women in advertising during the past century. She states, "For most of this century, advertising has portrayed women in an unusually narrow manner, as insipid dimwits, sex objects or one-dimensional powermongers." (Fawcett, 1993, S-1) Courtney and Lockeretz (1971) analyzed advertisements in 1970 and found four themes present in the ads: The woman's place is in the home, Women do not make important decisions or do important things,

Women are dependent and need men's protection, and men regard women primarily as sexual objects, and are not interested in women as people.

## Historical Review

The six dominant themes (Sex Object/Glamorous, Concerned with Looks, Decorative, Domestic/Mother/Traditional Leisure, Working Woman, and Nontraditional Leisure) also have chronological importance. These themes can be linked to certain areas in history. This historical review provides a brief overview, by decade from the 1890's through the 1990's, of the portrayal of women in American advertising. Visual representations were not common before the 1890's, especially in magazines, therefore this literature review begins at the late 1800s because of the difficulty of determining the portrayal without visual representations. America has experienced so many significant changes over the past three hundred years. This literature review determines what changes have occurred in advertising and why. The theory behind this review believes advertising is a reflection of society. This review shows how the dominant themes discussed above are tied to certain eras through reflecting society and the changes occurring within society. Views and theories will also be discussed from scholars and women's groups regarding the portrayal of women in advertising. This historical review is an attempt to inform the reader of what has transpired thus far in studying the portrayal of women in advertising.

## The 1890s through World War I

The 1890s through World War I mainly portrayed women as domestic and concerned with their looks. Most ads only portrayed women in the home or the grocery store. This is attributed to the fact that most women worked in the home and rarely venture outside the home (Stemple, Tyler, 1974; Cowan, 1976). This domestic

theme depicted women as being concerned with keeping the home free of germs and keeping themselves beautiful for their husbands (Elliot, 1995). Beauty products were commonly advertised in this time period. These advertisements mainly portrayed women as concerned with maintaining their beauty while attending to their domestic responsibilities (Cowan, 1976). Elliot (1995) discusses an advertisement for the Kellogg Company that portrayed an assertive woman lecturing her grocer: "Excuse me. I know what I want, and I want what I asked for, Toasted Corn Flakes. Good Day." (p. D 18) Cowan (1976) analyzed an advertisement for Lux laundry detergent. This advertisement shows two women in the kitchen discussing "The things you'd never put in the family laundry." (p. 11)

Many advertisements featured women in house-dresses and aprons, mopping floors, dusting, ironing, etc. Women were never portrayed as working outside the home. With the increase of appliances (electric irons, washing machines, water heaters, etc.) in the American market during 1915, ads from 1915 through 1920 portrayed the man as the breadwinner and the woman as the domestic (Cowan, 1976). These ads focused on the man purchasing appliances for his domestic wife. These ads also focused on the woman attempting to persuade her husband to purchase appliances for her. These appliance ads promoted "a reduction in drudgery or an increase in convenience; the vision of an escape from housework itself was rare." (Fox, 1990, p. 29) No ads portrayed the woman as purchasing the appliance for herself. The husband was always the purchasing agent (Cowan, 1976). Stemple and Tyler (1974) discuss the appliance advertisements. They state, "The reduction in the time needed to keep house and cook contained a potential for releasing women from the limits of the home ground. But instead of using this opportunity to get out into a more comprehensive world, there developed an obsession with physical appearance." (p. 272)

## The 1920s

The 1920s commonly portrayed women as free spirited (Elliot, 1995). This free spiritedness is attributed to the end of World War I and Americans wanting to forget the negative war memories and enjoy their life and freedom. The advertisers used the flapper to represent the free spirited women. The free spirited woman was also portrayed as the free spending woman. She mainly purchased cigarettes and hosiery. Cigarette ads visually representing women as flappers were very common during this time period. This is attributed to the cigarette industry wanting to end the social taboo of women smoking. In the past, women smoking in public was a social taboo. Advertisers were trying to change this social taboo to increase sales. Automobile and hosiery advertisements also visually represented women in their ads in this time period. Automobile advertisements never featured the woman driving the car. Women were commonly shown near or on the car. Many advertisements pictured beautiful women next to cars with copy eluding to men attaining these women if they purchase these cars. Women were commonly portrayed as possessions in these automobile advertisements (Elliot, 1995; Stemple and Tyler, 1974).

Advertisers in the 1920s depicted women as concerned with their looks in order to attain marriage and become domestic (Stemple, Tyler, 1974). Many ads during this time period spoke of the woman's primary ambition, which was to marry and have children. Because appliances were helping with housework, the advertisers focused on beauty and fashion in their advertisements. The advertisements in the 1920s also portrayed the woman as wanting to be beautiful for her husband. Advertisers commonly spoke to women about their duties: looking as good as possible, cleaning the home, and motherhood. (Stemple, Tyler, 1994). One predominant message was that the woman would not keep her man if she did not maintain her beauty. An example of an ad that portrays women in this light is an ad for Listerine. The title is



"Often a bridesmaid but never a bride". The copy read, "Edna's case was really a pathetic one. Like every woman, her primary ambition was to marry....And as her birthday crept gradually toward that tragic thirty-mark, marriage seemed farther from her life than ever...fortunately halitosis is only a local condition that yields to the regular use of Listerine mouth wash." The woman is portrayed as a flapper. The copy discusses the woman's problem: being unable to keep a man and attain marriage. The reason is her bad breath. This shows the usage of the free spirited flapper, and the focus on beauty to keep a man (Fawcett, 1993; Elliot, 1995).

### The 1930s

Elliot (1993) and Fox (1990) found advertisements in the 1930s mainly portrayed women as domestic. The woman was mainly portrayed as the household worker. She was rarely if never portrayed as working outside the home. Women were portrayed as house workers because they did not have money due to the Depression. Fox (1990) learned that advertisements mainly portrayed housework as a "labor of love". Stemple and Tyler (1974) uncovered that advertisers also portrayed women in the home yearning to be glamorous. The advertisers frequently used celebrities as symbols of glamour. These celebrities were commonly spokespersons for beauty products which were relatively inexpensive in the 1930s.

Many advertisers revolved their selling points around economical cleaning products due to the Depression and the lack of money. Financial deprivation caused decreased buying power for unnecessary products. Women were commonly portrayed as obsessed with their domestic duties. Cowan states, "The discovery of the "household germ" led to almost fetishistic concern about the cleanliness of the home." (1976, p. 14) Appliance advertisements decreased during this time period because they were not affordable. Fashion advertisements also decreased during this time

period. Families could not afford pricey designer clothes, mink coats and jewelry. Advertisements selling food and cleaning products during this time period were also very common because they were a household necessities (Stemple and Tyler, 1974)

Cigarette ads were also common in this time period. The cigarette industry was still trying to break the social taboo of women smoking in public. These ads promoted women smokers, portraying them as sexy and beautiful. Stemple and Tyler (1974) discuss an advertisement for cigarettes from the 1930s with a list of famous women smokers, showing the acceptability of women smoking and providing models of behavior. The cigarette industry also promoted cigarettes as a way to lose weight. These cigarette advertisements mainly portrayed women as obsessed with staying slim. One advertisement for Lucky cigarettes had a headline that read, "Grab a Lucky instead of a sweet." This advertisement had a sexy woman who was very slender smoking a cigarette at a kitchen table (Fawcett, 1993).

