We?Ve Come a Long Way, Baby – Or Have We? Sexism in Advertising Revisited

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We’ve Come A Long Way, Baby – or Have We?
Sexism in Advertising Revisited

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ABSTRACT
An extension of two advertising studies (Pingree et al. 1976 and Lazier-Smith 1989) was conducted. Advertisements for the period 2000-2001 were content analyzed in magazines predicted to vary in sexism. Overall, the level of sexism in ads featuring women has not improved since the early studies. Consistent with the earlier studies, sexist portrayals of women in advertisements is, on average, the worst in *Playboy*, followed by *Time* and *Newsweek*, and *Working Woman*. The overall level of sexism is worse for ads featuring men than for ads featuring women. Findings are placed within a socio-cultural context and future research is discussed.

INTRODUCTION
“We’ve come a long way, baby” -- or have we? In the decades since researchers first began investigating the portrayal of (primarily) women in advertising, some progress has been made. Responding to feminists’
concerns, the media industry “has muted the blatant simplicity of stereotypical gender images” (Croteau and Hoynes 1999, p. 212) and there is said to be a wider palette of roles and images for women in the media (Faludi 1991). However, advertising media have by and large not followed this trend. In fact, researchers have found that stereotypical portrayals have continued and perhaps even increased in the last twenty years (cf., Ford et al. 1998).

The problem of gender role portrayals in advertising is not a trivial one. Advertising’s impact on society, as well on individuals, is well documented (Stern 1999). Advertising is both a creator and a mirror of society (e.g., Fox 1994; Pollay 1986), showing us in a ‘soundbite’ how to act, dress, and behave (Klein 1999) and then feeding those images back to us in an endless feedback loop (Goodman and Dretzin 2001). These fleeting images often rely on stereotypes to convey information quickly – but if these stereotypes display limiting and narrow portrayals, what do we learn?

The undesirable consequences of stereotypical advertising and its detrimental effects upon women’s self-concepts, achievement motivations, and self-images are widely acknowledged (Frueh and McGhee 1975; Golden, Allison, and Clee 1985; Moschis and Moore 1982). In addition, men, women, and even children learn about sex roles and appropriate occupation choices from advertising and media (Whipple and Courtney 1978). Just as the idealized media portrayals of women creates problems, the “ideal version of dominant masculinity presents a problem for real men because the ideal is so difficult to attain” (O’Shaughnessy 1999, p. 200).

Indeed, the question of how women are generally portrayed in media and advertising is a popular one, and numerous studies have been conducted in this area since the 1970s (Courtney and Whipple 1983; Fergusson, Kreshal, and Tinkham 1990; Ferrante, Hayes, and Kingsley 1988; Gilly 1988; Goffman 1976; Lovdal 1989; Maracek et al. 1978). Such studies have mainly content-analyzed media using nominal variables to quantify or count issues of representation related to what, how often, when, and where women are depicted in advertising. Many of these studies have found that women are very frequently portrayed as dependent sex objects found most often in the home or domestic settings who have a high interest in physical beauty (Ford et al. 1998). However, due to inconsistency in coding schemes and definitions, it is difficult to compare studies over time.

In order to conduct a longitudinal analysis of sexism in advertising, we replicate and extend earlier studies (Pingree et al 1976; Lazier-Smith 1989) that used the Consciousness Scale for Sexism developed by Butler-Paisley and Paisley-Butler (1974). Using the same Sexism Scale as in previous studies provides a more consistent measure of sexism in advertising across time. Given the 25 years since the original study was published, and the 13 years since the Lazier-Smith study, it is worthwhile to assess what kind of progress, if any, has been made in the portrayals of women in magazine advertisements. In addition to examining the representation of women, we extend the earlier studies by looking at portrayals of men, too. Although the authors in the original study provided information for measuring the level of sexism present in advertisements featuring men, neither the original
Pingree et al. (1976) study or the Lazier-Smith (1989) study examined male portrayals, focusing instead solely on ads featuring women.

THE SCALE FOR SEXISM

Unlike earlier research that relied mainly on nominal data and counting schemes, a scale that relies on an ordinal set of categories to describe what is meant by sexism was proposed by Butler-Paisley and Paisley-Butler in 1974 and tested by Pingree and colleagues in 1976. This Scale for Sexism, made up of five levels (see Figure 1), offered a new way to examine sexism in advertising by defining and outlining the dimension of sexism along a continuum that ranges from very sexist to nonsexist portrayals.

