Impact on Purchasein Tent of Modern Femaler Ole Portrayals Focusing on Household Task Allocation

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In an experiment among 140 married adult women we investigate the advertising effectiveness of different modern female role portrayals in print ads. Since many married women work and are no longer available solely to manage the home, sharing household tasks has become critical to families. In this paper we incorporate this issue into our investigation of female role portrayals in print ads. Specifically, we consider the superwoman image in which a working woman manages the home with little spousal help, and the egalitarian image, in which a husband and wife share household tasks. Identifying the overall preference for the egalitarian positioning is an initial step in establishing the impact on advertising effectiveness of the cultural changes now taking place in American society and specifically in the women's market. The results are consistent with both economic and sociological theory of spousal power in a marriage and the corresponding division of household chores. These theories are demonstrated to extend their tentacles to the superior appeal of the egalitarian portrayal with respect to advertising effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

The increase in the number of women in the workplace has created a cultural upheaval in our society. Today, working women are torn between the demands of work and the demands at home. Women's uneasiness with these dual demands can be attributed to our society's belief that females should be able to handle household chores and child care without help from anyone. Consequently, many employed women assume two full-time jobs, one at work and one at home, regardless of the stress it might cause.

One way advertisers have responded to the increase in the proportion of working women is by creating the "superwoman image." In ad after ad we see the working mother with briefcase in one hand and smiling child in the other. The image suggests that she can easily manage the demands of job, children and household all by herself. "She has made it in a man's world without sacrificing her femininity" (Hochschild, 1989). She's a woman who can "have it all" ("do it all").

Studies have revealed that most mothers working full-time feel considerable stress when trying to balance demands of job and home (Googins, 1991; Townsend & O'Neil, 1990). Though women continue to be torn between the expectations of work and home, they are beginning to examine whether they can realistically "do it all." As a result, advertisers must now examine whether portrayals of women as super human beings are effective. They need to ask themselves whether these ads cause resentment among female consumers who realize they are unable to manage work and home without support from their spouse.

When women are at work and are no longer available solely to manage the home, family roles must be reassigned. Other family members, however, are often reluctant to share these tasks (Crispell, 1992). Both men and women agree that the most tangible way men can help women balance job and home is to share housework. Unfortunately their desire does not always translate into action (Townsend & O'Neil, 1990). Many women contend that they are not getting enough support from husbands when it comes to sharing household and child care responsibilities. Although men are doing a greater share than ever before, most research confirms that working women still do the lion's share of the housework (Burden & Googins, 1987; Hochschild, 1989; Pleck, 1982). In the 1990 Virginia Slims Opinion Poll, women were asked what would be the single most important factor in helping them balance work and home. Seventy percent responded that it would be getting more help with housework from their husbands (Townsend & O'Neil, 1990).
Advertisers have responded to women's need for more help by creating egalitarian images of nurturing husbands sharing household responsibilities (Gelfand, 1985). However, by developing this new egalitarian image, advertisers have created a dilemma for themselves. They have developed competing images of the modern working woman without investigating which is the more effective. At one extreme they portray a superwoman assuming most of the responsibility for household and child care by herself. At the other extreme, they show an egalitarian image where the working woman receives substantial help from her husband. There is little academic research to determine which of these images is more effective in reaching different segments of the women's market. Do women still believe they can do it all and respond favorably to ads depicting a superwoman? Or do they feel that it's increasingly difficult to balance work and home and respond less favorably to the superwoman portrayal? Does the egalitarian image of sharing household chores appeal to women and increase advertising effectiveness? Or do women find this image too unrealistic because their husbands are so often unwilling to share?

In a field experiment, we expose respondents to carefully prepared print ads for a food product. We compare the two modern images, superwomen and egalitarian, in terms of their interest in purchasing the advertised food product. Both of these modern portrayals are also compared to the traditional image of women. The traditional portrayal, typified by an image of a woman who focuses her attention primarily on home and family, is used as a base with which to compare the modern portrayals. We also use economic resource theory and socialization theory to explain women's varying response to these different female sex-role portrayals.