#### The 1940s

World War II influenced advertisements in the 1940s. Elliot, 1995; Lewis, Neville, 1995; Stemple, Tyler, 1974; Fawcett, 1993; all found that advertisements mainly focused on women in the workforce (Elliot, 1995). This was the first time in American history that women were portrayed in advertisements as employed. Many advertisements intertwined their product messages with patriotic messages. This is attributed to World War II and the government's effort to get businesses involved in wartime propaganda. It is also attributed to the advertisers adjusting to the social, political and economic changes during World War II (Lewis & Neville, 1995). The formation of the War Advertising Council and the pressure by the government for businesses and industries to help with the wartime efforts was also a factor in this propaganda. One of the biggest wartime efforts was to promote women workers and

alleviate the social taboo of working women. Studies have revealed that images of women as wage-earners and as working increased significantly from 1940-1943. Images of women in traditional roles significantly decreased from 1940-1943. The government needed women in the workforce to help out while the men were away at war. This need was reflected in the advertisements of this era (Lewis and Neville, 1995).

Although these ads portrayed women in nontraditional roles, the overall views of women in these ads did not change. They were not portrayed the same as working women in the 1990's. The ads in the 1940's portrayed working women as housewives sacrificing for their country. The advertisers were very careful in their portrayal, they did not want to upset the traditional norms and values of society. Therefore, this portrayal was somewhat patronizing, portraying women as sacrificing, not trying to climb up the corporate ladder and compete with men. These images mainly revolved around a "we can do it" theme. Beauty products dominated the advertisements. An example of a cold cream advertisement pictured two women in jumpsuits. The copy read, "Just because these women are working, doesn't mean they can't be beautiful." Many 1940s ads also talked of bad breath and body odor. Car advertisements were also popular but they promoted the glamorization of ownership. None showed a woman driving a car (Stemple, Tyler, 1974).

### The 1950s

Portraying women as domestic returned in the 1950s. Many advertisements pictured women in the home, cleaning and wearing aprons. The theme of being concerned with looks also dominated the 1950s. Beauty products were very common during this time period. The theme of maintaining beauty while attending to their domestic responsibilities returned in the 1950s (Elliot, 1995; Fawcett, 1993). The

war was over - women left the workforce and returned to their homes. Ads featured women concerned with managing the house; there were only a handful of ads depicting women in the workforce. Many ads went so far as to put down working women, showing unhappy lonely children. Elliot (1995) discussed an advertisement in the 1950s with a headline "Mother, when will you stay home again?" (p. D18)

The advertisements in the 1950s also reflected the baby boom, and featured babies and baby products (Busby and Leichty, 1993; Stemple and Tyler, 1974). The end of World War II brought appliance ads back into the picture. This is attributed to steel being available again because the war was over (Fox, 1990; Stemple and Tyler, 1974). Men were back in the workforce and the depression was over so families could afford appliances again. Appliance ads mainly portrayed women as managers of their homes, mothers, and desiring beauty. Men were still portrayed as the purchasing agent. These appliance advertisements commonly featured women using the products after their men purchased them (Fox, 1990). Elliot (1995) discusses an advertisement for Westinghouse which pictured a woman in an apron opening and closing a refrigerator door to show how it functioned. Advertisements in this time period did not portray women as intelligent. The important decisions were left to the men. Women were concerned with cleaning and maintaining their beauty. Men were portrayed as breadwinners and they made the financial decisions. They also portrayed women as little dolls in almost a childlike manner. Ads commonly showed these childlike dolls getting excited about new dresses, pretty make-up and appliances (Elliot, 1995; Fox, 1990; Fawcett, 1993; Stemple and Tyler, 1974).

### The 1960s

The advertisements in the 1960s portrayed women mainly as domestic and wanting to marry. Sex objects, concerned with looks, decorative, and dependent on

men, were also common portrayals in this time period (Busby and Leichty, 1993, Venkatesan and Losco, 1975). Sexton and Haberman (1974) discovered there was an increase in advertisements portraying working women in the 1960s, but only in traditional, pink collar occupations. Women were rarely portrayed as business professionals. Working women were also commonly portrayed as unhappy, not enjoying their jobs, and wishing to be domestic again. An ad for United Airlines pictured a young flight attendant with the headline "Old Maid". This ad is telling women that if you can't get married, join the airlines as a flight attendant (Fawcett, 1993). Many ads used women as the focus of cruel humor. One Volkswagen ad, promoting its new bus, had a headline, "Do you have the right wife for it." (Elliot, 1995)

The sexual revolution gave a new twist to ads in this era. The common portrayal of women as sex kittens is correspondingly attributed to the sexual revolution (Elliot, 1995). Ads portrayed women as sex objects, physically beautiful and dependent on men. Women as sex objects slightly decreased during this time period. There was also a significant decline in the number of women shown in the home and an increase in the number of women shown outside the home. Busby and Leichty (1993) attribute this to the beginning of the women's movement and the passing of The Equal Pay Act (1963) and the Civil Rights Act (1964). However, this decrease was only found in women's magazines, not general appeal and men's magazines. Busby and Leichty (1993) discovered that images of women as domestic decreased in the 1960s. They also found that the number of images of women outside the home without a male increased. A few ads began to portray the woman as independent. This is attributed to the feminist movement and advertisers viewing women as more independent. Images of women as decorative also increased, indicating that the feminist movement did not cause too much change or maybe caused change but in the

wrong direction. Most ads focused on food, clothing and beauty products (Stemple and Tyler, 1974).

### The 1970s

The 1970s gave rise to a new portrayal - the superwoman. The increase in working woman depictions is directly attributed to the women's movement and women reentering the workforce (Elliot, 1995, Fawcett, 1993; Dominick, Rauch, 1972; Busby and Leichty, 1993). This new imagery did not bring women out of the home entirely, it just added work on top of it. Women were shown as handling all of the domestic duties as well as working full-time. Although working was a portrayal, the domestic duties were stressed more in these superwoman roles (Henry, 1984). Many advertisements pictured the woman working all day and returning to a dirty home and needy children wanting dinner.

A study by Courtney and Lockeretz (1970) found that working women were under-represented in advertising in the 1970s. In 1970, 33 percent of full-time workers were women but only 12% of all the ads portraying working individuals were female. Additionally, 58% of all women portrayed as working were entertainers. None were portrayed as professionals or business executives. If the women were not being portrayed as entertainers, they appeared as clerks, stewardesses, assembly line workers, airline employees engaged in food preparation, and schoolteachers. Sexton and Haberman (1974) learned that there was an increase in images of working women but that their occupations were almost always traditional.

Skelly and Lundstrom (1981) studied advertisements in the 1970s and found that there was an increase in ads (late 1970) that portrayed men in nontraditional roles with women being treated as equals. There was also an increase of women being portrayed in authority positions. But despite these increases, women were portrayed

mainly as sex objects or decorative (Courtney, Lockeretz, 1971). The portrayal of women as homemakers and sex kittens was also very popular in the 1970s. Skelly and Lundstrom state, " Paradoxically, even as women and men are being shown as more equal, there has been an increase in the number of decorative or nonactive illustrations of women in the past decade." (1959-1979) (1981, p. 52)

### The 1980s

The 1980s and its advertisements were even more affected by the feminist movement. Women were more independent and advertising depicted women as autonomous and in control of their lives. One example is the Charlie fragrance woman -she patted a man on his rear end! (Fawcett, 1993; Fox, 1990; Elliot, 1995). Klassen and Jasper (1993) found that traditional depictions of women have been decreasing since the early 1980s and that "equality portrayals" are on the rise. Klassen and Jasper (1993) discuss an advertisement that shows working men and women with equal status; neither gender is shown as dominant. The headline reads, "America's Workforce is Changing. Are You? Valuing Diversity." This advertisement is promoting the recent changes in workforce consistency. Recent workforce trends include increasing numbers of minority workers--including women. Busby and Leichty (1993) learned that significantly more women were shown in professional, sales and mid-level business occupations than in the previous decades. Klassen and Jasper (1993) discuss an advertisement for GM, which reflects a role reversal. The woman is pictured as a high status employee. The man in the advertisement is less dominant than the woman. He is portrayed as a low status employee. This type of advertisement (role reversal) shows the progress in the portrayal of women in advertisements.

