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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### TO WHAT EXTENT ARE GENDER STEREOTYPES PORTRAYED THROUGH ADVERTISEMENTS AND HOW CAN THEY INFLUENCE CONSUMER COGNITION?

Rhea Singh

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#### Abstract

The portrayal of genders in marketing, specifically advertising, can in many ways be demeaning, objectifying, and sexualizing. By repeatedly reaching consumers, advertisements can substantially influence their perceptions. While some advertisements may be educational, others reinforce gender norms by abiding by them. This research paper aims to address advertisements where such oppressive depictions are evident, to evaluate the psychological effect on consumer perception, and to explain what their perception may transform into. The selection of this topic finds root in the desire to advocate and promote Gender Equality. Applying the learnings from the AP Psychology curriculum, the aim is to evaluate gender depictions in product advertising and analyse how the sexes, male and female, are presented in two distinct manners and why this characterization is flawed. Advertisements for household products, perfumes, cars, and other products will be analysed. The gender stereotypes will not be analysed in terms of psychological manners. However, they will explain why and how consumers may perceive gender stereotypes by referring to a list of gender norms.

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#### Introduction:-

In advertising, genders have been distinctly segmented into portraying characteristics that abide by society's gender roles. Although gender segmentation may allow businesses to hone their products/services and narrow their target market to males or females (The British Library), their approach and advertising style propose incorrect gender roles. From perfume advertisements to pandemic posters, males and females have been frequently sexualized, objectified, and stereotyped. Additionally, by being exposed to 6,000 to 10,000 advertisements daily (Carr), it can be inferred that viewing them is part of one's daily routine. When these representations are so regularly presented, through reinforcement, they convince consumers to believe that such representations are exemplary. Thus, it conditions consumers into thinking such characterizations of men and women are the standards to reach. Examples of product/service advertisements that reinforce gender norms are such as but are not limited to, household products, perfumes, and cars. This research paper will evaluate numerous advertisements and aim to prove how intensely apparent sexism is in the advertising industry.

First and foremost, understanding certain fundamental information is essential, hence, definitions of words will be clarified. According to the World Health Organization, Gender is a term referring to the socially constructed characteristics of girls, boys, women, and men. Gender identities are the intrinsic and personal experience of gender, for example, male, female, transgender, gender neutral, non-binary, and several more (Teen Talk). One may

recognize themselves anywhere along none or on a variety of spectrums of identities (Ontario). However, the definition of sex is the distinct biological and physiological attributes of males and females, like the reproductive organs, chromosomes, and hormones (Council of Europe). So, to put it plainly, gender is the identity one chooses to embody, whereas sex is the biological identity by birth. Moreover, gender norms are socially constructed roles/expectations believed appropriate for girls, boys, men, and women (Save the Children). The following list states some of the primary basic gender norms and stereotypes that exist in today's world.

1. Girls play with dolls. Boys play with cars.
2. Girls prefer pink and purple. Boys prefer blue and green.
3. Girls are better at reading. Boys are better at mathematics.
4. Girls mature faster and are well-behaved. Boys rebel and are ill-mannered.
5. Girls are neat, clean, and organized. Boys are messy, dirty, and unorganized.
6. It is wrong for a woman not to want children.
7. A woman who is a mother is less dedicated to their job.
8. Assertive women are "bossy." Assertive men are "attractive."
9. Women that look less feminine are lesbians. Men that look less masculine are gay.
10. Women are nurturers. Boys are leaders.
11. Women behave politely, speak in accommodating tones and appear nurturing. Men embody masculine energy through physical strength and a bold/confident tone of voice.
12. Women are more emotional and sympathetic than men. Men are more aggressive than women.
13. Women are better suited to look after children, maintain the household, provide meals for the family, and stay at home. Men are better suited to handle finances, own cars and perform home repairs.
14. Women are worse drivers than men. Men have better driving skills.
15. Women belong in the kitchen, either cleaning or cooking.
16. Women take the roles of teachers, nurses, and flight attendants. Men take on the roles of professors, doctors, pilots, and engineers.
17. Women should be thin, elegant, and shorter than their significant other. Men are tall and muscular.
18. Women usually wear dresses/skirts and make-up. Men usually wear pants and t-shirts.
19. Women have long hair. Men have short hair.
20. Women take care of their appearance more than men. Men barely care for their appearance.
21. Women wear revealing outfits and expose their skin to attract men.
22. Same-sex couples can never make good parenting or be good parents.
23. Transgender people and non-binary are immensely sinful.
24. (Planned Parenthood) (Gender Equality Law Center)