The original Pingree et al. (1976) study applied the Consciousness Scale for Sexism for the period July 1973 – June 1974 to ads featuring women in four magazines hypothesized to differ in sexism content (Ms., Playboy, Time, and Newsweek). Results of content analysis showed that the majority of ads (75%) fell into Levels 1 and 2 (see Table 1). This study was replicated 13 years later (Lazier-Smith 1989) looking at advertisements in the same four magazines for the period July 1986 – June 1987. Although changes in women’s roles in society reflected a greater range of portrayals than Levels 1 and 2 might dictate, the replication study found no significant changes had occurred in advertising portrayals of women (See Table 1). In fact, representation of Level 1 imagery had actually increased, though not significantly so.

The Scale for Sexism has been used in other studies to examine the portrayals of men and women in various media. These studies extend the scale’s use to other arenas, including television and cross-cultural media. The sexism scale has been applied to portrayals of men in print magazines (Skelly and Lundstrom 1981), to women and men in MTV videos (Vincent, Davis and Boruszkowski 1987; Vincent 1989), and to Japanese women in print media (Ford et al. 1998).

While many researchers have looked at how women are portrayed in the media, few studies have examined men’s roles or representation in advertising (but see Kolbe and Albanese 1996). The study conducted by Skelly and Lundstrom (1981) applied the sexism scale to the November issue of nine magazines for the years 1959, 1969, and 1979, although they deviated from the magazines originally studied. Three of the magazines (Cosmopolitan, House Beautiful, and Redbook) were predicted to contain less sexist advertising role portrayals; three were predicted to contain more traditional, masculine role portrayals (Esquire, Field & Stream, and Sports Illustrated) and three “general interest” magazines were expected to fall in-between (Reader’s Digest, New Yorker, Time).

Overall, the authors found significant differences such that men were portrayed increasingly in ‘decorative roles’ (Level 1) over time from 21.9% in 1959 to 29.3% in 1969 and 42.8% in 1979, respectively, and less often in traditional masculine activities (Level 2) over time (78.1%, 69.2%, and 53.7%, respectively). These trends held true for each of the magazine categories, although the changes were not as dramatic for the men’s magazines.

Level 3 or 4 portrayals were not noted for any of the ads in 1959, but Level 3
ads emerged in 1969 for general interest magazines (3.5%) and men’s magazines (.8%). Level 4 ads were found for general interest magazines (1.8%), men’s magazines (1.4%) and women’s magazines (3.0%) in 1979. No Level 5 ads were found in any of the magazines in any year. The authors pointed out the increasing portrayal of men as objects and suggested that this trend may be a “tit for tat” – that “as women achieve sexual equality, advertisers may use portrayals of men in decorative roles to appeal to them, just as men have been the object of such appeals” (p. 56). Does this mean that as societal sex roles ‘evolve’ toward equality, we get less evolved advertising?

MEN AND WOMEN: THEN AND NOW

“It’s been difficult for women to determine their roles, as professional women and family members, as mothers and caretakers” (Jean Hamilton, female CEO of the Prudential Insurance Co., quoted in BusinessWeek Online, 2001).

When the original sexism scale was devised and tested, the Women’s Movement was well under way, but women still made up only 40% of the workforce and earned only 59% of men’s earnings (U.S. Department of Labor, 1999). Today’s environment offers several differences as well as contradictions. Although college completion rates are higher for women (30%) compared to men (28%) (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2000), women still make up less than half of the workforce (46%) and earn only 72.2% of men’s earnings (U.S. Department of Labor 1999). For the most part, women still occupy traditional roles, making up the largest proportion of the workforce in these categories: secretaries (98%), nurses (93%), elementary school teachers (84%) and a smaller proportion of traditional male jobs: management (30%) or sales supervisory (41%) roles (U.S. Department of Labor, 1999). Men, too, primarily occupy traditional roles in business or in manufacturing, but this is discussed less frequently in academe and popular press.

In top positions of power, women still make up only a minute portion of top tier income-earners, 4.1% in 2001 (Business Week online, April 6, 2001) and those that do are less likely to have children. For example, a study of MBA earners who worked full-time without interruption after earning their degrees found that only 22% of women had children compared with 70% of men (Businessweek online, April 6, 2001).