But this new portrayal should not cause too much excitement. Domesticity dominated ads in the 1980s as well. Women were still obsessed with laundry and "ring around the collar". Women were also featured as sex kittens, sex objects and inferior to men. One of Fawcett's articles (1993) discusses an advertisement for Johnnie Walker. The ad shows two slender, tan women jogging in bikinis. The headline reads, "He loves me for my mind and he drinks Johnnie Walker." This advertisement may be stating that the woman is appreciated for her mind, but she is also obsessed with her body and looks. Busby and Leichty (1993) found a significant increase in the portrayal of women as decorative. Klassen, Jasper and Schwartz (1993) discovered a very large percentage of ads from 1972-1989 that displayed women in the traditional role (domestic, sex object and inferior) but that this role was decreasing. They also learned that nontraditional roles of women (working, superior, etc.) were increasing.

### The 1990s

1990s gave way to a new portrayal--the woman of the 90's. This portrayal showed women as the purchasing agent, independent, self-sufficient and in control. In a Virginia Slims ad, a woman wore a sun dress and smoked a cigarette while laughing and watching a man cook at the stove in an apron. The headline read, "Equality comes with no apron strings attached." "You've come a long way baby." (March, 1995, *Life Magazine*). Camero automobiles had an advertisement promoting their new convertible. This advertisement pictured a woman wearing sunglasses and jeans. She had a very masculine stance and was standing behind the car. The headline read, "Put down the top. Turn up the stereo. Wear dark glasses. Worry the neighbors." This ad is referring to a woman going through a mid-life crisis (August, 1995, *Life Magazine*).



The Camero ad shows how women in the 1990s are being portrayed in a wider variety of roles including ones not seen in the past. Women are seen more often as business executives. (Elliot, 1995; Fawcett, 1993; Fox, 1990). One advertisement for Boeing airplanes features a woman on a airplane late at night with a laptop. The copy reads, "She had breakfast with the national sales manager, met with the client from 9-11, talked at an industry luncheon, raced across town to the plans board meeting and then caught the 8:05 back home. Women are playing a greater role in business. And commercial airlines are helping that come about with Boeing jetliner flights to nearly every major city in the U.S. For women in business, as well as men."

This new portrayal shows progress in the portrayal of women in advertisements but traditional portrayals are also common in the 1990s (Fawcett, 1993; Elliot, 1995; Fox, 1990; Warlaumont, 1993). Warlaumont (1993) studied ads in 1992 and 1993 and found that males are mostly, if not always, shown as powerful over women in Western advertisements. This relationship can be expressed in the stance, gaze, etc. of both men and women. The power relationship between genders is due to the cultural norms and values of Western society that men are dominant and women are submissive. Warlaumont (1993) discusses an advertisement for Carlos Falchi, featuring a semi-nude female, lying down. Above her, a man stands staring down. "The woman is shown as a sexual object solely for the male's adoring gaze." (p. 33)

Fawcett (1993) feels there have been some improvements in the portrayal of women in advertisements in the 1990s, although, many ads still show "gravity-defying breasts and giggly silliness." (Fawcett, 1993, S-10) These improvements relate to women in the workforce and their increase in purchasing influence. Fawcett also feels improvements are increasing because marketers have to accurately represent the "working woman of the 90s". Therefore advertisers are showing women as tired and fatigued from work, but also in control of their lives.

Fawcett predicts a change in the portrayal of women because women are now the purchasing agents, not just for domestic products, but for homes, cars, life insurance, etc. (Fawcett, 1993; Elliot, 1995). Ford and LaTour discuss (1993) that advertisers must modify their appeals for financial reasons. Their study found that women that are associated with Women's organizations were more critical of stereotypical portrayals in advertisement and oftentimes boycott products that unfairly represent women. Their study also found that women that are associated with women's organizations tend to have higher education and incomes. They state, " We feel that advertisers cannot risk alienating market segments like the League of Women Voters and the National Organization for Women. These women often are key opinion leaders for a variety of products." (p. 50) These studies predict even more improvements for the portrayal of women in advertisements.

## Research Questions

- R Q 1: Are the dominant themes found in past studies (Sex Object/Glamorous, Concerned with Looks, Decorative, Domestic/Mother/Traditional Leisure, Working Woman, and Nontraditional Leisure) still present in 1996 advertisements as far as the portrayal of women? Are the frequency of occurrences in each category different from past studies or has there been a shift in patterns from past studies?
- R Q 2: Were there any other portrayals found in 1996 advertisements other than the dominant themes discussed above? If so, which ones occurred most frequently?
- R Q 3: Does the current 1996 portrayal differ from past portrayals as far as category patterns?
- RQ 4: How are working women portrayed in 1996 advertisements? Are working women portrayed similarly or differently than past portrayals? If there is a change, what might it be attributed to?

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

In this chapter, study design, data collection procedures, and coding will be discussed. This study explored how women are portrayed in 1996 general appeal magazine advertisements. It also determined if women are portrayed similarly to past portrayals. This current study was compared to past studies found in the literature review as well as the four anchor studies and their results: Vankatesan and Losco (1975), Lewis and Neville (1995), Courtney and Lockeretz (1971) and Busby and Leichty (1993).

#### Study Design

This study is a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of magazine advertisements. "The purpose of content analysis is to make inferences about variables by systematically and objectively analyzing the content and/or process of communications." (Sproull , 1995, p. 246) There are many definitions of content analysis. Babbie (1995) defines content analysis as "a social research method appropriate for studying human communication." (pp. 335) Severin & Tankard (1988) define content analysis as "a systematic method of analyzing message content. It is a tool for analyzing the messages of certain communicators." (pp. 26) Walizer and Wienir (1978) describe content analysis as "Any systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded information. The data can be written documents, films, audio recordings, video presentations, or any other type of interpretable communication media. These could include any of the mass media of radio, television, movies, billboards, books, magazines, records, eight track tapes,

newspapers, and so on.” (pp. 343-344) Wimmer and Dominick (1995) think that content analysis is particularly suitable for studying trends in the mass media because it is systematic (chosen based on specific and uniformly applied rules), objective (the researcher's biases are absent in the findings), and quantitative ( the sample is representative of the population and summable).

This study analyzed advertisements in three general appeal magazines, *Life*, *Reader's Digest* and *Vanity Fair*. The year 1996 was chosen because it is the most current year that data can be collected for the entire year. General appeal magazines were chosen because they appeal to both men and women and therefore its advertising will also be directed towards men and women. They are also more likely to portray women in a wider variety of roles than specialty magazines such as women's magazines or family oriented magazines. Specialized magazines tend to direct their advertisements and products toward their specialized audiences. News magazines are also excluded because their articles and features appeal to higher income families.

The researcher chose *Life*, *Reader's Digest* and *Vanity Fair* because of the information given in the *SRDS Consumer Magazine Advertising Source* book which is used industry wide. The *SRDS Consumer Magazine Advertising Source* book listed all general appeal magazines. The magazines chosen (*Life*, *Reader's Digest* and *Vanity Fair*) met certain criterion that other general appeal magazines in the SRDS did not (See Appendix A for details on magazine selection):

1. Magazines must not be cross listed with a specialized classification. A cross listing gives evidence that the magazine at hand is somewhat specialized.
2. No magazine should be tied to an association. Association magazines, such as *American Legion Magazine*, are more likely to focus their advertisements towards the interests of their members relating to that particular association.

