Constructing Gender: Gender Inversion and Expansionist Ads in Cosmopolitan Magazine

Joyce D Hanmiond, Western Washington University, Bellingham

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/15613/gender/v03/GCB-03

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
Constructing Gender: Gender Inversion and Expansionist Ads in *Cosmopolitan* Magazine

Joyce D. Hammond, Western Washington University, Bellingham

Gender inversion and gender expansionist ads in *Cosmopolitan* in the 1970s-1980s borrowed from feminist paradigms of gender construction to paradoxically promote an underlying essentialist message of gender difference and to reinforce a different valuation of gender roles. The means by which advertisers co-opted feminist ideology and marketers' reasons are examined.

In the past thirty years, feminists have used both essentialist and constructionist arguments in analysis and praxis. A basic argument for passing the Equal Rights Amendment, for example, was that gender inequality is based on constructed social differences rationalized in biological sex differences. Other feminists have created essentialist explanations to argue that women are inherently more concerned with environmental protection through a connection between nature and female reproductive functions or that women "naturally" understand and work for peace better than men.

In the midst of these contradictory positions, advertisers who specifically targeted women as consumers during the 1970s and 1980s often created ads which borrowed from feminist constructionist paradigms of gender to paradoxically promote an underlying essentialist message of sex difference. Alternatively, advertisers used constructionist logic to extend a different valuation of femininity and masculinity. In two related genres of ads, which I will call gender inversion ads and gender expansionist ads respectively, advertisers drew upon white, middle-class American women's familiarity with the dominant feminist paradigm of constructionism and manipulated it in ads as a means to sell products and services. By drawing attention to gender and tying their advertising to the controversy and attention attendant to the women's movement and its goals, advertisers sought to bolster marketers' sales to an increasingly waged female market.

Despite their apparent differences, the constructionist focal point of both gender inversion and gender expansionist ads gave each a similar foundation for conservative marketing strategies: both genres emphasized differences between women and men. Gender inversion ads reinforced constructions of conventional femininity by marketing specific products as necessary for women to communicate their "natural" femininity and essential biological differences from men. Gender expansionist ads reinforced a dichotomized paradigm of gender difference in which the greater valuation of men and masculinity over women and femininity was emphasized and a separate spheres approach to gender roles was paradoxically promoted through a device of offering women the status of being "honorary men."

While gender inversion and gender expansionist ads may occasionally still occur in women's magazines of the
1990s, they are not nearly as prevalent as they were during the 1970s and 1980s. Their creation and proliferation (even though they were always greatly outnumbered by ads which relied upon "traditional femininity" messages) coincided with the twenty year period popularly referred to as the Second Wave of the American Women's Movement, a time of intense feminist critique of women's roles and the capitalist society which benefited from those roles. From the standpoint of the 1990s, an era alternatively referred to as Postfeminist or the Third Wave of the American Women's Movement depending on one's point of view, a retrospective look at gender inversion and gender expansionist ads offers unique insights into the way in which advertisers' ridicule and co-optation of the women's movement of the 1970s and 1980s reflected some of the most contested gender issues of that specific historical period. In addition, a consideration of gender inversion and gender expansionist ads from today's perspective provides the means for making comparisons with those contemporary ads which have updated co-optation of the feminist movement by attempting to commoditize feminism and create a new breed of "post-feminist" customers.

In this paper I will examine a number of gender inversion and gender expansionist ads of the 1970s and 1980s taken from Cosmopolitan, a popular women's magazine targeted at white, middle-class, youthful (20s and 30s) women working outside the home. Cosmopolitan was selected as the data source for this study for several reasons. It was one of the most popular magazines of the era and was marketed to women who, although they might not have considered themselves feminists, were part of the middle-class Euroamerican population from which the majority of feminists came. Thus, advertisers in Cosmopolitan targeted women who could potentially identify with feminists and who were themselves involved in women's changing roles.

Cosmopolitan's ads were representative of gender inversion ads found in other publications. However, perusal of several other women's magazines, including Ms., Vogue, and Elle, reveals Cosmopolitan to be one of the richest sources of gender inversion and gender expansionist ads for the 1970s and 1980s. From an examination of nearly 240 issues of Cosmopolitan, I identified 177 ads which conformed to the attributes I discuss as typical of gender inversion or gender expansionist ads. The number and variety of such ads in the magazine is, I suggest, directly related to its profile as a women's magazine for the woman who, in the words of its editor Helen Gurley Brown, wanted to "have it all": financial security gained through work outside the home, heterosexual romance, and feminine sex appeal.

The present study focuses on the techniques and conventional understandings of gender roles which advertisers utilized to create gender inversion and gender expansionist ads. A corollary, future study could center on an investigation of women's reactions to the advertisements and the impact those reactions had on their consumer decisions.