This research differs from past advertising research on women's role portrayal in advertising in a number of ways. Firstly, it focuses on the critical issue of the sharing of household responsibilities as a function of women's changing role in society. It addresses the changing role of men, as well as women, by assessing what women need and expect from men in terms of sharing household chores. Moreover, it addresses how advertisers must respond to these needs and develop female role portrayals that are effective and socially responsible. Secondly, most of the research on women's role portrayals in advertising have concentrated on comparing the effectiveness of modern and traditional role portrayals. These studies have typically considered only the superwoman modern portrayal. This study goes further. It compares the traditional female role portrayal to two distinct modern portrayals, each of the two identifiably different in focus. The results of this study will suggest the superior modern portrayal for different segments of the female market.

HYPOTHESES AND SUPPORT

Several studies have investigated the effect of female role portrayals on advertising effectiveness (Jaffe, 1991; Jaffe & Berger, 1988; Sherman Group, 1982). These studies indicate that, in general, any modern female role portrayal is more effective than a traditional portrayal. Moreover, modern portrayals are preferred over traditional ones by many segments of the female market in many product categories. Therefore, we expect that:

**Hypothesis 1a:** The main effect of role portrayal on purchase interest will be significant. Each of the two modern portrayals (superwoman and egalitarian) will yield higher purchase interest than will a traditional portrayal.

Research has suggested that some women find the superwoman portrayal unrealistic. When Hochschild (1989) showed working women advertising images of the superwoman, many responded negatively. Most could not imagine combining work and home with the ease that advertisers had depicted in these portrayals. These working women felt that the superwoman did not remind them of anyone they knew. In another study, many women stated that they no longer desired to manage work and home without help from their spouse (Townsend & O'Neil, 1990). When these women were asked to identify the most satisfactory marriage with respect to shared responsibility, 53 percent felt the ideal was one in which both partners work and share household responsibilities. We assume that many
women will find the idea of sharing household chores an ideal worth attaining and prefer advertisements that depict this ideal. Therefore, we postulate that:

**Hypothesis 1b:** Of the two modern portrayals, superwoman and egalitarian, the egalitarian portrayal will yield higher purchase interest than will the superwoman portrayal.

Buried behind the issue of managing household chores and who does what in the home, is the more profound issue of gender equality and power in the marriage (Googins, 1991). Economists and sociologists have each developed theories that explain power in the marriage and its relationship to unequal division of household chores (Pleck, 1985). Economic resource theory contends that men do little in the family because of their greater paid work contribution to the household. Sociological theory argues that we are socialized to believe that men should not be expected to do family work. Roberts and Wortzel (1984) state that both socialization variables (e.g., sex-role ideology) and situational variables (e.g., wife’s working status and income) determine household partners’ expectations about household task allocation. In this paper we use both of these theories to develop and test hypotheses explaining women’s varying response to advertising portrayals.

According to economic resource theory, a wife has less power than her husband because she provides fewer economic resources to the family (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Pleck, 1982; Scanzoni, 1972; Steil & Weltman, 1991). A husband, because of his high-paying, often prestigious job has more material resources than his wife. He, in turn, exchanges these resources for greater authority and decreased work at home (Scanzoni, 1972). According to this theory, if a wife could achieve comparable material status through her own employment, then the couple would eradicate unequal division of household chores.

There is some evidence to support economic resource theory. Among a sample of 65 couples, Hochschild found that the less wives earned relative to their husbands, the more housework they did. In another study, Steil and Weltman (1991) found that wives with higher incomes had more influence in the home; wives who earned less had more responsibility for household chores. Townsend and O’Neill’s (1990) research indicated that when a wife contributed more to family income, she expected a more equal division of housework. Blood and Wolfe (1960) have suggested that as a wife’s occupational status is enhanced, she has more power to compel her husband to share household tasks.

Since research has indicated that a woman’s income impacts the division of household labor, we anticipate that women who earn higher salaries will expect their husbands to share more of the housework. Moreover, they will prefer ads that express this egalitarian theme more strongly than their lower-earned counterparts. Therefore, we postulate that:

**Hypothesis 2:** Women with higher incomes will respond more favorably to the egalitarian portrayal than to the other portrayals to a larger degree than women with lower incomes (i.e., the two-way interaction effect between income and female role portrayal on purchase interest will be significant in the direction indicated).