The late 1990s also showed what was hailed as “a startling new finding” -- in 22% of dual-earner families, women earned more than their husbands or partners (Commuri 2000; Galinsky 2001; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001). This statistic could be due, in part, to the fact that more men were beginning to take up responsibility for childcare and were working only part-time outside of the home or not at all. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) there were 6.3 million married fathers of preschoolers whose wives were employed in 1993. Of these fathers, 25% maintained primary responsibility for their children while the moms worked. From 1977 to 1991, the percent of stay-at-home dads increased from 17% to 23% (O’Connell 1993). Although stay-at-home dads have created their own social networks as evidenced by web communities (e.g., slowlane.com), the breadwinner role is, according to Griswold, in his book
Fatherhood in America (1993), still the historically, legally and socially sanctioned essence of manhood: "... male breadwinning has been synonymous with maturity, respectability, and masculinity" (p. 2). Masculinity itself has been undergoing somewhat of a ‘crisis’ since the 1960s because old masculine ideals are being called into question (O’Shaughnessy 1999).

In sum, U.S. women have made some progress in the areas of income, work, leadership, and family life since the mid-1970s. U.S. men, as well, have taken up fatherhood roles traditionally employed by women. To what extent these changes are reflected in the media is a question addressed by our study.

THE STUDY

Consistent with the Pingree et al. (1976) study, we examined the advertising content of four magazines for the period July 2000 – June 2001. The original study involved four magazines; two high-circulation mainstream publications (Time, Newsweek) and two publications proposed to vary in sexism according to editorial and advertising content (Ms., Playboy). Time and Newsweek, both general interest newsweekly magazines that provide current stories about world events, as well as newsworthy items about business, science, technology, art, and entertainment, were expected to contain mostly Level 2 ads. Ms. magazine, which emphasizes in-depth investigative stories and feminist political analyses of contemporary issues, was expected to have more Level 4 and 5 ads. Playboy, a men’s magazine known for its “centerfold” and other photos of nude women, as well as fiction, interviews and investigative articles, was expected to have the highest proportion of Level 1 ads.

In our study, Working Woman had to be substituted for Ms., the magazine used in the original study, because Ms. stopped accepting advertising in 1990. Working Woman was selected because it reaches a major portion of the Ms. magazine demographic, and reflects a feminist ethos similar to Ms., although admittedly its editorial focus is on business issues rather than politics. The other three magazines used in the original study – Time, Newsweek, and Playboy – were used in this study.

As with the Pingree et al. (1976) and Skelly and Lundstrom (1981) studies, we expected that the editorial content of the magazines would coincide with the level of sexism indicative in the advertising. Thus, Playboy would likely contain a relatively higher proportion of sexist (Level 1, 2) ads than would the other magazines, while Working Woman would have the smallest proportion of sexist ads. The sexism level of ads in the mainstream general interest magazines, Time and Newsweek, were expected to fall between the other two magazines.

In addition, given the (slight) social progress of women and the expansion of gender roles since 1976 and 1989, we expected that ads in 2000-2001 would show a greater proportion of less sexist (Level 3, 4, 5) ads than in the previous studies. Further, for the 2000-2001 ads, we wanted to compare the level of sexism in portrayals of men versus women across all the magazines, as well as within each magazine. Specific hypotheses and results are presented after a discussion of methodology.
Method

Like the two earlier studies, this research employed content analysis as a means of assessing portrayals in advertising. Content analysis is a commonly used method in communications research and consumer behavior (Belk and Pollay 1985; Kassarjian 1977; Sayre 1992). Two female coders were employed for the content analysis; one was in her 20s and the other in her 30s. In a training session, each coder independently coded advertisements in a sample issue of *Time* magazine consistent with the established coding scheme (see Appendix 1 for a description of the coding scheme). Coders then compared the results of their coding. The two discrepancies in coding were easily resolved, and coders were assigned to independently code advertisements in either the even or the odd months of each publication.