**A FOCUS ON GENDER**

During the 1970s and the 1980s, a period when the women's movement and women's increased participation in the American work force resulted in widespread societal debate and reassessment of women's roles, gender inversion and gender expansionist ads appeared in many American magazines targeted to young, white, middle-class women. The ads almost exclusively featured women with whom the readers identified in terms of age, class, and ethnicity, and they were overwhelmingly marketed to women who
worked outside the home earning disposable income.¹

As women entered the job market in larger numbers—a realm ideologically labeled the man’s domain under the conventional, middle-class model of divided gender rules—they crossed gender boundaries associated with a dichotomized gender paradigm of separate spheres and gender expectations. Depending on individual points of view, white, middle-class women who worked outside the home were inverting gender roles by becoming more masculine or by challenging gender role ideology and definitions of femininity.

Both gender inversion and gender expansionist ads foregrounded the subject of gender and societal expectations about women by drawing attention to the contemporary and potential changes in gender expression. The constructionist references of both ad genres served as a device to draw the reader’s attention to the subject of gender expectations. Within the ads, the change in gender attributes centered on the appropriation of attributes associated with the “other” gender: speech, clothing, gestures, postures, occupations, and activities predominantly linked with one sex were utilized in expressions of gender reversal or change. The specific historical and cultural context of selected attributes was significant, since gender change is dependent upon those attributes normatively associated with women or men (e.g., in American society—men smoking cigars, women wearing lipstick).

During the 1970s and 1980s, marketers with products specifically targeted at women faced the possibility that the products’ sales might be greatly reduced if women abandoned certain aspects of conventional femininity. Marketers of perfume, cosmetics, lingerie, and nylons had a large stake in preserving distinct gender attributes which would perpetuate their own products as those popularly associated with women. In light of the very low probability that the products could be sold to men (given an ongoing dynamic of more rigid gender markers for masculinity and general devaluation of things labeled feminine for men) it was to the marketers’ advantage to reinforce a distinct, bipolar gender paradigm in order to retain women as future consumers of products traditionally recognized as feminine. At the same time, however, many companies wished to capitalize on women’s increased disposable income as wage earners. Gender inversion ads drew attention to the paradigm of constructionism by creating ads depicting women humorously or ludicrously appropriating traits conventionally associated with men. The marketers’ agenda in the parody of the constructionist arguments of feminists was to shore up an underlying essentialist premise upon which the sale of conventional “feminine products” was based.²

Gender expansionist ads highlighted a serious constructionist argument, ostensibly for the sake of urging women to reformulate their own gender roles. The immediate marketing objective was to urge women to buy products and services formerly targeted to men (such as liquor, cars, credit cards, and condoms), thus increasing overall product sales. Marketers of formerly recognized “masculine” products saw an opportunity to tap into women’s purchasing power by expanding their clientele to include women. Advertisers recast feminist messages—i.e., that women should be entitled to the same privileges and opportunities that men enjoyed—as consumerism messages to women. A transformation of gender role expectations suited the marketers’ purposes: women were to be encouraged to carry credit cards and drive their own automobiles. Gender
expansionist ads placed women in positions conventionally recognized as belonging to men in order to urge women to exercise power and choice, attributes popularly ascribed to men and sought by many women, whether they considered themselves feminists or not. For advertisers, power and choice translated into the power to purchase and the choice to select from a variety of products. Thus, while gender expansionist ads often appeared to support the goal of the women’s movement in enabling women to gain the kinds of powers and choices open to men of comparable ethnicity and class, in actuality, advertisers’ use of men’s privileges and feminists’ goals served simply as metaphors of consumerist power and choice.3

The use of gender constructionist references in ads permitted advertisers to allude to feminist debates about gender roles and to co-opt the feminist goals of gender equity for capitalist gain. In addition, both gender inversion and gender expansionist ads’ allusion to the women’s movement simultaneously promoted an image of contemporaneity by highlighting concern with gender. The constructionist emphasis in gender inversion and gender expansionist ads allowed marketers to emphasize gender as an identifying principle for consumers, one which was promoted as a driving force for making choices about specific products and services.

GENDER INVERSION ADS

In 1963, Dana introduced their Tabu fragrance with an ad featuring Rene Prinet’s 1941 painting The Violinist. The scene depicts a nineteenth-century male violinist and his accompanying female pianist. In a moment of passion, the man embraces the woman, pulling her unexpectedly to her feet. In May, 1974, Dana inverted the gender roles of the scene in a photographic format with [then] contemporary scene markers (Fig. 1). In the 1970s setting, the female violinist initiates the unexpected embrace of the male accompanist. Framed by its cultural and historical context, as well as by viewers’ knowledge of the original ad, the parodic, inverted version of the Tabu ad was (and still is) easily recognized by American viewers as a constructed scene of gender inversion for both sexes.