3. Magazines must have at least a one million circulation to generate the number of advertisements necessary for a comparative study.
4. Each magazine must also be general interest and people oriented. People oriented magazines focus their articles, features, etc. on people rather than sports, cooking, travel, finance, etc. People oriented magazines are more likely to feature people in their advertisement versus products, animals, food, sports, etc.

#### Data Collection Procedures

Each ad has to contain at least one woman. Advertisements with crowd scenes were excluded from the researchers observations because of the difficulty of determining the woman's role. Children and teenagers were also excluded from the study if no adult women was present in the advertisements. The coders observed the ads and tallied the perceived portrayal of the woman or women shown in the advertisements. The men and children featured in the advertisements were also observed to help determine the role of the woman/women. The copy/text in the advertisements were also analyzed to determine its role in the portrayal of the woman/women.

The overall representation of women were compared to the overall representation of men, children and animals. This was accomplished by counting the number of men, women, children and animals visually present in each advertisement and comparing the results. Please see Appendix B for details on coding sheets. Please see Appendix C for details on recording sheets. The advertisements were also coded into several categories determined from past studies. The studies used to obtain these categories are: Vankatesan and Losco (1975), Lewis and Neville (1995), Courtney and Lockeretz (1971) and Busby and Leichty (1993). The researcher also used these

categories for a 1995 study of *Life Magazine* and found the categories to be mutually exclusive. An overlap in categories occurred twice in the 1995 study which contained 102 advertisements. The categories used in this study for coding the advertisements are: 1) Sex Object/Glamorous, 2) Concerned with Looks, 3) Decorative, 4) Domestic/Mother/Traditional Leisure, 5) Working Woman, and 6) Nontraditional Leisure. On the following page (Table 1) are the categories and descriptions for each category.

# TABLE 1

<u>CATEGORY</u>	<u>DEFINITION</u>	<u>EXAMPLE</u>
Sex Objects/Glamorous	Women in sexy clothes, with sexy gazes, stances, etc. Glamorous is defined the same as Sex Objects although they commonly contain a celebrity or someone famous. Sex Object/Glamorous is defined as any advertisement using a woman's gender and feminine attributes to sell a product.	A woman in a bikini and high heels draped over a car. Supertmodel in a slinky black dress with a milk mustache advertising milk.
Concerned with Looks	Any advertisement portraying a woman as being concerned with her physical beauty (face or body).	Woman in front of mirror applying make-up. Woman exercising.
Decorative	Inactive with a somewhat neutral portrayal except to help sell the product or show how the product is used.	Woman modeling winter coats in Department Store ad.
Domestic/Mother	Any advertisement portraying a woman in the home, with children, or performing home related duties	A woman cleaning the home. A woman doing laundry. A woman feeding a baby
Traditional Leisure	Any women being active in the home or outside the home accompanied by a man. Traditional Leisure is also defined as any non-working role.	A woman drinking coffee at the kitchen table with her female friend. A woman antique shopping with female friend. A woman dining out accompanied by a male.
Working Woman	Any women being portrayed as a business professional, in a work environment or performing work-related duties.	A woman in a business suit. A woman in a business office. A woman working at a computer.
Nontraditional Leisure	Any women being portrayed in any non-working role that has been considered masculine in the past	A woman mowing the yard. A woman windsurfing. A woman playing baseball.



The researcher chose two coders with high education levels in order to help with coder sensitivity. One coder had a Master's in Communication and just completed her thesis. The other coder had an MBA and was a Market Research Analyst by trade. Market Research Analysts perform qualitative and quantitative market research studies for various clients such as Kellogg's, Hallmark Cards, Con Agra, O.P.P.D. The coders were also both females, helping with consistency and intercoder reliability.

The researcher first explained the study, then explained the coding and recording sheets and answered any questions. The coding sheet was carefully analyzed with both coders and questions were answered. The Recording Sheet was also carefully discussed with the coders and the researcher demonstrated tallying and recording of several ads.

The researcher then ran pre-coding tests and looked at results and compared to each other to determine inter-coder reliability. The coder pretest consisted of coders pre-coding the same 15 advertisements. After a coder pretest, the answers were cross tested between coders for consistency between answers. The researcher encountered one inconsistency between the coders relating to the Sex Object and Decorative categories. The researcher and coders again went over the Coding Sheet and Recording Sheet and examples contained in the Coding Sheet. The researcher then ran another coder pretest with 15 advertisements that came out 100% consistent. Inter-coder reliability tests were accomplished by using verification of coder consistency techniques.

The coders then coded each advertisement that qualified for the study. Advertisement qualification was discussed in the Study Design section of Methodology. There were a few instances where an ad fell into two categories (Working and Sex Object). The coders were given instructions to tally the ad in both

both categories. This occurrence was extremely infrequent and only with Working and Sex Object categories.

Research questions 1-3 were then quantitatively analyzed to determine the perceived portrayal of women in 1996 general appeal magazine advertisements. The tallied results were placed into frequency tables and graphs. These frequency and percentage tables were then compared to frequency and percentage tables from past studies.

The study design could be perceived as limiting in that both coders were identical in education and gender. Also, after initial training, and intercoder reliability verification, the researcher felt that no more intercoder reliability verification was necessary. This could also be perceived as a study limitation because no more intercoder reliability tests were performed during the actual coding.

## CHAPTER IV

### Results

#### Overall Representation of Women

A total of 2083 advertisements contained visual representations of men, women, children, or animals. These 2083 advertisements contained 2795 visual representations. These visual representations were either men, women, children or animals. Out of these 2795 visual representation, 972 visually represented men, 1168 visually represented women, 393 children and 262 animals. Please see Table 2 for frequencies and percentages.

**TABLE 2**

Visual Representation in *Life*, *Reader's Digest* and *Vanity Fair Magazine* Advertisements  
(Based on 2083 ads, 2795 visual representations)

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	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Women	1168	41.79%
Men	972	34.78%
Children	393	14.06%
Animals	262	09.37%

---

These findings suggest that women are represented more often than men in 1996 magazine advertisements. When compared to the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* and the ratio of men versus women in the population, advertisements and their representation are close to accurate. In 1990, women composed 51.2% of the

population whereas men composed 48.8% of the population. In 1996 advertisements, women composed 54.6% of the visual representations. Men composed 45.4% of the representations. Women were represented slightly more often than men in general appeal magazine advertisements (women, 54.6%; men, 45.4%). There are also slightly more women in the population versus men (women, 51.2%; men, 48.8%). Although these findings suggest accuracy regarding representation in advertisements, they do not suggest equality in portrayal. The portrayal of women in these magazine advertisements is discussed below.

### Category Analysis

A total of 1168 women were visually represented in 1996 *Vanity Fair*, *Reader's Digest* and *Life Magazine* advertisements. These 1168 visual representations were analyzed and coded into the existing categories as defined in the methodology (Sex Object/Glamorous, Concerned with Looks, Decorative, Domestic Mother, Traditional Leisure, Working Woman and Nontraditional Leisure). These 1168 visual representations contained 1232 portrayals.

### Current Portrayal

Out of all the 1232 portrayals, women were portrayed as Sex Object/Glamorous 40.26%; Concerned with Looks, 9.82%; Decorative 14.85%; Mother/Domestic, 9.42%; and Traditional Leisure 11.20%. Women were portrayed as Working 6.90% of the time and Nontraditional Leisure occurred 7.55%. These findings answer Research Question 1: Are the dominant themes found in past studies (Sex Object/Glamorous, Concerned with Looks, Decorative, Domestic/Mother/Traditional

Leisure, Working Woman, and Nontraditional Leisure) still present in 1996 advertisements as far as the portrayal of women. The answer is yes, which indicates that women are still being portrayed narrowly, traditionally and stereotypically. These findings also answer Research Questions 2: Were there any other portrayals found in 1996 advertisements other than the dominant themes discussed above? The answer is no. Working and nontraditional leisure portrayals added up to approximately 14%. This implies that advertisements are also portraying women in roles that have more variety than in the past--nontraditional leisure and working. The frequencies and percentages are listed in table 3.