It is not only the social groups that reinforce these gender stereotypes but also the media industry. How the media communicates information and ideas diligently supports the mentioned stereotypes, thereby shaping one's cognition of their behaviour. Through observational learning, the process of learning by witnessing the actions of others (DeBell), one begins to naturally or purposely model those actions. To apply this to a real-world scenario, when a girl notices the limited coverage of women's sporting events on the leading sports channels on television, she begins to believe that sports must not be suitable for girls. Therefore, she may naturally avert from engaging in sports activities. Moreover, as she is a young child, it is easier to influence her thinking (Children and Screens) when her belief that women do not engage in sports is persistently reinforced not only through TV but also through sport product and service advertisements. An advertisement solely aims to persuade customers to purchase their good or service, hence, each element—like colour, context, connotations, tone, etc.—of an effective advertisement will be powerfully convincing for the viewers. They are powerfully convincing when consumers are repeatedly exposed as per the Mere Exposure Theory, which states that recurrence forms familiarity and admirability (JCarlos). In other words, the more often one sees something, the more one will admire it, which can conclude why a person so frequently views one advertisement. For this reason, advertisements can be declared influential in shaping one's perception and why many girls and boys grow up abiding by discriminatory beliefs also known as gender stereotypes.

### **Analysis of Advertisements**

1.0 Household Advertisements; laundry detergents and dishwashing detergents, and clothing

"Women are better suited to look after children, maintain the household, provide meals for the family, and stay at home. Men are better suited to handle finances, own cars, and perform home repairs."

“Women belong in the kitchen either cleaning or cooking.”

Girls are neat, clean, and organized. Boys are messy, dirty, and unorganized.

Detergent products are exceptional examples of how advertisements reinforce gender stereotypes. From posters to shirt labels, detergent advertisements (ads) have one common feature: a woman. Women are predominantly the subject in the advertisement and the target audience of laundry products. The projection of unemployed mothers who run the household and care for the family abides by society’s viewpoints on a woman’s purpose in life and promotes the idea that detergent products are exclusively designated for women to purchase. Although many such promotional features are from times when society’s norms were not questioned and criticized—unlike recent times—such sexist ads still exist today.

#### Dawn’s Special Care Advertisement

Dawn’s Special Care advertisement’s title, “Send your hands to a spa without leaving the kitchen,” exemplifies how women are instructed and considered to belong in the kitchen. First, the central dominant image is the hand’s scenic blue silhouette, which immediately captures the viewer’s attention. It possibly signifies how paradise, the setting in the silhouette, is in the viewer’s reach, one arm’s reach (Psuopog). The hand is slim with long, manicured nails, thus a woman’s hand. So, immediately after establishing that the hand is a woman’s, the female audience is intrigued to discover more about the advertisement. Meanwhile, the male audience may be discouraged from spending more time observing this feature as it has no intended relevance to them, unlike the female audience. In this manner, Dawn has explicitly denoted that their detergent product is not suitable for male consumers, and is not targeting them.



Figure 1.1

Secondly, credibility, which is the customer’s perspective of the speaker, directly influences how accepting or refusing they will be of what the speaker says (Baier). The viewer presumably gives credibility to Dawn, The United States’ top-selling dishwashing product in the early 2000s (Levere), which appeals to the mode of persuasion—ethos

—and convinces the female audience to believe that this product is only intended for them. Dawn’s early success conveys useful credibility and conditions both the male and female audiences that such products are for women to use.