During the 1970s and 1980s, when feminists were writing articles such as “X: A Fabulous Children’s Story,” constructionist theories were frequently used in arguments advocating gender equality. Advertisers borrowed the idea of constructing a gender role, combined it with a widespread conservative attitude that feminists really wanted to be men (since they were fighting for the same opportunities and privileges afforded to white, middle-class men) and devised gender inversion ads which performed the same basic function as heterosexual male enactments of women—namely that of ridiculing an expansion of gender role attributes as “unnatural” and humorous. The overarching message advertisers created in gender inversion ads designed to promote women’s products was that the appropriation of the “other” gender’s attributes was an amusing enactment or masquerade—a foregrounded construction in contrast to a “natural” occurrence associated with “real” attributes of the sexes. Products promoted in gender inversion ads were marketed as enhancing a woman’s “innate” femininity.

The prevalent use of masquerade in status quo gender inversion ads communicated the message that female gender inversion was not a transcendent appropriation of attributes conventionally recognized as masculine. Through ad copy, images, or both, conservative gender inversion ads portrayed women acting like men in
order to reinforce two ideas: one, that
attributes conventionally regarded as
masculine were seriously associated
only with men; and two, that women
could not/should not aspire to change
their "true natures" (or "become") men.
Not only did the contrast of the
masculine and feminine within the
gender inversion ad serve to underscore
what was feminine by emphasizing
what it was not; it also reinforced a
popular belief that femininity is,
Igor
Kopytoff's terms viewed as an
existential identity—". . . an identity
culturally defined as having to do with
what people 'are' in a fundamental

In gender inversion ads, traits
conventionally recognized as masculine
were frequently distorted and rendered
ridiculous, trivial, or cute in women's
possession.5 Given the historical
context of the ads, the advertising
approach trivialized feminists' efforts to
claim for women various attributes
viewed as masculine under the bipolar
gender paradigm.

In some ads for women's products,
appropriate masculine clothing was
treated as a literal mask to obscure
women's "real feminine nature.” A
Gingriss Formalwear ad (June 1980),
for example, used a masculine facade to
metaphorically reveal women's "true"
femininity. The ad, which declared "A
good wedding tuxedo fits the bride,
too" positioned the bride (wearing a
traditional wedding dress) almost
directly behind the tuxedoed groom, her
body and part of her face concealed by
his (Fig. 2). The playful allusion that
the woman was wearing the tuxedo was
enhanced by the position of her hands,
which reached around the groom's neck
to adjust his tie.

Masculine disguises and enactments in
gender inversion ads for women's
products never obscured feminine
identities; rather, the masquerade served
to accentuate the essentialist character of the women portrayed. In
the ads, women who tried on
"masculine" attributes were cast (in the
theatrical sense) as engaged in
ludicrous, playful, or non-serious
actions, and the frivolous quality of the
gender inversion could itself be
interpreted as an attribute of femininity.

In Gender Advertisements (1979),
Erving Goffman noted that women in
ads were much more likely to be
depicted as assuming the special
unseriousness of childlike disguises and
clowning " . . . styled in a manner to
which one isn't deeply or irrevocably
committed." According to Goffman,
for women " . . . the sense is that one
may as well try out various possibilities
to see what comes of it . . ." (1979:51).

Revlon’s ad for Intimate perfume
(November 1972), depicting a young
woman wearing an oversized man's
pajama top as her costume in a gender
masquerade, illustrates the link which
many ads established between
femininity and playful disguise (Fig. 3).
As a "man," the model wore the
perfume in the sense of the ad's double
entendre: "Intimate. It's really a man's
fragrance." The reference to the long-
lasting quality of the perfume (". . . and
it lasts as long as a girl needs it") was
also a part of the inversion, of course,
referring to a man's ability "to last"
sexually. In contrast to the dress-up,
make-believe surface treatment of the
ad, the underlying status quo message
reasserted the conventional under-
standings of a divided gender role
model with feminine attributes solidly
associated with women through
essentialist reasoning.

In many ads, female models wore
men's styled clothing, modified or
depicted in a manner that would have
been unacceptable or ridiculous in real
life. The make-believe female police
officer of Gillette's Daisy razor ad
(April 1983) sported a uniform in which
the pants were shortened to thigh length
to better display the model's smoothly
shaved legs. Similarly, Burlington
(May 1981) sold pantyhose by dressing a female model in a man’s suitcoat, shirt, and bowtie. From the waist down, the model wore pantyhose only. The clothes in the ad extended the traditional understanding of masculine economic support to which the ad’s copy alluded: “Support your legs in a style they can become accustomed to,” but the distortion of the generally understood meaning of support was mirrored by the model’s lack of pants. It is interesting to note that the old axiom about men wearing the pants in the family (making the decisions, economically supporting a family) is tacitly referenced in both ads.6

In gender inversion ads for women’s undergarments, women’s femininity was revealed not by playfully wearing masculine garments or ludicrously modifying them, but rather by taking them off. The ad construction of a masculine exterior and a feminine interior reinforced many stereotypical traits associated with an essentialist view of women. Typically ads which revealed women’s “true” character depicted it as below the outer, feminized surface presentation. Femininity was frequently linked to the interior life of the emotions and intimately tied with sexual and domestic activities. Not surprisingly, marketers of lingerie found the gender inversion ploy of unmasking women extremely useful. Coupled with a reinforcement of dichotomized gender roles, such ads conveyed the message that women who pursued changing gender roles in real life were actually engaged in a masquerade.