**TABLE 3**

Categories and frequencies and percentages of 1996 portrayals of women in general appeal magazine advertisements.

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Sex Object/Glamorous	496	40.26%
Decorative	183	14.85%
Traditional Leisure	138	11.20%
Concerned with Looks	121	9.82%
Mother/Domestic	116	9.42%
Nontraditional Leisure	93	7.55%
Working	85	6.90%

### Sex Objects/Glamorous

This portrayal occurred 40.26% of the time. Sex objects can be defined as women in sexy clothes, with a sexy stance, gaze, etc. Glamorous also falls into this category because most portrayals of glamour include famous people, usually in evening gowns or sexy outfits. Glamorous portrayals may also include women that are not famous. Advertisements portray women as sex objects and glamorous when they use the woman's gender and feminine attributes to sell the product. Women are still being portrayed as sex objects and glamorous in 1996 advertisements. These ads commonly portrayed women as beautiful, slender, and dressed in skimpy evening gowns. The National Fluid Milk Processor Promotion Board advertisements commonly portrayed women as sex objects/glamorous. These particular advertisements are known for the milk mustaches placed on famous people. These milk advertisements featured famous models and stars mainly clad in sexy dresses, with sexy stances. The advertising text always had these models and stars discussing diets, waterproof mascara, skimpy little black dresses, etc. Cleavage was also common in these ads. Karastan carpet ads were next in line for portraying women as sexy and glamorous. Several of Karastan's ads featured naked women skimpily draped with carpet. Donna Karan clothing also portrayed woman as sex objects, with their models almost always half nude. Versace also featured many nude women in their advertisements. Many other advertisements in *Life*, *Vanity Fair* and *Reader's Digest* portrayed women as sex objects and glamorous but these examples prove that women are still being portrayed as sex objects and glamorous in today's advertisements.

### Concerned With Looks

Women were portrayed as being concerned with their looks 9.82% of the time. Advertisements that showed women in sweat suits were very common. This gives the impression that the woman has just left the gym or is planning to go to the gym. Advertisements selling exercise machines frequently portrayed women as concerned with their looks. These advertisements pictured the woman exercising on the particular products. The copy/text in these ads talked of burning excess fat, thinning the waist, flattening the stomach, and toning the body. Companies that commonly advertised women in this way were Fast Track II, NordicTrack, HealthMax, Nutrition 21, and StairMaster.

Women were also portrayed as being concerned with their looks in advertisements for diet and health food. Healthy Choice portrayed women as eating low fat foods in order to look good. An advertisement for American Standard, a bathroom fixture company, had five young women in the bathroom frantically looking in the mirror and applying make-up. The headline read, "Boys, they'll be right out." There were other ads that fit into this category such as the Virginia Slims advertisement showing a beautiful woman, in a slinky black dress, standing in front of the mirror with a make-up brush. Mastercard also had an ad with a woman at a clothing store, standing in front of the mirror trying on clothes and looking at herself. Comtrad featured a woman removing unwanted facial and leg hair. All of these examples prove that the portrayal of women as being concerned with their looks is still present in current advertisements.

### Decorative

Decorative can be defined as inactive with a somewhat neutral portrayal except to help sell the product or show how the product is used. Women were portrayed as decorative 14.85% of the time. An advertisement for puppy chow showed a woman holding a puppy up in the air and kissing it. Another example is an advertisement for a mattress company. This advertisement had a woman and man sleeping on a mattress. There was no dominance in the sexes both were just sleeping on their sides. Maxwell House had an advertisement that pictured a woman drinking coffee. These ads were very neutral with no portrayal except to show the product and its usage.

The copy in these advertisements were also very neutral. The products were discussed in detail and the women were neutrally used to show how the product was used. When men were featured in these ads with the women, there were no sexual dominance. The men were also neutral and demonstrated the product.

### Domestic/Mother/Traditional Leisure

Women are still being portrayed as domestic and as mothers in 1996 advertisements. Women were portrayed in this light 20.62% of the time. The most common advertisement in this category had mothers holding their babies or with their children. Amway had an advertisement that pictured a mother with her children. This ad had the mother sitting at the breakfast table. The children were around the table drinking orange juice and talking to Mom. Dad was in the background in a business suit talking on his cellular phone. Another ad from Amway showed the father playing ball with his son at a park. The mother was in the background at a picnic table pouring iced tea into several glasses. The copy in these mother/domestic advertisements commonly discussed being a mother, washing cloths, etc. American Standard had an advertisement with a mother helping her child with potty training.



Another advertisement for Mazda minivans had two moms in front of an antique store loading up the van with antiques and children. The copy in this ad discussed managing the home. Minolta cameras showed a woman holding a child, and a man grasping her in a protective manner. Maytag washing machines commonly portrayed the woman as a domestic mother. These advertisements pictured the woman standing next to the washing machine or sitting in the home next to a picture of her husband. The copy in the Maytag advertisements discussed washing dirty diapers, sports uniforms and everything else produced by children. These examples show how women are still being portrayed as domestic in today's advertisements.

Some advertisements pictured the woman in a traditional leisure portrayal. These women were primarily shown as shopping, in the kitchen, on the couch, in the bathroom, or out in public accompanied by a man. Only a few ads featured women shopping. One woman was shopping for jewelry and being serviced by a male clerk. Another woman was shopping for clothes. Women were commonly seen out and accompanied by their significant others. These examples show that women are also being portrayed as traditional in their leisure activity.

### Working Woman

6.90% of the advertisements portrayed women as working. These findings suggest that the working woman was not so common in 1996 *Life Magazine*, *Vanity Fair* and *Reader's Digest* advertisements. This working woman had both traditional and nontraditional tones. Traditional working portrays women in pink collar occupations. Many advertisements portrayed the working woman as teachers, waitresses, nurses, secretaries, maids, and daycare employee. Other advertisements portrayed the working woman in a less traditional light. These nontraditional working portrayals pictured women as executives or professionals in male dominated

occupations. An advertisement for Virginia Slims pictured a beautiful woman in a business suit with a very short skirt holding a briefcase and a newspaper. She was also talking on the car phone and smoking a cigarette. The copy read, "Success doesn't always come in pinstripes." "You've come a long way baby." Other advertisements for Virginia Slims portrayed women in nontraditional working roles. One advertisement showed a beautiful woman in a business suit sitting on her desk talking on the phone and smoking a cigarette. Another advertisement depicted a beautiful woman in a suit with a short skirt smoking a cigarette. She was dominant in the advertisement where most traditional portrayals have the man in the dominant role and the woman in the background. A man was sitting behind her at work as a disc jockey. The copy read, "What do you call a take-charge woman? How' bout boss?" "You've come a long way baby." Other company's advertisements contained nontraditional portrayals of working women that were a little more serious. These advertisements abandoned the short skirts and beautiful women to give a more realistic portrayal of the working woman. Joan London was featured in a milk advertisement, wearing a business suit. The copy/text referred to her job as a news reporter. A Toyota advertisement showed cars on a factory line. Two men and one woman were engaged in conversation by the cars. All were wearing jumpsuits and eye protectors. Another advertisement for AT&T portrayed a woman as a chef. An advertisement for Coldwell Bankers portrayed a woman as a real estate agent.