Sociologists offer a different explanation for unequal division of household tasks between spouses. They contend that men spend less time doing housework because of deeply embedded societal norms (Pleck, 1982). Men and women have been socialized to believe that housework is simply not men’s work. Traditional gender socialization means that men and women grew up seeing a traditional division of labor between their parents. They have internalized these beliefs about the way men and women should behave. Consequently, many men and women today still do not view housework as appropriate for males.

A number of researchers have investigated the relationship between gender ideology and spouses’ family work (Hochschild, 1989; Huber & Spitz, 1983; Pleck, 1985; Roberts & Wortzel, 1984). It is postulated that the more contemporary a woman’s gender ideology, the greater the likelihood of spouses sharing many household tasks (Roberts & Wortzel, 1984).

Hochschild (1989) defines gender ideology as a specific set of beliefs about men and women and their marital roles. A woman’s gender ideology determines what sphere she wishes to identify with, work or home or both, and how much power she wishes to have in the marriage. Of course, not everyone adheres to the same gender ideology. Hochschild (1989) identifies three
gender ideologies: traditional, transitional and egalitarian. The traditional woman wishes to identify primarily with the home and wants her husband to base his identity at work. She wants less power than her mate. The egalitarian woman wishes to identify with the same spheres as her husband. She wants both her mate and herself to balance work and home and to have an equal amount of power in the marriage. The transitional woman is somewhere between the two. She wishes to identify with both work and home, but wants her husband to identify primarily with work.

We expect that women's varying gender ideologies will also impact the way they respond to different female sex-role portrayals in ads. It is reasonable to assume that women with more traditional gender ideologies will relate to traditional role portrayals in ads. Since women with transitional ideologies expect their husbands to identify primarily with work, they are likely to assume most of the household responsibilities. Therefore, they are likely to relate to the superwoman image. Since egalitarian women want equality in their marriage, we expect they will relate to portrayals of couples sharing household chores. Therefore, we postulate that:

**Hypothesis 3:** The two-way interaction effect between gender ideology and female role portrayal on advertising effectiveness will be significant. In terms of advertising response, a woman with a more contemporary gender ideology will prefer the modern portrayal to the traditional portrayal to a greater degree than will the woman with a more traditional gender ideology.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Overview**

We conducted a field experiment with 140 adult women; each respondent was exposed to six carefully prepared print advertisements for a food product. The ads used for the experiment were selected after a systematic content analysis and were developed specifically for this study. After studying the ads thoroughly, the respondents indicated the ad's effectiveness in terms of their purchase interest. They then filled out questions concerning their gender ideology and demographic status. Each interview lasted approximately twenty minutes.

**Sample**

The sample consisted of 140 married women between the ages of 21 and 50. We used a quota sample that captured roughly equal proportions of the various demographic combinations that could potentially impact the outcome of the study. To get a variation in income, the sample included women with different working status: unemployed outside the home, working part-time and working full time. One third of the women were ages 21 to 30, another third were ages 31 to 40 and the other third were ages 41 to 50. Interviewers screened respondents to obtain representatives from each subgroup. Interviews were conducted at various mall locations near several large northeastern cities. To prevent potential cyclical bias, the interviews were conducted on weekdays and on weekends, during the day and evening.

**Dependent Variables**

*Purchase interest* was captured using a 6-point semantic differential scale that asked respondents about their interest in purchasing the tested food product. Our scale included not only the positive set of possibilities, but rather measured the full range of possibilities from positive through negative purchase interest (Clancy and Shulman, 1991). This scale was anchored by the phrases, "This ad makes me more interested in buying this product (6)" and "This ad makes me less interested in buying this product (1)."

**Independent Variables**

*Role Portrayal: Development of Stimuli.* Content analysis of female roles in advertising is often a starting point for experimental research. Content analysis is a research technique used for the objective, quantitative and reliable classification of ad content (Kassarjian, 1977; Kolbe & Burnett, 1991). Objectivity refers to the use of independent judges, other than the researchers themselves, to classify ad content into specific categories. Quantifying ad content is a process to determine the degree to which the content represents a specific category. Reliability refers to agreement among judges as to how well the ads are categorized. We followed the procedures set forth by the aforementioned researchers (Kassarjian, 1977; Kolbe & Burnett, 1991) to classify our ads into the three female role categories: traditional, superwoman, and egalitarian.