Thirdly, the gender stereotype XXII: “Women belong in the kitchen, either cleaning or cooking,” is precisely reinforced through the advertisement’s text. This advert uses the rule of thirds, which portrays this page’s three primary elements (Broz), the title, the silhouette of the hand, and the margin at the bottom. Dawn’s title, “Send your hands to a spa without leaving the kitchen,” and the text at the bottom margin ironically prioritize a woman’s comfort despite simultaneously implying that regardless of feeling exhausted while laboring in the kitchen, escaping and resolving the situation by relaxing is not the answer. Instead, women should purchase this product and bring relaxation with them to the kitchen. The accompanying text reinforces the notion that women should accept their daily struggles and also acknowledges that everyone—the brand, Dawn, itself— is aware of how opposing cleaning in the kitchen and having a spa is yet, still expect women to stay in the kitchen, clean the dishes and experience a “spa.”

This advertisement communicates biased messages and ideas to the audience, which plausibly will form inappropriate beliefs and perceptions. Dawn is an example of the numerous brands that promote the social stereotypes of genders and strategically persuade consumers to believe those statements only for the sale of their goods or services.

#### **Radion Detergent Channel 4**

This laundry advertisement allows one to concentrate on the stereotypes for both men and women. To explain the context, a father and a son who has been outdoors assumingly repairing their house for hours enter their house and approach the mother and daughter. Instantly, juxtaposition is evident between the appearances of the sweaty, fetid, and unclean males and the clean and orderly females in the frame. The mother then instructs them to take a bath, implying a “bath” for the shirts. Later, the product is elaborate on and the family is seen close together with smiles on their face.



Progressing onto the analysis of the video advert, the idea of men being outdoors and working hard while the women are indoors managing the housework reinforces how these two genders are more suited to be in the assigned settings. Additionally, the daughter has, very subtly at 0:10 of the advert, opened the washing machine door indicating how the young girl is more responsible than the two males, even though one is an adult. Again, this reinforces the IV stereotype: “Girls mature faster and are well-behaved. Boys rebel and speak loudly.” This representation may result in consumers forming and agreeing with stereotypical attitudes due to confirmation bias.

Confirmation bias is the tendency to seek information that agrees with and confirms one's knowledge. For this reason, confirmation bias allows this advert to seep into consumers' minds and reinforce these gender stereotypes because consumers have likely seen similar stereotyped adverts.

### **Cascade, Dawn Commercials**

One may argue that the advert was released in 1991, a time when such poor representations of women and men were unquestioned, and in today's world, society has evolved for the better. Thereupon, it is irrelevant to analyse such outdated advertisements to explain how gender in advertising is misogynistic. This statement is valid as society has been evolving and reconstructing its value. Brands like Cascade by Dawn have developed and refined their gender representations in advertisements. For example, in Figures 1.3.1 and 1.3.2, male characters demonstrate how to use the product, enhancing the idea of gender non-conformity by having a male character using the product. The mere shift of swapping gender roles demonstrates how products are not necessarily gender-specific. It is significant in advancing gender expression as it does not align with societal standards (Lowry). However, the current market leaders of the detergent industry majorly rely on gender conformity to portray their commercials. In most detergent commercials, the woman is portrayed as using the product, emphasizing the point that laundry advertisements are exceptional examples of how gender stereotypes are promoted to consumers and reinforced in their thinking.

**Figure 1.3.1**



**Figure 1.3.2**



### **Shirt Tags with Sexist Messages**

As time progresses, it can undoubtedly be claimed that more sexist comments and behaviours are being consequences as more individuals are acknowledging, noticing, and learning about gender discrimination. However, it may come as a surprise that gender discrimination and misogyny are apparent in places as unfortunate as clothing tags. This attempt to, perhaps, humour the consumer proves how brands believe that misogynistic advertising is

appropriate. Figures 1.4.1 and 1.4.2 display the derogatory washing instructions that Salvo, an Indonesian firm (Harvey-Jenner), has printed.

Figure 1.4.1



Figure 1.4.2



“Give it to your woman. IT’S HER JOB” is a quote that re-emphasizes the gender stereotype “Women belong in the kitchen, either cleaning or cooking.” By stating, “Give it to your woman,” it can be inferred that this message is for men, husbands to be specific. This comment encourages men and anyone in a relationship with a woman to hand over the laundry to because “it’s her job.” It promotes misogynistic attitudes and attempts to convince the male audience that a woman’s job is to serve others. This mindset is indeed the cause of gender discrimination because such standards and expectations for women were encouraged by society and men in earlier times. Thereby, seeing such degrading messages in advertising in today’s world is tragic as it reiterated how many mindsets are yet to change.