Advertisements in each of the July 2000-June 2001 monthly issues of *Playboy* and *Working Woman* were examined, as well as the first issue of the month for *Time* and *Newsweek* (*Time* and *Newsweek* are published weekly) for the same time period. Advertisements that were a sufficient size (1/6 page or greater) to show usable information and that contained an adult human figure were selected for analysis. In addition, only the central figure of focus for each ad was analyzed, and no more than two central figures were analyzed. In total, we examined 963 ads, including 532 ads whose focus was a female figure and 431 ads whose focus was a male figure.

Results

In order to compare our findings to the earlier studies, we first analyzed only 2000-2001 ads featuring women and looked for differences among the four magazines. We then combined the data from the 2000-2001 ads featuring women across magazines, and compared the levels of sexism in the 2000-2001 ads to the Pingree et al. 1976 study (1973-74 ad data), and the Lazier-Smith 1989 study (1987-88 ad data). Finally, we looked at differences between male and female portrayals in the 2000-2001 ads.

H1: For 2000-2001 ads featuring women, *Playboy* will have a higher proportion of sexist ads (Level 1, 2) than *Time*, *Newsweek*, or *Working Woman*.

This hypothesis is supported. An overall cross-tabulation analysis of level of sexism by magazine indicated a significant relationship between sexism level and magazine, $\chi^2 (12) = 131.66$, $n=532, p < .001$. Consistent with the Pingree et al. study (1976), *Playboy* had significantly more Level 1 ads than any other magazine $\chi^2 (1) = 35.31, n=266, p < .001$. Fully 87% of the 2000-2001 ads in *Playboy* portrayed women as decorations (Level 1; see Table 1), compared to 54% in the earlier study. In both studies, 88% of the *Playboy* ads were Level 1 or 2.

Further, a one-way ANOVA revealed significant differences in the mean level of sexism in the four magazines, $F(3,528) = 46.32, p< .001$. The means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1. Higher levels of sexism are indicated by lower mean values (more Level 1 and 2 ads). Post hoc tests revealed that on average, the ads in *Playboy* were significantly more sexist than the ads in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Working Woman* ($p < .001$).
H2: For 2000-2001 ads featuring women, Working Woman will have a higher proportion of less sexist ads (Level 4, 5) than Time, Newsweek, or Playboy.

This hypothesis is supported. Results of a cross-tabulation indicated Working Woman had the highest proportion of Level 4 or 5 ads (45%), and more than Time (31%), Newsweek (42%) or Playboy (12%; see Table 1), $\chi^2 (1) = 8.58, n=178, p < .001$. However, tests of mean differences revealed that on average, the ads in Working Woman were significantly less sexist than the ads in Playboy, but only marginally less sexist than ads in Time ($p < .07$). The mean level of sexism in Working Woman was not significantly different from that of Newsweek.

H3: For 2000-2001 ads featuring women, Time and Newsweek will have a higher proportion of traditional ads (Level 2) than Playboy or Working Woman.

This hypothesis is supported. The two mainstream magazines had the highest proportion of traditional ads, Time: $\chi^2 (1) = 11.60, n=72, p < .001$; Newsweek: $\chi^2 (1) = 10.00, n=72, p < .001$. Newsweek led with 28%, followed closely by Time (25%). Working Woman had 11% Level 2 ads, while Playboy had a mere 1% (see Table 1).

H4: Overall level of sexism in ads featuring women will be higher (more sexist) for ads in the 1976 and 1989 studies compared to the 2000-2001 ads in the current study.

This hypothesis is not supported. The distribution of advertisements by level of sexism across each of the three studies is listed in Table 2. A one-way ANOVA of level of sexism yielded no significant differences between the studies with regard to overall level of sexism in ads featuring women, $F (2, 1508) = 0.41, ns$. While the mean level of sexism across all four magazines improved from the 1976 study ($M = 2.21$), it decreased slightly (indicating slightly more sexist ads), from 2.28 in 1989 to 2.27 in 2001.

The central tendency showed the median level for all three studies to be Level 2 traditional ads. The mode level was Level 2 in the 1976 study, worsened in the 1989 study to Level 1, and remained at Level 1 in the current study. In looking at the distribution of ads across sexism levels, it appears that advertisers are moving away from the traditional portrayals of Level 2 ads (48% in 1976, 35% in 1989, 14% in 2001) toward more extreme portrayals – either the highly sexist decorative portrayals of Level 1 ads (50% in 2001, compared with 27% in 1976 and 37% in 1989) or the more progressive Level 4 and 5 ads (33% in 2001, compared with 21% in 1976 and 26% in 1989). Is this progress?