We first developed a portfolio of female advertising images that we thought represented each of these three categories. Next, six
independent judges (Marketing doctoral candidates and faculty) rated the ads on their ability to capture these categories. The judges were given a list of phrases that described each of the three categories. We quantified the degree to which an ad represented its appropriate category using a repeated measures ANOVA. The within-subjects factor was role portrayal. This analysis was essentially a two-way ANOVA with judges (subjects) as the row factor and role portrayal as the column factor. Judges were treated as a "random-level factor" and role portrayal as a "fixed-level factor." The goal was to choose two ads that best represented, respectively, each of the three categories. To be a chosen ad for the actual study, it had to score high in its appropriate category while scoring significantly lower in each of the other two categories.

For each ad, we first tested its ability to capture the various role portrayals. Although most of the ads were able to capture their appropriate categories, certain ads did this significantly better than others. Using Tukey multiple comparison tests, we determined which of the two ads scored the highest in their appropriate category while also being significantly different (p < .001) from each of their inappropriate categories.

Finally, we tested for inter-judge reliability (i.e., the agreement among judges). We did this by testing, for each ad, the two-way interaction effect between judges and ability to capture role portrayal. Testing this interaction effect considers whether judges are in general agreement as to the ad's ability to capture each of the specific role portrayals. For each of the ads, we could not reject (p > .30) the null hypothesis of zero interaction between judges and ability to capture role portrayal. We concluded that the judges agreed in their classifications of the ads.

After the female images were chosen, headlines and body copy were developed to form a positioning that further emphasized the three categories, respectively. The ads were carefully matched in terms of their appeal. For each of the three positionings, the copy stressed our busy lives and the benefit of relying on the advertised food product (specifically, Rice'A-Roni) to make our job in the kitchen easier.

The traditional positioning emphasized that the woman was a housewife who had most of the responsibility for household chores. The superwoman positioning showed a woman in a business suit with a briefcase in one hand and a child in the other. The copy emphasized that she worked full-time and had primary responsibility for household chores. The egalitarian positioning showed a husband and wife in the kitchen, each helping prepare dinner. This copy emphasized the couple's decision to share household chores.

We have considered the possibility that responses to the three positionings might be driven by social desirability (i.e., subjects may respond in line with a perceived norm that favors egalitarian roles). While this possibility exists, it is based on assumption, not fact. It is just as likely that the respondents will report their real feelings, given our treatment of the alternative portrayals. All three female portrayals are positive images of women; they are young, attractive and look confident. A woman would feel comfortable selecting any of the three positionings. Moreover, at least two of the portrayals, the working woman and the egalitarian woman are socially desirable. Many women today enjoy working and are proud that they have expanded their role. Still, one could continue to speculate that the egalitarian portrayal is the perceived favorite norm. However, even if this were the case, it would account only for an exacerbated main effect and not significant interaction effects. We test for the significance of several interaction effects to rule out the possibility of concluding that results are driven by social desirability.

Manipulation checks indicated that the positionings varied as intended. At the end of her interview, each respondent indicated the extent of her agreement or disagreement with our description of the modern and traditional positionings shown. For each positioning the correlation between positioning and the correct description was positive (p < .01). The correlation between the positioning and each wrong description was negative (p < .01).

Gender Ideology. Respondents were asked five questions concerning their gender ideology. Several of these questions were obtained from other studies that measured gender ideology (Pleck, 1985). The remainder of these questions were obtained from the Yankelovich MONITOR (1990), a business service designed to provide marketers with annual information on the nature of social change in the United States. In our study respondents were asked the extent to which
they agreed or disagreed with the five statements. An example of a statement is, "I believe that a husband and wife should share household chores equally if they both work outside the home."