This study also analyzed the location, demeanor and equality of working women. Working women were portrayed 34% of the time in the office. They were found 2% of the time in the home. 51% of working women portrayals were found in other professional settings such as hospitals, schools, laboratories, etc. Women were found only 1% of the time in other domestic settings and 12% of the portrayals were not applicable to any location. Please see table 4.

**TABLE 4**

(Location of Working Women Portrayals)

---

<u>Location</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Other professional setting	51%
Office	34%
NA	12%
Home	2%
Other domestic setting	1%

Table based on frequency of 85, or percentage of 6.90%

---

A little over half of working women portrayals depicted women as equal to their male counterparts (56%). 4% of working women were portrayed as subordinate and 1% superior. 39% of the portrayals were not applicable because they contained no males for comparison. Please see table 5.

**TABLE 5**

(Equality of Working Women Portrayals)

---

<u>Equality</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Equal to Male Counterparts	56%
NA (No Male Present)	39%
Subordinate to Male Counterparts	4%
Superior to Male Counterparts	1%

Table based on frequency of 85, or percentage of 6.90%

---

Working women were almost always portrayed as having a confident and satisfied demeanor (92%). Working women were portrayed as harried and unsatisfied 6% of the time. 2% of working women were portrayed as confident and harried. No women were portrayed as confident and unsatisfied. Please see table 6.

**TABLE 6**

(Demeanor of Working Women Portrayals)

Demeanor	Percentage
Confident and Satisfied	92%
Harried and Unsatisfied	5%
Confident and Harried	2%
Confident and Unsatisfied	0%

Table based on frequency of 85, or percentage of 6.90%

Nontraditional Leisure

Nontraditional portrayals occurred 7.55% of the time. These nontraditional leisure roles can be defined as any non-working role that has been considered masculine in the past. Nontraditional leisure portrayals may also have the woman as the dominant figure in the advertisement. Traditional leisure portrayals usually picture the man as the dominant figure and the woman as the less dominant figure or even in the background. Nontraditional leisure portrayals also show the woman alone in public. Advertisements from the past usually pictured the woman accompanied by a man when out in public. Examples might help with this explanation. In a Virginia

Slims ad, a woman wore a sun dress and smoked a cigarette while laughing and watching a man cook at the stove in an apron. The headline read, "Equality comes with no apron strings attached." "You've come a long way baby." Troy Bilt lawn mowers pictured a woman in slacks mowing the yard. The armed forces had a young woman in a skirt standing and holding books. The headline stated, "If you never thought of your child as the military type, think again." This advertisement wants parents to suggest joining the armed forces to their children. The copy read, "So if you know a smart, ambitious high school graduate who's determined to make the most of the future, maybe he or she is the military type after all." Kool cigarettes showed a man and a woman in hiking gear standing on top of a mountain. Neither male or female are dominant. Camero automobiles had an advertisement promoting their new convertible. This advertisement pictured a woman wearing sunglasses and jeans. She had a very masculine stance and was standing behind the car. The headline was "Put down the top. Turn up the stereo. Wear dark glasses. Worry the neighbors." This ad is referring to a woman going through a mid-life crisis. Another nontraditional role is the woman out in public alone. *Style Magazine* featured Cindy Crawford in a beautiful slinky red dress walking down the sidewalk at night alone. Plymouth minivan had an advertisement with a woman standing behind a man. The man was kneeling with open arms awaiting his daughter who was running towards him. Another advertisement for Amway pictured a woman and man in grubby clothes cleaning and unpacking together. There was no sexual dominance. Blue Cross and Blue Shield pictured three older women (sixties) playing baseball. The copy in this advertisement discussed traveling for business. Bacardi rum had a woman and man next to each other on windsurfers. The woman was just as muscular as the man. There were also many more advertisements that portrayed women in these

nontraditional ways. These examples show the new portrayal that is emerging in the 1990s.

### Current Study Portrayals Compared to Past Study Portrayals

When this study is compared to Vankatesan and Losco (1975), Lewis and Neville (1995), Courtney and Lockeretz (1971) and Busby and Leichthy (1993) studies, the results show that the portrayal of women in advertising has improved in some areas and worsened in others. These findings answer Research Question 3: Does the current 1996 portrayal differ from past portrayals as far as category patterns? Yes, the portrayals differ from past studies to present studies. This question will be addressed pertaining to improvements and regressions. An improvement can be established by an increase in the number of advertisements portraying women in a wide variety of roles including working and nontraditional. It can also be established by a decrease in traditional portrayals such as sex object, concerned with looks, decorative, and mother/domestic/traditional leisure. A regression or worsening can be defined as an increase in the traditional portrayals such as sex object, concerned with looks, decorative and mother/domestic/traditional leisure. Please see table 7 for comparisons and percentages.

**TABLE 7**

The current portrayal of women in advertising compared to past portrayals. A study to study comparison.

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Category	1940	1959-71	1996
Sex Object/Glamorous	no category	73%	40.26%
Mother/Domestic/Traditional Leisure	52%	9%	20.62%
Decorative	no category	10%	14.85%
Concerned with Looks	no category	11%	9.82%
Nontraditional Leisure	no category	no category	7.55%
Working	5%	no category	6.90%
Other	43%	no category	no category

---

Table 7 suggests that there have been some improvements as far as the portrayal of women as sex objects (from 73% in the 1960's to 40.26% in 1996). The portrayal of women as Domestic/Mother/Traditional Leisure has also changed dramatically over the years. Women in the 1940's were portrayed as Mother/Domestic/Traditional Leisure 52% of the time. In 1996, women were portrayed as Mother/Domestic/Traditional Leisure only 20.62% of the time.

The category Concerned with Looks has also seen some improvements over the years. In the 1960's women were portrayed as concerned with their looks 11% of the time. In this 1996 study, women were portrayed as concerned with their looks 9.82% of the time.

The portrayal of women as working has also had some slight improvements over the years (from 5% in 1940 to 6.90% in 1996). But this improvement is not that

notable if it is compared to actual census data on working women. *The Statistical Abstract of the United States* reported that in 1993, 57.9% of women in the United States work. There have been some slight improvements as far as the portrayal of working women in advertising over the years but working women are still greatly underrepresented in advertising when compared to actual working women. If these findings are compared to Courtney and Lockertz's (1970) study there are also more setbacks for the portrayal of working women. Working women portrayals were 9% in the 1970's and only 6.90% in the 1990's. Therefore, the portrayal of working women in advertisements has decreased since the 1970's.

When looking at working women portrayals, there have been some improvements since the 1970s. Table 8 shows the changes in occupational portrayals. In the 1970's, women were mainly portrayed as entertainers. Women were never portrayed as professionals or business executives. In the 1990's, women were found to be professionals and business executives 26.18% of the time versus 0% in the 1970's. Women were portrayed as scientists, executives, political leaders, doctors and business owners. Sales, middle-level business and semi-professional portrayals also increased in the 1990's (8% in the 1970's to 22.35% in the 1990's). Women were seen as reporters, writers, interior decorators, etc. Women being portrayed in the military or police force also increased in the 1990's (0%, 1970's; 5.88%, 1990's). This shows that there are some improvements in the way working women are being portrayed in advertisements. The 1990's portray women more often in business related positions, whereas in the past, women were mostly portrayed as entertainers.



**TABLE 8**

How are working women portrayed in general appeal magazine advertisements.

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	1970	1996
Proportion shown as workers	9%	6.90%
Occupational categories		
Professionals/business executive	0%	26.18%
Nonprofessional white collar	17%	26.18%
Sales, middle-level business, semi-professional	8%	22.35%
Blue collar	17%	5.88%
Military/police	0%	5.88%
Entertainers/professional sports	58%	1.18%

1996 percentages are based on a frequency of 85, or total portrayal percentage of 6.90%

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Table 8 answers Research Question 4: How are working women portrayed in 1996 advertisements? Are working women portrayed similarly or differently from past portrayals? If there is a change, what might it be attributed to? Attributing a reason to this change will be touched upon in the discussion.