“You may be a banker by day. But you’re a woman by night...” stated the text accompanying two photographs in a Kayser advertisement (December 1983)—one, a woman in a fitted business suit coat with her hair pinned up, and the other, a much larger photograph of the same woman at home or in a hotel room wearing her hair down and a long “sensual nightgown” (to quote from the ad). The equation of femininity with a domestic setting and sexual activities spelled out some conventional existential qualities associated with women. A Bali ad (November 1986) depicted a woman relaxing in a seated position with her eyes closed. Her unbuttoned blouse revealed her brassiere. “Underneath this gray flannel suit beats a heart of satin and lace.” The gray flannel suit, symbol of work outside the home (traditionally men’s domain) and a cold, unfeeling exterior, was treated as a mask for the woman whose true character was associated with matters of the heart and sexuality.

In a well-known campaign of Maidenform products, a series of ads depicted young, slender female professionals—lawyers, stockmarket analysts, and business executives—in settings appropriate to their occupations, surrounded by male colleagues (e.g. September 1980; January 1982) (Fig. 4). Aside from shoes, jewelry, and occupational props such as briefcases, the women wore very little except brassieres and panties. In an atmosphere reminiscent of the fable “The Emperor’s New Clothes,” neither the women nor their male associates7 are shown as being aware of the women’s state of undress. In addition to the ads’ pragmatic message that women in well-paying occupations wore Maidenform products at work, the implication was forwarded that the true “inner” nature of a woman who dressed for and worked in a male-dominated work setting was in fact masked both to herself and to her male co-workers. Only the reader is credited with seeing “through” the mask and could clearly perceive the women for who they really were. The ads’ construction could also be interpreted to mean that women were out of place in careers dominated by men—the women’s state of undress in the work settings is clearly ridiculous; the credibility of a woman working in...
the setting undermined. At the same time, the women’s state of undress reinforced the association of women with sexual provocation, since it is primarily women who undress in public as strip-tease artists.

Advertisers also used inverted language conventions to convey a message of women playing “dress up” with men’s names and titles. When Revlon introduced their new perfume “Charlie” (February, 1973) women were invited to simultaneously identify themselves as “Charlie girls” who could “make it” with Charlie. College Town clothing used an advertising technique of naming the models with first initials in addition to a surname, a convention which has long been used to mask a woman’s identity, and the familial nomenclature of Jr. normally reserved for males. A.T. Trencher, Jr., Det. M.H. Flagg, Jr., and M.P. Wolfer, Jr. were all featurled as women who pursued such “masculine” careers as basketball coach, police officer, and accountant in College Town ads (September 1980; March 1982; December 1983). That the naming convention was not to be understood as a serious transformation in women’s titles was indicated by the advertisement’s explanation (in small type) that the Jr. in these College Town advertisements referred to junior sizing in clothing.

COMPLEMENTS TO MASKING

Beyond theatrical costuming—revelations of women’s “underlying” feminine natures and the use of double entendres—advertisers also utilized depictions of women’s failed imitations of men, fantasy forms, and the conflation of biology with gender. In many cases, these strategies were combined to communicate stronger essentialist messages about women.

Typical scenes in which a woman, under the surveillance of a man, endeavored to engage in an activity conventionally marked as masculine is illustrated by Tampax’s ad (May 1974) in which a woman attempts big game fishing. Although the small print copy equated confidence in the tampon with confidence in a newfound skill, the ad’s imagery suggested that the self-deprecating woman with the helpless look was not confident and needed the man’s steady and serious help to reel in a fish. The failed imitation technique discussed by Goffman (1979:37) highlighted the incompetence of the woman or, at the very least, placed it in “parenthesis” by showing the man looking on “appraisingly, condescendingly, or with wonder.” At the same time, the arrangement underlined the stereotypical association of the activity with the “proper” sex. In the example cited, the strength of the male in reeling in a big fish was underlined and contrasted with a woman’s physical weakness.

The inversion of commonly recognized gender adages in juxtaposition with images of conventional femininity was another advertising method used to construct gender inversion in ads reinforcing the essentialist paradigm. Advertisers relied on the viewers’ cultural knowledge of familiar expressions, many based upon an essentialist view of the sexes’ behavior. In ads based on a contradiction of ad copy and imagery, the image always “told the truth,” following the common view that “seeing is believing.” The juxtaposition of inverted adages or phrases with conventional gender role portrayal signaled the non-serious quality of the ad copy, thus negating the language as transformative and reinforcing the inversionary quality of the statements. Exemplary of this technique was Naturalizer Shoes’ inversionary ad copy (March 1989), “You can’t sweep a man off his feet if you’re dead on yours,” which appeared on a nearly blank pink page with a small picture of one stiletto shoe. The combination of two symbols of
conventional femininity—the color pink and a high heeled shoe—communicated the fanciful, non-serious aspect of the gender inversion message.