A reliability analysis of the responses to the five gender ideology questions yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .81. Therefore, we averaged the responses to these questions to form the final measure of gender ideology. Each respondent received a gender ideology score on a scale of 1 to 6. A lower score represents an adherence to a "more traditional" gender ideology, while a higher score indicates an adherence to a "more contemporary" gender ideology.

Experimental Design
The experimental design is a complete factorial design with partially repeated measures. It included two within-subjects variables (comprising a 3 X 2 factorial design for each respondent) and two between-subjects variables. One within-subjects variable was positioning, where positioning refers to the female role portrayals used in the ad. There were three levels of positioning: traditional, superwoman (modern 1) and egalitarian (modern 2). The second within-subjects variable was execution, at two levels: set 1 and set 2; each set consisted of a traditional positioning, a superwoman positioning and an egalitarian positioning. The members of each set were carefully matched in terms of their appeal. Having two levels of execution allows us to generalize to variations in our modern and traditional positionings. The two between-subject variables were wife's income and gender ideology.

Analysis
We used MANOVA for repeated measures using SPSSx software to test for main effects and interaction effects on advertising effectiveness. First, we determined whether there was a main effect due to positioning. Next, we constructed orthogonal contrasts to compare the average of the two modern positionings to the traditional positioning, and to compare the superwoman to the egalitarian positioning. Finally, we determined the two-way interaction effect between positioning and each of the demographic variables and between positioning and gender ideology.

RESULTS
The analysis reveals that the main effect of positioning on purchase interest is significant at p < .001 (see Table 1). The first of a set of two orthogonal contrasts indicates that the average of the two modern positionings is significantly higher than the traditional positioning in terms of purchase interest (p < .001). Moreover, analysis also reveals that each of the modern positionings yields significantly higher purchase interest than does the traditional positioning. Hypothesis 1a is therefore supported.

The mean purchase interest of the egalitarian, superwoman and traditional positionings, respectively, are 4.50, 3.72 and 2.76. The egalitarian mean purchase interest of 4.50 and the superwoman mean purchase interest of 3.72 are each significantly higher than the traditional positioning mean purchase interest of 2.76.

There is support for hypothesis 1b which contrasts the two modern positionings. The second orthogonal contrast shows that the superwoman and egalitarian are significantly different from each other at p < .001 in terms of their purchase interest. Of these two, the egalitarian positioning had higher purchase interest than the superwoman positioning (see Table 1). The mean purchase interest for the egalitarian and superwoman positionings are, respectively, 4.50 and 3.72.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positioning</th>
<th>Traditional</th>
<th>Superwoman</th>
<th>Egalitarian</th>
<th>Significance Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean Purchase Interest</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>p&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our results support economic resource theory for explaining unequal division of household chore between spouses. As table 2 illustrates, the two-way interaction effect between positioning and income on purchase interest is significant at p < .05. (Note that women's income was dichotomized into "higher" and "lower" groups using a median split.) Analysis reveals that women who earn higher income have a bigger...
difference in purchase interest between the modern and the traditional positionings compared to women with lower income. That is, higher income women differentiated more sharply between these positionings. For example, the higher income group had a mean purchase interest of 4.57 for the egalitarian positioning and a mean of 2.36 for the traditional one, for a difference in means of 2.21. The women with lower incomes had a mean of 4.43 for the egalitarian positioning compared to a mean of 3.15 for the traditional one, for a difference of (only) 1.28.

Moreover, the higher income group had a higher mean purchase interest of 4.57 for the egalitarian positioning compared to a mean of 3.58 for the superwoman positioning for a difference in means of .99. In contrast, the low income group did not differentiate as sharply between these two positionings, with a difference in means of .56 (4.43 and 3.87, respectively). Thus, hypothesis 2 is confirmed.

Moreover, women with a more contemporary gender ideology favored the egalitarian positioning over the superwoman to a greater extent than women with more traditional gender ideologies (see Table 3). Mean purchase interest for women with a more contemporary gender ideology was 4.66 for the egalitarian positioning compared to 3.35 for the superwoman positioning, for a difference of 1.31. For women with a more traditional gender ideology the difference between the two modern positionings was only .25, (4.34 and 4.09, respectively).