There also seems to be a new portrayal that was not seen in past advertisements -- Nontraditional leisure. This nontraditional role gives the contemporary woman more variety as far as her perceived role. This is also seen as an improvement. Past studies neglected to even include this category in their studies. This 1996 study contained 93 Nontraditional leisure portrayals. Women were portrayed nontraditionally in leisure roles 7.55% of the time.

The portrayal of women in advertising has also seemed to worsen in some areas. Decorative went from 10% (1960's) to 14.85% (1996). There is also a problem with the Mother/Domestic/Traditional Leisure improvements discussed above. These improvements are not exactly as good as they seem when looking at table 3. The Mother/Domestic/Traditional Leisure portrayal was found 9% of the time in the 1960's study. So this portrayal increased from the 1960's to the 1990's. Although this portrayal has decreased over the years it has also increased from the 1960's.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **Discussion**

This study found that the portrayal of women has improved in some areas and stayed the same in other areas or even worsened. The portrayal of women as sex objects, concerned with looks, and mother/domestic/traditional leisure has decreased from past portrayals. Women are being portrayed as working more than in the past. Women are also being portrayed in a new light--nontraditional leisure. These changes in the portrayal of women in advertising are improvements as far as representing women more realistically and showing women in a variety of roles and occupations. The portrayal has also worsened as far as the depiction of women as decorative. These portrayals increased from the past to the present. Therefore, not only have there been improvements as far as the portrayal of women in advertising, there have also been setbacks.

Improvements aside, this study found that 1996 advertisements are still portraying women stereotypically. This study found that women in 1996 advertisements are still being portrayed as mothers, concerned with their looks, decorative, sex objects and traditional in their leisure activities. But they are also being portrayed in other roles such as working and nontraditional leisure. Some may find it offensive that women are still being portrayed in these traditional stereotypical roles. But women in the nineties are still full-time mothers, going to the gym and spending millions of dollars on beauty and exercise products. Women are also buying slinky outfits and dieting to fit into them. Advertisers are portraying women accurately if you look at it this way. Some may also find it offensive that working women are still being portrayed as nurses, secretaries, maids, and teachers. But the

majority of nurses, secretaries, maids, and teachers are women. So advertisers are also reflecting society accurately as far as women in traditional occupations.

On the positive side, working women are also being portrayed as business executives, factory line workers, radio station managers, news reporters, chefs and real estate agents. This is because women are also entering into male-dominated areas of business and successfully climbing up the corporate ladder. Therefore, this is also an accurate representation of women as far as advertisers and their advertisements. Women are also being portrayed in a nontraditional light in current advertisements. The research found that when looking at all the categories, women in 1996 advertisements were just as likely to be portrayed as nontraditional. This is progress as far as women and their portrayal in advertising because the representation is more realistic and less narrow. These findings agree with the Klassen, Jasper and Schwartz (1993) study that found traditional roles decreasing and nontraditional roles increasing. Many women's activist groups may think that the increase in the portrayal of women in nontraditional roles is a positive trend in the portrayal of women in advertising. But there may be nothing more to it than the fact that women are hiking, windsurfing, mowing lawns, joining the military, driving Cameros, going out in public alone, playing baseball, and just about everything else. It has less to do with political correctness than accurately reflecting society.

It seems as if advertisements are different today in the way that they portray women as professionals and in nontraditional roles more often than in the past. It may be safe to say that this is attributed to more women entering into nontraditional, male dominated occupations, hobbies, sports, etc. Advertising does reflect the society in which we live and we live in a society where women choose a variety of roles and occupations. Our culture no longer dictates that women stay home, care for the children, and clean the home. Women can choose to stay home or they can choose a

demanding profession and hire a nanny and a cleaning lady. If this is true, than it is also true that society and its norms and values are changing. This is a good sign for women in general as well the portrayal of women in advertising. But there are also problems as far as women in general and their current portrayal in advertising.

Although culture is changing for the better as far as women, it is still staying the same in many ways. Women are still being portrayed as sex objects and concerned with their looks. But this is attributed to the fact that women are still starving themselves and spending millions of dollars on beauty and exercise products. Our society and its cultural norms and values tell women that in order to be loved they must be slender and beautiful. And as long as women continue to buy into these cultural norms and values, advertisers will continue to reflect them. Women need to realize that they are just as important as Cindy Crawford, with or without their gray hair and flabby legs. Women need to recognize their importance and stop judging themselves by their clothes size. Until this happens, society will not change, nor will the advertisements that reflect it.

There are also problems with the new nontraditional portrayals of women. Many of the advertisements that portray women in a nontraditional light focused on the woman being masculine. This reflects our culture and its views--that in order to be important you must imitate the man because men are the important people in our world. Our culture perceives women and femininity as inferior. Men and masculinity are superior. Examples of these advertisements are women dressed in masculine cloths with masculine stances. A Merit cigarette advertisement is a perfect example of this cultural problem. A woman is pictured with very short hair in masculine clothes smoking a cigarette laughing. The headline read, "You've got Merit." Why does this woman have "merit"? Is it because she is in masculine clothes with a masculine haircut? Another example of ads that reinforce our cultural norms and

values regarding women are role reversals. One advertisement by Virginia Slims, which was mentioned above, had a woman smiling and watching a man cook, at the stove, in an apron. Our society dictates that cooking at home is a woman's job and therefore inferior. Women must change society's perceptions that cooking is a woman's job and therefore inferior. In an equal society people would realize that cooking food is a necessity and everyone must eat, man or woman. Our culture needs to change its views regarding femininity. Women must be portrayed as feminine and important in order to help change these cultural perceptions. Portraying women as masculine and important only promotes the unequal perceptions of gender in our society. Women need to celebrate femininity and womanliness. They can not obtain equality by imitating men.

Another example of the problems in our culture regarding gender is portraying woman as sex objects, particularly in work settings. Virginia Slims is one of the major culprits. They had many ads with beautiful women in short skirts and business suits. The headlines always contained a cutesy referral to women executives. Yes, these ads are celebrating women as far as being feminine but they are also portraying women as sex objects. In reality, most working women are not 5'10", beautiful, and 105 pounds. There are many credible and intelligent business women that are not 105 pounds and are not stunningly beautiful. Many of them also work in businesses that do not allow skirts that stop at the end of one's fanny. And many do not give looks as if they are going to jump into bed with the first available man that walks by in the office. These advertisements give a misleading impression of working women. These advertisements portray women as working but also exploit women as sex objects. These advertisements may be cute, but they are also reinforcing the cultural perceptions that women are only here on this earth in order to be looked at. Advertisements must accurately portray the working woman and promote their

feminine qualities, not exploit them. Changing this will help change our cultural perceptions of women.

In summary, perhaps the common headline for Virginia Slims cigarettes should read, "You've come a long way maybe" instead of "You've come a long way baby." Women need to realize their importance, whether it be as a mother or business executive. But advertising will only change if women change. Until this is accomplished, society and its norms and values will stay stagnant as well as the advertising that reflects it. Women also need to deal with offensive advertising. Women must demand respect and follow these demands with their actions and behaviors. These actions and behaviors may be writing the company that sponsored the ad or refusing to buy the products using offensive advertising. Only this will help promote the accurate portrayal of women in advertising whether it be as a mother or as a business executive. In closing, we can not blame advertisers for the unfair portrayals of women in advertising. We must blame society itself and the norms and values it has created. In order to change advertising, we must change ourselves.