Yet another common advertising tool used in gender inversion ads was the creation of a fantasy situation steeped in gender attribute content. The fanciful quality of appropriating stereotypical gender traits within a fantasy served very well as a device for communicating the activities as enactments rather than transformations. Dep Styling Glaze’s fantasy ad (January 1988), for example, depicted a female clerical worker who stood triumphantly by a file cabinet in which she had deposited a man. His upended feet in the top drawer suggested possible murder. The inversion content in this ad obviously did not center on the woman’s job—after all, she was someone who filed and presumably did other conventional “women’s jobs” in an office setting. The inversion derived from her satisfied completion and display (to other women—assumed female co-workers and, of course, the ad’s viewers) of physically overcoming a man (presumably her boss or superior) and putting him under her control. That viewers were to understand the situation as a fantasy is keyed by the improbable act in a semi-public setting, the impossibility of stuffing an entire body into a filing drawer (possible mutilation being even more improbable), and by the woman’s snug display of her “work.” In fantasy even farther afield, Epilady Trio’s (September 1989) female model sat in a moonscape in a tight fitting astronaut’s costume (complete with the insignia of EPI) carefully depilating her leg. The ludicrous action was complemented by the trivialization and inversion of a well known quotation: “One Giant Leap for Womankind.”

Not surprisingly, an emphasis on the female body as the location of femininity was, to use a corporal metaphor, at the heart of the essentialist messages transmitted to women through the gender inversion ads for “female products.” The contrast drawn between the true inner core of femininity and the false outer, appearance layer of non-traditional women (feminists) was cleverly mirrored and replicated through all reversals constructed in the ads. Given the body as the focus of essentialist arguments in gender, it is not surprising that many of the ad campaigns which utilized gender inversion were those for products that were used to groom, clothe, or otherwise draw attention to the female body. The products being sold by such ads were themselves overwhelmingly designed to enhance women’s sexuality, as well as to accentuate certain physical features. Brasieres accentuated breasts; high heels exaggerated the curvature of calves and the thrust of the buttocks; perfume was applied to the body; razors removed hair from women’s bodies; and “feminine products” concealed menstrual blood or covered natural body odors. Drawing upon the historical emphasis and equation in western societies of the female body with sexuality, the marketers who used gender inversion ads for their products perpetuated a popular understanding of femininity as being grounded in biological difference.

One of the most interesting approaches to conveying an essentialist message within gender inversion ads was that of conflating physiological characteristics of sex with the constructed aspects of gender. Ads which depicted women imitating men’s muscle mass, for example, depicted women flexing their biceps (Newport, October 1984; Coca-Cola, June 1985) or displaying metaphorical male genitalia (Dingo Boots, March 1981). The viewer’s recognition of the impossibility of women having male physical features, symbolized by huge biceps and male sexual organs, rendered the ads humorous and underlined the message...
that women and men differ essentially, based on their biological differences.

GENDER EXPANSIONIST ADS

In contrast to gender inversion ads, which reaffirmed an alignment of women with attributes traditionally considered feminine, gender expansionist ads for products such as credit cards, liquor, automobiles, life insurance and condoms were used to market services and products which had formerly been associated only with men to women consumers. The ads suggested that women could seriously appropriate attributes associated with men. Many of these ads were able to draw upon a long-established tradition in Western cultures of women appropriating "masculine" attributes, particularly clothing, as a means of achieving equality and visibility in a man's world.11

Typically, gender expansionist ads used seemingly realistic scenes and a serious tone to suggest that gender role changes (and the products/services symbolized and facilitated by them) were attainable to women and should become part of their everyday lives. Advertisers sometimes inserted "real" identified women in their ads instead of models to impart a tone of seriousness. In an ad campaign for Dewar's Scotch, for example, entitled "Dewer's Profiles," identifying information was supplied for prominent women in such non-traditional occupations as orchestra conductor or physicist (September 1974; June 1974). The women were photographed engaged in the activities of their chosen professions. However, this constructed realism often obscured the image as a depiction of a token situation in terms of women's overall gains in society.

Superficially, gender expansionist ads presented opposite messages to the gender inversion ads used to sell traditional feminine products. The disassociation of women from stereotypically feminine attributes was, after all, part of the rethinking and actions associated with the women's movement. Changes occurring or advocated within society for women's roles were reflected in gender expansionist ads which depicted women in occupations, sports, and various activities conventionally associated only with men. Yet, given viewers' complete familiarity with the bipolar gender model being challenged by the women's movement and the social reality that major changes in gender roles were not yet established or accepted, women's gender role changes were susceptible to being interpreted as gender inversions rather than gender redefinitions or transformations.