#### **Perfume Advertisements; Tom Ford, Dior**

Women should be thin, elegant, and shorter than their significant other. Men are tall and muscular.

Women must behave politely, speak in accommodating tones and appear nurturing. Men are expected to embody masculine energy by seeming physically strong and speaking boldly and confidently.

Women want to appear attractive to men when more of their skin is exposed.

Purchasing perfume is considered a luxury by many because of the associated prices (Barbara). The answer to the question, “Why are consumers purchasing high-end priced perfumes when they can purchase cheaper substitutes?” lies in the emotional appeal of the advertisement. The fragrance industry comprises products that require one of the five senses—smell—to be active to ensure consumer engagement. Therefore, fragrance brands need to market their

perfume in such a manner where its scent is conveyed. Demographically segmenting the target market for fragrance into men and women is an effective strategy for narrowing down a business's market (Lotame). However, communicating the "emotion" behind each perfume for the segmented genders sexualizes and objectifies femininity only to boost product appeal (Shikongo). Several advertisements rely upon women's sexuality by using provocative poses, facial expressions, and body nudity.

### Tom Ford For Men (Rachel)

Tom Ford's debut perfume for men utilized women's body parts to capture the male audience's attention depicting them as sex objects because of the nudity. Figure 2.1 includes the cologne placed between a woman's legs and breasts. The facial expression where the woman's mouth is wide open as though in surprise or shock simultaneously serves with the red lipstick applied onto her lips to imply that using the cologne in the photograph will lead a man to a woman like the one displayed in the image to appreciate. In this case, the psychology behind the color red effectively provokes passion, desire, and aggression (Kendra), mainly because it appears on a woman's lips and fingernails. The long red nails symbolize claws as if the woman is fierce and striking, guilelessly leading the viewers into perceiving this image in a sexually appealing manner. The reason why fragrance brands employ sexual appeals and create erotic advertisements is to capture the audience.



This advert displays women as objects which lure men when stripped down and appear nude. Tom Ford (the brand) objectifies women and sexualizes their bodies to ease the customer's remembrance of this product. By doing so, consumers may believe that when a woman exposes her skin, she does it for male validation and attention. This then allows the introduction of the phrase, "She was asking for it."

"She was asking for it" is a phrase that is used in the context of female sexual assault victims. They are often blamed and the assault is attributed to how they were acting, speaking, wearing, and standing. Based on a survey conducted by YouGov, 40% of American adults believe that when one wears revealing clothing, they are accountable for any unconsented sexual contact and action. The hysteria does not revolve around the fact that 55% of US adults think that a woman exposing more skin purposely wants to draw attention, but that 61% of those surveyed were men (LaFata).

With such adverts, brands like Tom Ford are reinforcing immoral ideas, using extensively inappropriate and disrespectful measures to entice a man's gaze, imprint the product and brand name in the consumer's mind and raise sales.

### Davidoff's The Power of Cool, Cool Water (Goller)

The product is targeted towards men, therefore should portray a man in the advertisement. However, the model selected is typically a tall and masculine man to embody the "power" of being cool. Celebrity endorsements are an

effective advertising strategy as they can gain audiences who follow and keep up with the celebrity. It also helps more people like and purchase the product because they admire the celebrity. Celebrities bring on a new set of loyal customers to a business. In this advert, the “legendary” surfer, Laird Hamilton, is seen assumingly coming from the waves to shore after surfing yet still appears physically attractive, active, and bold. Thus, this implies several overlapping messages; to be as “cool” and chic as the man, use the perfume. Additionally, it suggests that the perfume is meant for men that appear like the one in the advert, and the perfume may make a man feel as though you are the man in the advert. However, the reality is far-fetched. (1) No man will appear like Hamilton by simply using the cologne as the cologne does not affect one’s physique in any possible way. Not every man resembles Hamilton. Hence, those who do not may feel pressured into forcing themselves to fit that physique. By wanting to fit into a self-constructed prototype, one’s mental health can be severely affected. In this case, attempting to become Hamilton takes years of hard work and patience, which one may not achieve in a short period. Furthermore, this can lead to body dysmorphia and possibly eating disorders because one’s dietary habits are essential in determining body shape and appearance. When models fit society’s expectations on gender appearance, not only are they reinforcing and abiding by these stereotypes, but also projecting the idea that one can appear so “perfect” in physique all of the time or, to put it plainly, one is so “picture-perfect.”