## Suggestions for Future Research

There are many topics that could expand upon this study using the same magazines as the tools of analysis. A brief, and certainly not inclusive, list of suggestions follows:

1. An analysis from the female reader's perspective. In-depth interviews with a wide variety of women, including full-time mothers, women that work full-time, and women that are affiliated with women's activist groups, to show how women feel about their portrayal in advertising. It would also show how women are affected by cultural norms in our society.
2. An analysis from the advertiser's perspective. In-depth interviews with the producers of the ads in these magazines to determine the sensitivities of the people behind these ads. This study could also bring gender in as a variable.
3. An analysis of the portrayal of men in the same advertisements. The finding could then be cross-referenced with the results of this study, bringing valuable insight to the differences in portrayal between men and women in advertising.
4. An analysis of the nontraditional roles and working roles of women. Researchers could look at the amount of nontraditional roles to see if they correlate with the actual percentage of women that are nontraditional. Working women and the amount portrayed in advertisements could also be compared to the actual numbers of women in the workforce.
5. The effects on viewers regarding gender could also be studied. This study could look at how viewers are affected by stereotypical advertisements. Subjects and their views on women could be studied before and after viewing stereotypical advertisements.

In addition, the format of this study could be applied to more recent years of the magazines or other magazines.



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**Appendix A:**  
**SRDS Consumer Magazine Advertising Source**  
*Please see SRDS for further information.*

**Listing of General Appeal Magazines**

<b><u>General Editorial Publication</u></b>	<b><u>Chosen</u></b>	<b><u>Reason</u></b>
AARP/NRTA Bulletins	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Air and Space	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Alaska	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Aller Simple	No	Total circulation under 1 million
American Cowboy	No	Total circulation under 1 million
American Heritage	No	Total circulation under 1 million
American Legion Magazine	No	Tied to Association
The American Scholar	No	Total circulation under 1 million
The American Spectator	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Americana	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Archaeology	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Architectural Digest	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
The Atlantic Monthly	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Audubon	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Avenue	No	Total circulation under 1 million
The International Jewish Monthly	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Body Mind Spirit	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Bon Appetit	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Business Week	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Buzz	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Car and Travel	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Carnegie Magazine	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Catholic Digest	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Celebrate Life!	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Cigar Aficionado	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Civilization	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Commentary	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Common Boundary	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Conde Nast Traveler	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Consumers Digest	No	Focus on products not people oriented magazine
Country America	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Country Journal	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Country Living	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Country	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Das Fenster	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Departures	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Discovery Channel Monthly	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Details	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Diabetes Self-Management	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Discover	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Discovery channel Monthly	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Ebony	No	Cross listed into specialized classification, extra unwanted variable

Emerge	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Entertainment Weekly	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Esquire	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
FAD Magazine	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Family Circle	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Filipinas	No	Total circulation under 1 million
The First Americans	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Freebies	No	Total circulation under 1 million
The Futurist	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Globe	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Going Bonkers Magazine	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Grit	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Harpers Magazine	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Harvard Magazine	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Heartland USA	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Hispanic	No	Total circulation under 1 million
InStyle	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Indian Artist	No	Total circulation under 1 million
The Jerusalem Report	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Journal of Accountancy	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Kentucky Living	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Kiplinger's	No	Focus on finance, no finance section to cross list
La Herencia Del Norte	No	Total circulation under 1 million
La Revista Aquino	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Life	Yes	People oriented, over 1 million circulation
Lifestyles 5756	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Living Magazine	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Los Angeles	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Los Angeles Times Magazine	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Magical Blend	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Money	No	Focus on finance, no finance section to cross list
Monk	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Mother Jones	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Mutual Funds Magazine	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
National Enquirer	No	Newspaper not magazine
National Examiner	No	Total circulation under 1 million
National Geographic	No	Science and environmental focus, not people oriented
National Geographic Traveler	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
National Review	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
National Wildlife	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Natural History	No	Total circulation under 1 million
New Age Journal	No	Total circulation under 1 million
New Choices	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
The New Republic	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
New York Magazine	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
The New York Times Magazine	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
The New Yorker	No	Total circulation under 1 million
OCS News	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Odyssey	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Old Farmer's Almanac	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Out	No	Total circulation under 1 million

Parade	No	Newspaper
Playbill	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Playboy	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Popular Science	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Premier	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Preservation	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
The Price Connection	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Private Clubs	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Prodigy	No	Computer focus not people oriented
Reader's Digest	Yes	General, circulation over 1 million
Robb Report	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Russian Life	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Saturday Evening Post	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Secure retirement	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
SI Magazine	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Sierra	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Smithsonian	No	Science and environmental focus, not people focus
Sports Illustrated	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Spy	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Star	No	Newspaper
Swing	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Time	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Town and Country	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Travel and Leisure	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Troika	No	Total circulation under 1 million
TV Guide	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
The 21st Century	No	Total circulation under 1 million
U.S. News	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Union Plus	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Upscale	No	Total circulation under 1 million
USA Weekend	No	Newspaper
USA Today	No	Newspaper
Utne Reader	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Vanity Fair	Yes	General, over 1 million circulation
Vegetarian Times	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Vibe	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
The Washington Post Magazine	No	Cross listed into specialized classification
Wildlife Conservation	No	Total circulation under 1 million
WQ	No	Total circulation under 1 million
The World & I	No	Total circulation under 1 million
World Press Review	No	Total circulation under 1 million
Yankee	No	Cross listed into specialized classification

## **Appendix B:** **Coding Sheet**

### **Sex Object/Glamorous:**

Sex Objects/Glamorous is defined as women in sexy clothes, with sexy gazes, stances, etc. Glamorous is defined the same as Sex Objects although they commonly contain a celebrity or someone famous. Sex Object/Glamorous is defined as any advertisement using a woman's gender and feminine attributes to sell a product.

**Examples:** A woman in a bikini and high heels draped over a car. Supermodel in slinky black dress with a milk mustache advertising milk.

### **Concerned with Looks:**

Concerned with Looks is defined as any advertisement portraying a woman as being concerned with her physical beauty (face or body).

**Examples:** Woman in front of mirror applying make-up. Woman exercising.

### **Decorative:**

Decorative is defined as inactive with a somewhat neutral portrayal except to help sell the product or show how the product is used.

**Example:** Woman modeling winter coats in Department Store ad.

### **Domestic/Mother**

Domestic/Mother is defined as any advertisement portraying a woman in the home, with children, or performing home related duties.

**Examples:** A woman cleaning. A woman doing laundry. A woman feeding a baby. A woman in the grocery store.

**Traditional Leisure:**

Traditional Leisure is defined as any women being active in the home or outside the home accompanied by a man. Traditional Leisure is also defined as any non-working role.

**Examples:** A woman drinking coffee at the kitchen table with her female friend. A woman antique shopping with female friend. A woman dining out accompanied by a male.

**Working Woman:**

Working Woman is defined as any women being portrayed as a business professional, in a work environment or performing work-related duties.

**Examples:** A woman in a business suit. A woman in a business office. A woman working at a computer.

**Nontraditional Leisure:**

Nontraditional Leisure is defined as women being portrayed in any non-working role that has been considered masculine in the past.

**Examples:** A woman mowing the yard. A woman windsurfing. A woman playing baseball.



**Appendix C:**  
**Recording Sheet**

**Magazine:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Issue:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Sex Object/Glamorous**

**Concerned with Looks**

**Decorative:**

**Domestic/Mother/Traditional Leisure**

**Working Woman**

**Nontraditional Leisure**

Total # of advertisements: \_\_\_\_\_

Total # of visual representations of men: \_\_\_\_\_

Total # of visual representations of women: \_\_\_\_\_

Total # of visual representations of children: \_\_\_\_\_

Total # of visual representations of animals: \_\_\_\_\_