Most advertisers of expansionist ads strove to highlight women's acquisition of former masculine attributes as masculine appropriations in order to reinforce a dichotomized gender paradigm which separated gender attributes and bolstered a differential valuation of the two that privileged the masculine. Gender expansionist ads were transformative in as much as they encouraged women to abandon or downplay those attributes which were popularly considered feminine and to accentuate attributes which were associated with masculinity. Masculine attributes and men, however, were not disassociated in the ads in the same way that feminine attributes and women were.

Given the advertisers' combined goals of retaining the value associated with masculine attributes and attracting women as a new market, expansionist ads communicated the message that women could aspire to becoming a kind of "honorary men."12 "Why do women need the American Express Card?"

queried the advertisers for American Express (March 1982). In response to their own question, "For the same
reasons men do.” In a condom ad, a woman with a serious expression on her face was accompanied by the copy, “Very often, the best contraceptive for a woman is the one for a man” (Carter-Wallace, September 1987). On one level, the messages of such ads spelled equality between women and men in terms of spending power, eradication of a double standard, and birth control. On another level, however, they communicated the idea that women should aspire to be like men, reinforcing the association between men and masculine attributes as well as principle of the masculine as ideal propagated under the bipolar model of gender.

Another method of inducting women into their honorary status as men was that of indicating women’s disassociation with the feminine as understood under the conventional paradigm. Drambuie (May 1980) posed the question to women: “Isn’t it time you knew an exciting drink to order instead of taking a man’s suggestion?” In the testimonial style associated with many expansionist ads, the female model for Drambuie declared, “I used to skirt the issue of what cocktail to order—deferring to my male companion . . .” (italics mine). J.C. Penney urged women to buy diamonds for men with the following copy: “I realized that with my cooking, I’d never get to his heart through his stomach. So I took the more direct route” (July 1988).

Gender expansionist ads typically depicted their products as necessary for the expansion of gender role norms. Many goods and services were treated as both a means of entreée for women to the world beyond family and home and proof that women “had arrived” in the men’s world. Automobile marketers often juxtaposed a woman and a car in their ads. In image and text, the ads usually coupled the woman and her car with an upwardly mobile business career, visually symbolized by the ubiquitous briefcase. The cars were marketed to women as status symbols of success in corporate business, traditionally a masculine domain. The ad copy typically framed a woman’s acquisition of a car within the concerns conventionally associated with men and their struggles for success—competition, power, and hierarchical pecking orders. “Dodge Aspen RT. For the person with driving ambition” (Chrysler, June 1976). “Because the one who gets there first, wins” (General Motors, June 1989).

In gender expansionist ads, the construction of a gender identity was equated with the acquisition of products and services which were themselves often underscored as constructed to aid the buyer. In a Master Charge ad, the model flashed a credit card and declared “I carry clout” (June 1977). In a General Motors ad, the female viewer was urged “On your way to the top, drive the car that’s already there” (February 1985).

Many expansionist ads underscored the conventional association of their products with masculinity by drawing attention to women’s unprecedented use of the product. “Announcing Koromex—the woman’s condom. That’s right . . . woman’s” (August 1987). “Break tradition” Romico Rum’s marketers urged women in a series of ads depicting women dressed in sports uniforms associated with horse racing, ice hockey and baseball (June 1982; March 1983; July 1984) (Fig. 5). Using such formats, advertisers recalled and reinforced the masculine association to their advantage. In a society which continued to value traditionally recognized masculine attributes more highly than those considered feminine, a continued association of a product with the masculine communicated the idea of the product as worthy of acquisition.

Concomitant attributes, conventionally recognized as masculine, were often
ascribed to the use of products in expansionist ads. Attributes such as confidence, control, power, and clout, easily identified as masculine under the bipolar model of gender, were systematically associated with the products. As an analogic device for the “masculinity” of the product, the use of such attributes suggested the product’s great value. Analogies between credit card use and conventional masculine activities, for example, were widely used. Women in American Express ads picked up checks at restaurants, entered gyms, played lacrosse, made business trips, and cheered sports teams to victory (June 1983; November 1983; March 1982; July 1985). Significantly, women did not use their charge cards in scenes of buying kitchen appliances, personal jewelry, children’s clothing or other products conventionally associated with women. Similarly, the occupations linked with women who used Master Charge were not ones conventionally associated with women working outside the home—i.e., nursing, teaching, clerical and social service jobs (Fig. 6).

CONCLUSION

Gender inversion and gender expansionist ads published in Cosmopolitan throughout the twenty-year period of the 1970s and 1980s were designed to increase marketers’ sales by attracting the attention and consumer dollars of adult women who had grown up with the dominant paradigm of divided gender roles. Whether potential clients consciously sought to resist gender role changes or embraced ideas of change in gender expectations, marketers knew that potential buyers were completely familiar with the dichotomized gender paradigm and its valuations. Using references to gender constructionism as a focal point for creating ad copy and image, advertisers underscored the debates of the 1970s and 1980s which revolved around the bipolar gender paradigm.

