

Part 2: Theoretical Background and Further Information

How females are portrayed

For more than 30 years, the representation of women in advertisements has been the subject of analyses and critical studies [cf. Mikos (1988), Schmerl (1992a,b) Spieß (1992)]. In the 1980s, there were two different female stereotypes and images of women:

- Housewife and mother
- The young, attractive dream woman.

In both roles, women are dependent on a man. The housewife is shown taking care of the family by shopping, cleaning, cooking and washing... The dream woman is often alone, indirectly connected to a man, as she is supposed to lure and to "catch" a man and then to be defined in relation to that man and then in turn to wait on him and their child/children. Therefore, according to Mikos (1988), the dream woman role is the stage before taking on the housewife/mother role (Mikos 1988, 55f.).

"Who is Paulchen here?"

Source: active beauty 10/Winter 2007, dm drogerie markt, Vienna, p. 41.



Schmerl (1992a, p. 19ff.) Marschik/Dorer (2002, p. 37) defines five categories of anti-women portrayals: a *woman = sex*: Sexual suggestiveness (visual or verbal) conveying the impression that women are always available. This category also includes "eye-catching advertisements", in which a woman only serves as a decorative accessory, without any reference to the product. *Woman = product*: This impression is achieved through advertising slogans or through product similarity with a woman's body/figure. *Female shortcomings*: fat, clumsy, frequently sick (headaches) and more recently-indigestion... *Male cynicism*: The advertising message goes in the direction of "male jokes". The *beauty ideal*: young, slender, perfect measurements, large eyes... and above all without any wrinkles or grey hair.

Subtle discrimination is also evident in commercials in which only women appear, (or to be more exact, nearly only!). In fact, a male's voice can be heard in the background as the "downstream expert" or "voice over". A man is regarded as conveying credibility and competence and has the role of explaining which product should be used or bought by women and how this product works (cf. Schmerl 1992b, p. 193) – especially for washing machines, tooth paste, pharmaceutical –).

How males are portrayed

Only since the 1980s has there been a systematic study of male images and male stereotypes in the media (special advertising) in the German-speaking world (encouraged by general gender research and *Men's Studies* especially from the USA).

Krohne (...) has examined male role models and has classified them according to different impact levels: Male area of life – age bracket – the typology of advertising representation areas (Krohne 1995, p. 142ff.). The most widespread role model is the *male professional*: competent, logical and speaks with authority based on facts, an expert with specialized knowledge (a dentist, a computer expert, a washing machine installer...).



The *image of husband and family father* (breadwinner, the (sole head of the family head)

has been revised since the 1970s. The father figure no longer systematically appears as rigid and authoritarian, however the role-specific behaviour in the family is still evident. As a creative alternative, the role reversal appears where the father or the husband is represented as a family member who also admits his weaknesses, needs advice and “takes a crack” at helping out in housework and with the children. This role reversal amongst married couples originates mostly because of external factors: The storyline for the advertisement is simply for one reason or the other, the woman is just not around at that time. Therefore, it is not the sign of a more serious recognition of the need for a role reversal. In a man’s leisure time, he mainly acts as a “sportsman, a handyman, a judge of women, an avid car critic or a gourmet cook” (Krohne 1995, p. 144).

“He knows what’s what...” – and definitely about what he buys. She drags the shopping basket around and asks for advice. In the picture presented here, the man’s coat is being advertised, the woman at his side, is only a decorative accessory.

Source: Peek&Cloppenburg,

Postwurfsendung (Direct mail advertisement), 21 Nov. 2007, p. 2.

The “TV presenter” (i.e.: medical doctor - Dr. Best), one of the traditional forms of representation, has turned into an “Infotainer” (providing news and entertainment) who has a good sense of humour, acts casually, is not afraid to show emotion and conveys the advertising message in a narrative-style, sometimes a bit overdone and/or ironically. Krohne states that there is a trend for more male than female TV presenters and that’s due to the male self-image and self-assurance which give them a richer repertoire of possibilities

Prominent advertising figures come from all areas (sports, theatre, television film – often as in the case of the synchronization area, well-known voices are used); they are also present on the international scene, as a commercial showing celebrities tries to transfer their aura of glamour to the product advertised; another advantage is that a commercial with international stars can be distributed worldwide.

Moreover, homosexual couples have only been explicitly portrayed in German advertisements since 2000, according to Nickel (2002, p. 7). Krohne (1995) has come to the conclusion that the portrayal of men is mostly based on traditional role stereotypes, and unlike the portrayal of women, is more distinguished: “... the attractive lover and the motherly housewife, on the one side, contrasts with the competent expert, the cool daredevil, the self-confident and successful business man, the decisive father and husband and the self-fulfilled adventurer, on the other side” (Krohne 1995, p. 151). He sees in men, a male equivalent for the female dictate of beauty, however the representation of male beauty is not increasing.

Images of boys and girls – Advertisements with children/advertising for children

“Hokuspokus, sit!” is how the words of an advertisement for a major Austrian banking company goes.

The young girl wearing butterfly wings and holding a magic wand, first speaks firmly and then pleadingly to a sweet dog. The dog does not, however, have any intention of obeying her. You can also hear in the background: “Save as much as up to 600 Euros”, with the BA-CA housing loan.” The male version of this advertisement for the same bank shows a boy climbing a wall, dressed as batman—in order to get an overview of the European Market. A control shot (“should I?” / “am I allowed to?”) shows his uncertainty. With difficulty, he succeeds in climbing the wall. He’s made it. But what will happen next? Finally, he is standing all alone on the top of the wall ...



"Hokuspokus, sit!"



"Conquer the European Market!" (female voice-over)

Both advertisements use children for advertising purposes that clearly advertise products for adults; they convey the traditional role stereotypes to onlookers. The small girl (blond-hair, in a pink-collared pullover with butterfly wings...) would also like to climb higher, like her male counterpart, but in fact she stays with her feet firmly on the ground (reality). The young boy- encouraged by his batman outfit- achieves in reality, higher dimensions... Typical woman! Typical man! In contrast, children's advertisements aim at appealing to children. The commercials last 20 and 30 seconds with a cut frequency of one to three seconds. Here, real film and animation tricks are used: the children participating (often individual children) are generally in the main roles. Advertising targeting children often uses well-known media characters such as cartoon characters (Tom & Jerry, the Flintstone Family...), as well as celebrities from TV shows (Thomas Gottschalk advertises with credibility for "Haribo" and "McDonalds").

Commercials addressing boys show quick shots and emphasize technical details, energy and strength. Commercials for girls are characterized by soft fade-over techniques, the stereotypical girl-behaviour is obvious, supported through the catchy tune and special colour (pink). The fact that there are many products that are only popular with a group of children is plausible: i.e. Boys like computer games, cars and electrical equipment and girls like dolls/figurines, clothes, cosmetics and baby food.

"Practice early, if you want to please ..."

Source: Steffl Trend Letter, 05/07

Postwurfsendung (Direct mail advertisement), 23. Nov. 2007, p. 7.



An exercise to study advertisements, to look at their contents and to reflect upon them is an ideal activity for children. As children are already used to watching television with adults, they enjoy commenting on TV commercials.

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