### **Beyoncé’s HEAT perfume (Parfumo Community)**

Beyoncé launched her first fragrance, HEAT, which was advertised in the aesthetic shown in Figure 2.3.1. The colour red is the first element consumers notice both in the foreground and background. The background is blurry and unclear, and serves to highlight the foreground –the text, Beyoncé herself, and the perfume bottle. Similar to the Tom Ford for Men perfume analysed previously, the psychology behind the colour red makes the consumer feel invited, lured, and aroused. According to (Elliot), the colour red of the dress the model (Beyoncé) is wearing is associated with and signifies romance. Therefore, the model’s gaze creates a captivating and arousing mood as her eyes seem elegantly patient. Her stance is that she is laying eagerly on the ground with her legs exposed along with her cleavage.

Moreover, the name of the perfume, “HEAT,” denotes hot, glowing, sizzling, and burning terms suggesting that using this perfume can make you as “hot” (sexually appealing) as the model. These elements emphasize a seductive mood formed within the reader’s mind and create the impression that using the perfume will attract men. Moving on, when celebrities as credible as Beyoncé lend their name to advertisements that convey messages like when more skin is exposed, men are attracted, consumers tend to start believing the conditioning consumers into thinking that exposing more skin will lure more men, again, because of confirmation bias. Confirmation bias theory is relevant here to how consumers are receiving conditioning messages as Beyoncé has released several similar perfume endorsements which communicate the exact overall meaning. Consequently, when these promotions repeatedly reach consumers, confirmation bias supports how and why they will begin believing such messages. Not only this but the Band wagoning effect, where consumers adopt specific mannerisms, lifestyles, and preferences as such



celebrities due to their credibility, is also exemplified in this advertisement as Beyoncé grows her credibility by being one of the top-leading vocalists.



Car Advertisements: Toyota Fortuner and BMWs Premium Selection

Women are better suited to look after children, maintain the household, provide meals for the family, and stay at home. Men are better suited to handle finances, own cars and perform home repairs.

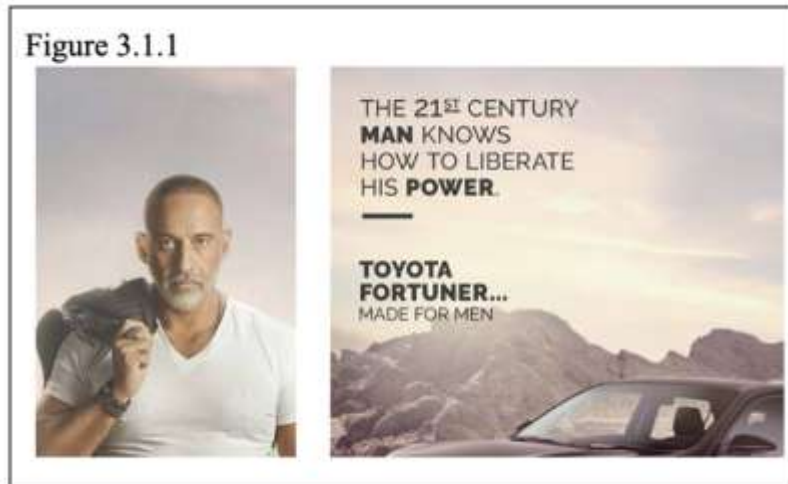
Women are worse drivers than men. Men have better skills in driving.

In the vehicle advertising industry, male models purchase, sponsor, and endorse car commercials. Conceivably because cars are a route to flaunt a man's masculinity as they own high-priced and powerful things (CAR RC). Cars symbolize success and capability. Thus, because of the societal pressure on men to maintain a confident, dominating, and successful reputation, men were the target audience of car brands. Such representations of men and women in the advertisements for Toyota and BMW display gender stereotypes like men are better equipped to purchase cars,

#### **Toyota Fortuner (Elsayed)**

Toyota, a Japanese automotive manufacturer, is undoubtedly one of the most famous car brands because of its quality and diverse product range (**Elsayed**). However, Toyota harshly suffered when they released Toyota Fortuner's new campaign with the slogan and taglines "Made for men", and "The 21st-century **man** knows how to liberate his **power**". "With this form of marketing, Toyota has limited its potential customers to only men, negatively affecting its brand image.