The wider cultural context of societal concern with gender, particularly women’s roles, during the 1970s and 1980s allowed marketers who used gender inversion and gender expansionist ads to appear contemporary in their concern with gender, regardless of their product or message. Similarly, by presenting women in unconventional and novel ways, the ads lent themselves to the marketers’ need to draw viewers’ attention to their products over those of other companies. Despite the much larger volume of ads with conventional message content and images in issues of Cosmopolitan, gender inversion ads and gender expansionist ads could attract a viewer’s attention with the unexpected. The theme of change, embodied within the ads’ content, also suited marketers’ purposes for promoting new products and supporting modification for established products. The most cogent reason for marketers to use both genres of ads, however, was to firmly connect their products and services to the expression of gender.

Depending upon the product they sought to market, advertisers urged women to adhere to the trappings of “natural” femininity or to embrace unconventional choices (namely, formerly masculine attributes) in consumer goods. The two messages were not contradictory, since both actually served to reinforce the conventional, dichotomized view of gender. The overlay of constructionist ideas of gender roles, rendered ridiculous by marketers of traditional feminine products and plausible for recognized masculine ones, was, upon close examination, a ploy for reinforcing a bipolar paradigm of gender. The deception of the constructionist “argument,” though achieved in different ways for the two kinds of ads, resulted in a reinstatement.
of basic principles of the traditional
gender paradigm. Superficially dealing
with the subject of change in gender
expectations, both ad genres supported
an understanding of difference rather
than similarity between the sexes and of
superiority of those attributes identified
as masculine over those identified as
feminine. In light of the fact that the
ads appeared in a self-styled women’s
magazine with articles on dieting,
fashion, and heterosexual relationships,
it is not surprising that gender was
foregrounded and the traditional
principles of a dichotomized gender
paradigm were reinforced.

In marketing terms, gender inversion
and gender expansionist ads were
particularly useful devices for selling
specific products which in the 1970s
and 1980s were still strongly associated
with one gender or the other. In
promoting such products to women,
advertisers contributed further to a
consumerist mentality of building
gender identity through the acquisition
and use of specific products.

Ironically, however, the constructionist
aspect of gender expression through
product acquisition and display was
disguised in gender inversion ads,
despite the use of a constructionist
paradigm to build image and copy.

Gender expansionist ads clearly
featured products as part of a
constructed gender expression, but they
simultaneously reinstated a gendered
dichotomy which continued to privilege
the “masculine” construction. In view
of the political implications of a feminist
recognition of constructed gender roles
and the advertisers’ references to
cyberpunk goals, advertisers who created
gender expansionist ads co-opted
cyberpunk ideals for capitalist gains.

Gender inversion and gender
expansionist ads did not contribute to a
reworking of the bipolar gender
paradigm, and by the late 1980s the
impact of feminist discourse and action
in American society began to render the
ads obsolete. As more and more
“masculine” traits were incorporated
into women’s lives and redefined as
appropriate for women (in much the
same manner as long pants historically
moved from being solely masculine
garments to become sartorially
acceptable as feminine apparel), the
premise of both gender inversion and
gender expansionist ads began to
crumble. This, coupled with
widespread feminist criticism of
advertising which occurred in the
1980s, led advertisers to devise
different co-optation strategies which
could capitalize on feminist agendas and
actions and “reincorporate the cultural
power of feminism” (Goldman
and Chinyelu Onwurah (1987) have
noted, commodity feminism came into
being as advertisers created a “New
Ideal Woman” who would signify the
gains postfeminists (who don’t identify
as feminists) take for granted—those
gains secured largely through the efforts
of the feminist movement. Advertisers
have turned feminist goals into
individual lifestyle choices through an
assembly of “feminized” signs which
connote independence, participation in
the work force, individual freedom and

Ads which might be termed “post-
feminist ads” began to emerge in the late
1980s and are used today by marketers
such as Esprit, Hanes, and Nike.

Gender inversion and gender
expansionist ads featuring women and
targeted at women, used by a limited
number of advertisers in the 1970s
and1980s, have largely given way to
the new postfeminist ads of the 1990s.
Their demise may be attributed to the
triumphs of the women’s movement
which primarily emphasized a
constructionist understanding of gender
roles and sought to give women more
choices in the creation of their lives and
identities. In the history of advertising,
the presence and passing of these two
genres communicates a great deal about
societal reactions and understandings of the gender issues raised by the women's movement during the twenty-year period. A historical perspective also offers insights into the manner in which advertisers sought to respond to and capitalize upon the constructionist arguments of gender roles raised by the women's movement.

NOTES

1. Very few gender inversion ads appeared in women's magazines such as Redbook, Parents or Better Homes and Gardens, directed at women who were full-time homemakers.

2. The seeming contradiction of using a constructionist reference to bolster underlying essentialist messages may be seen as a part of the larger paradox discussed by Judith Butler (1990) and others who argue that essentialism is itself a manifestation of constructionism. The tactics of selectively highlighting certain physical or morphological traits over others in explaining behavior is itself a construction.