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Ideology</th>
<th>Positioning</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary</td>
<td>T M1 M2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>T M1 M2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Significance Level

Mean Purchase: 2.25 3.35 4.66 3.27 4.09 4.34 p<.01

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The problem of balancing work and homelife has become homogenized throughout American society (Googins, 1991). A generation ago dual-earner families were typically confined to lower-income families. This is not the case today. Dual-earner families are pervasive among all social classes. They have become the mainstream, and the problem of few has become the problem of many.

Advertisers can respond to this cultural shift by creating ads that keep pace with the changes in American society. Our research indicates that they will, in turn, be rewarded for their astuteness to women's changing needs. A major finding of
this study indicates that, when averaging over all segments of the women's market, an egalitarian positioning is favored over a either a superwoman or a traditional positioning. Particularly noteworthy was the strong preference for the egalitarian over the superwoman positioning. This finding indicates a clear message to advertisers. A theme that expresses the sharing of household responsibility is one of the superior positionings of the future for appealing to many cohorts of the female market.

Why should an egalitarian positioning be preferred across so many different segments of the female market? For women working outside the home this finding can be attributed to their realizing that they have been over-burdened with the demands of managing work inside and outside the home. Beneath the cultural cover-up suggested in the image of the happy superwoman, there is a quiet struggle going on in many two-job marriages (Hochschild, 1989). Many working woman now realize they cannot "do it all" as the superwoman advertising image suggests. They need and expect their spouse to help with housework. They favor ads that address their problem and that offer equitable solutions to it.

For women who are solely employed in the home taking care of the kids and the house, the positive support for the egalitarian positioning is suggestive of a fundamental change in the way these women view their housework role. Many women now accept housework and child care as legitimate full-time work. They see themselves giving as much support to their family as their husband. After they have completed their normal 40 hour workweek, cooking, cleaning and changing diapers, they would like some help from their husbands with the second shift. They, in turn, prefer ads that express the ideal of couples sharing.

There is support for both economic resource theory and socialization theory in explaining women's varying response to female sex-role portrayals. Analysis reveals that women with higher incomes favor ads that use egalitarian positionings more than superwoman or traditional positionings to a greater extent than women with lower incomes. In accordance with economic resource theory, as a woman's income increases and she contributes more to total household income, she expects her husband to contribute more to housework. Our research suggests that attitudes toward household task allocation carry over to attitudes toward role portrayals in ads. Women with higher incomes prefer ads that reflect their increased expectations for a more equitable division of household chores.

There is also support for socialization theory in explaining women's varying attitudes toward sex-role portrayals. Women with more contemporary gender ideologies favor the egalitarian positioning over the other two positionings to a greater extent than women with more traditional gender ideologies. Many woman, regardless of their economic earning power, want equality in their marriage. Moreover, this finding reflects the current cultural upheaval of gender roles in our society. Many women no longer view housework as solely women's work. They view it as appropriate for both genders and, consequently, favor ads that reflect this trend. Our findings suggest that they want advertisements to be sensitive to their need for equality in the home.

As noted earlier we considered the possibility that responses to the three positionings might be driven by social desirability (i.e., subjects may respond in line with a perceived norm that favors egalitarian roles). Even if the main effect were heightened, there is no reason to believe that the interaction effects have been heightened. Our study revealed three significant interaction effects. Certainly it would be unlikely for subjects to consistently know the socially desirable response for their particular demographic group. Therefore, we attribute our results more to respondents' true feelings about the positionings.

We acknowledge that these results might be different for other product categories such as cleaners. Since men are more likely to cook than clean, the egalitarian positioning may appear realistic and appropriately favored. We specifically chose the food category because advertisers of food products like to personalize their ads. They prefer to have people in real settings using their product rather than merely showing the product itself. Our findings provide useful information for those advertisers who want to use females in their ads.

The present research has examined the advertising effectiveness of different modern female role portrayals in print ads. Specifically, it considers the superwoman image in which a woman "does it all," and the egalitarian image, in which a husband...
and wife share household tasks. Identifying the overall preference for the egalitarian positioning is an initial step in establishing the impact on advertising effectiveness of the cultural changes now taking place in American society and specifically in the women's market.

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