Before the 21st century, cars were associated with men, and extreme gender stereotypes were solidified. However, as time passed, many women and men began criticizing and questioning societal norms and advocating for change. The movement for gender equality is, unfortunately, still an ongoing debate. Many businesses have used their platform to spread awareness of cases of gender inequality. They have changed many of their gender-discriminating activities like workforce male-to-women ratio, unnecessary gender distinctions in products and more. However, when brands encourage consumers to remain abiding by society's stereotypes and expectations of gender roles, consumers are heavily influenced, making the fight for gender equality more challenging. Equivalent to the previously evaluated Davidoff advertisement, Toyota's Fortuner advertisements attempt to influence the consumer in similar ways. The models create a stereotypical prototype of a strong man—broad shoulders, intimidating yet attractive facial expression, and tan skin complexion—indicating that the car is only meant for a man who is courageous, assertive, and independent.



This advert asserts that the Toyota Fortuner is a man's car. The tagline "The 21st-century **man** knows how to liberate his **power**" appeals to the male ego by implying that without the Toyota Fortuner a **man** cannot liberate his power nor is he a modern 21st-century **man**. Using this storyline, the commercial aimed to instill feelings of guilt in the male audience if they did not own this car model.

Expectedly, controversy followed this campaign, and when Toyota Egypt poorly defended itself by replying to the comment, "What about women?" saying "Anyone can drive a man's car!", Toyota miserably failed to understand the issue with its advertising. Due to this Toyota's brand image deteriorated over time. No controversy should exist in segmenting a market and targeting men and women separately. However, when done for products and services that are useful to everyone, there should be a consequence.

#### **BMW Premium Selection (Riley)**

BMW's Premium Selection campaign, "Used Cars" utilized the idea of sex and women to market their cars. They aimed to create demand for pre-owned BMWs but ultimately failed as they hinted that using old cars is similar to having a sexual relationship with a sexually experienced woman. Using such a connotation disrespects women as it objectifies them to a car. On top of that, the woman appears nude in a supine posture gazing up at the consumer

creating provocative signs that women indicate. The question presented by the model, “But do you really care?” can accommodate the idea that she is purposely portraying herself seductively.

This advertisement shows how women can be and are sexualized and objectified in any manner for any purpose (advertising products), even when marketing vehicles. This advertisement sides by gender stereotype XXIX: “Women want to appear attractive to men when more of their skin is exposed.” and performs the same effects as every other advert which sexualizes women, it degrades them.



### Conclusion and Inferences:-

This report explained the different ways in which advertisements reinforce gender stereotypes and how the effect of viewing such advertisements influences consumers' thinking. Different product industries—namely laundry detergents, dishwasher detergents, perfumes, and cars—have been analysed in terms of what message they convey, the manner that they have communicated this message and the potential impact on consumer thinking. Specifically, the report majorly demonstrates how many advertisements sexualize, objectify, degrade, and negatively characterize women, promoting societal norms through gender representation. The depictions of women that many of these advertisements directly or indirectly portray obediently abide by societal gender roles. The marketing industry reinforces society's standards on the appearance and mannerisms of genders by including models who fit such standards to condition consumers into thinking that their “goal/wish” to fit society's requirements can be fulfilled if they purchase the advertised good. However, the reality of excessive editing/refining, makeup, and aesthetic surgeries which many of such “perfect” models experience is hidden.

Going forward, marketing agencies should capitalize on the opportunity of designing advertisements to limit the abundance that advertisements have for society's norms as such changes will progress consumers closer to abandoning several unjust stereotypes and perceptions. By being considerate of the potential influence that the characterization of genders will have on consumers' existing perceptions and cognitions—through non-sexualizing and non-objectifying of women, non-conforming to societal expectations, and equitable gender representations—brands may excessively impact and change consumers' perceptions.

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