3. Although the constructed gender messages of gender inversion ads usually ridiculed the idea of serious appropriation of "masculine" traits, to some extent the use of constructionist messages within the ads may also be seen as references to issues of choice—choosing to remain feminine as it was conventionally defined.

4. Such ritual enactments include the U.S. Navy's equatorial-crossing ceremonies, "womanless" beauty contests, and Harvard University's "Hasty Pudding Club" cross-dressing events.


6. In Burlington's ad, the horizontal zoning of the figure into a masculine cerebral function and a feminine sexual/reproductive function replicates dichotomized gender characteristic ascription. These allusions (even if created at an unconscious level) reinforced the gender inversion advertisement's overall message that the gender switch wasn't serious and that the sexes remained essentially dichotomized.

7. Congruent with the ads' reinforcement for conventional gender roles, there is an implied demasculinization of the men pictured in the advertisements. They seem oblivious to the women's state of undress and, given its conventional meaning, do not manifest the stereotypical interest in pursuing a possible sexual encounter. The implication is established that women's inversion results in an inversion (negatively interpreted) for men as well.

8. This is a long standing theme in Maidenform advertising as Barbara J. Coleman's (1995) essay on Maidenform ads of the 1950s attests.

9. Historically, many women who sought acceptance in the literary world used initials to mask their identities as women and to imply that they were men. In contemporary American society, many women opt to include their first and sometimes second initials along with their last names for telephone directories to lend...
10. In the Oasis Collective's film on contemporary images of men in advertising entitled *Stale Roles and Tight Buns* (1988), the filmmakers point out that a variety of objects such as ties, golf clubs, and "third legs" have been used by advertisers to create metaphorical penises.

11. See Marjorie Garber's discussion in *Vested Interests* (1992:71). As Garber relates, there is a long history of women appropriating "masculine" attributes, particularly clothing, as a means of achieving equality and visibility in a man's world. From the perspective of western cultures' idealization of men and the masculine, a woman who "wish[es] to be a male is perfectly 'normal' culturally speaking" according to Garber, p. 139.

12. "Male" does not have to be present to exert its power. She who writes well "writes like a man" and "thinks like a man..." (Minh-ha 1989:27).

13. As Erving Goffman aptly demonstrated in *Gender Advertisements*, gender is a prominent feature in American advertising, even when the subject of gender is submerged. Since gender is one of the most basic of human classifications and "... touches the very core of our definition as human beings" (Leiss, Kline and Jhally 1986:168), its appeal as a vehicle for communication in ads is indisputable, especially since ritual gender displays can be recognized easily in the short time it takes to view an ad. Although many ads include gender information easily accessible to the viewer, the gender content may not be consciously registered. Messages about gender may go unremarked if they are part of a person's everyday assumptions about reality).

14. In light of numerous studies indicating a greater valuation placed on so-called masculine attributes by both women and men (e.g. rationality, control, power, confidence, etc.) the traits of frivolity, approval-seeking and beautification associated with many of the feminine products marketed in gender inversion ads may be interpreted as of lesser value that traits associated with "masculine" products.

REFERENCES


Never mind how it happens.
A GOOD WEDDING TUXEDO FITS THE BRIDE, TOO.
Christened as one of the world's seven Great Happinesses.

Inmate: By Revlon

(and it lasts as long as a girl needs it.)

Inmate: It's really a man's fragrance.
THE MAIDENFORM WOMAN.
YOU NEVER KNOW WHERE SHE'LL TURN UP

The evidence is in and Pretty Me" is the answer. Simply feminine.
this front close bra and matching bikini are lustrous super-satin with fan-shaped
lace appliqués. Unquestionably natural in sport cup (shown), underwire, or

Pretty Me by Maidenform

Figure 4
Break tradition.

Drink Ronrico Gold Rum instead.

Ronrico Gold Rum is a new premium blend of Caribbean rums. It is a smooth, easy-drinking rum that is perfect for cocktails.

Try it instead of regular rum by mixing it with your favorite fruit juice or soda. You'll be amazed at how much better it tastes.

RONRICO GOLD RUM

Figure 5
Why do women need the American Express Card?
For the same reasons men do.

There are lots of reasons.
With the Card, you'll be welcome at airlines, car rentals, restaurants, hotels, and more than 100,000 fine shops around the world. You'll get travel help, check-cashing privileges, and, if you lose the Card, fast replacement. At more than 1,000 offices, here and abroad.*

Another kind of security: with the American Express Card, there are no fixed limits on spending. Purchases are approved based on your ability to pay, as demonstrated by your past spending, payment patterns and personal resources. If you run into unexpected expenses, you don't have to worry.

So join the 1,000,000 women who already have the Card and get the care you deserve. Call (800) 528-8000 and we'll send you an application.

The American Express Card. Don't leave home without it.