H5: Overall level of sexism across all magazines in 2000-2001 is higher for ads featuring women than for ads featuring men

This hypothesis was not confirmed. An overall test of mean differences for ads in all four magazines confirmed that ads featuring women ($M = 2.27, SD = 1.47$) were significantly less sexist than ads featuring men ($M = 2.03, SD = .98$), $t(677) = -3.11, p < .01$. This surprise finding is discussed further below.

H6a: The level of sexism in 2000-2001 Playboy ads will be lower (more sexist) for ads
featuring women than for ads featuring men.

This hypothesis is confirmed. Results of the cross-tab indicate a significant relationship between level of sexism and sex of ad spokesmodel in *Playboy* magazine, $\chi^2 (3) = 114.35$, n=284, $p < .001$. Of the 135 ads in *Playboy* featuring women, 86.7% were Level 1 ads, compared to only 34.9% for the male ads (see Table 3). Fully 94% of the male ads were Level 1 or 2 ads, while 87.4% of the female ads were Level 1 or 2. There were no Level 3 ads in *Playboy*. As expected, the majority of *Playboy* ads portrayed women as decorations and men in traditional settings.

A test of mean differences confirmed that *Playboy* ads featuring women ($M = 1.44$, $SD = 1.15$) were significantly more sexist than *Playboy* ads featuring men ($M = 1.78$, $SD = .76$), $t(282) = 2.92$, $p < .01$. However, it is interesting to note that seven (5.2%) of the female ads were Level 5 ads while only one male ad was a Level 5 ad. Does this suggest enlightened attitudes or simply a desire for attention-getting ads?

H6b: The level of sexism in 2000-2001 *Time* and *Newsweek* ads will be the same for ads featuring women and ads featuring men.

This hypothesis was not supported. Results of the cross-tab indicate a significant relationship between level of sexism and sex of ad spokesmodel in *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines, $\chi^2 (4) = 57.61$, n=426, $p < .001$. Admittedly, of the 184 ads in *Time* and *Newsweek* featuring women, 36.4% are Level 1 ads, compared to 24.8% for the male ads (see Table 3). However, the majority of the male ads (58.7%) are Level 2 ads.

Surprising, women fare better in *Time* and *Newsweek* ads. While 62.5% of the ads featuring women are Level 1 or 2, this compares favorably to 93.5% for ads featuring men. Additionally, 30% of the ads featuring women are Level 4 (compared to 8.3% for male ads). So although the majority of ads in *Time* and *Newsweek* still portray women and men as decorations or in traditional settings, there is progress toward less sexist portrayals of women in the ads in these mainstream magazines. A test of mean differences confirmed that *Time* and *Newsweek* ads featuring women ($M = 2.42$, $SD = 1.38$) are less sexist than *Time* and *Newsweek* ads featuring men ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 1.04$), $t(424) = -2.55$, $p < .01$.

H6c: The level of sexism in 2000-2001 *Working Woman* ads will be higher (less sexist) for ads featuring women than for ads featuring men.

Results of the cross-tab analysis indicate a relationship between level of sexism and sex of ad spokesmodel in *Working Woman* magazine, $\chi^2 (4, n=253) = 44.17$, $p < .001$. Of the 213 ads in *Working Woman* featuring women, 38.5% were Level 1 ads, compared to only 15% Level 1 male ads (see Table 3). The majority (52.5%) of male ads were Level 2 ads; only 10.8% of the female ads were Level 2. For ads featuring women, 34.3% were Level 4 ads, compared to 30% for ads featuring men. It is interesting to note that 23 (5.2%) of the female ads were Level 5 ads but no male ad was a Level 5 ad.

However, a test of mean differences confirmed our hypothesis that there are no significant differences in the average
level of sexism portrayed by ads in *Working Woman* ads featuring women (M = 2.68, SD = 1.53) compared to ads featuring men (M = 2.48, SD = 1.09), t(251) = -1.02, p < .31.

For *Working Woman* magazine, the findings suggest that on average the levels of sexism in ads featuring men or women is similar, but that differences exist in the particular level of sexism portrayed. In *Working Woman*, more men are portrayed in traditional roles (Level 2), while more women are decorations (Level 1), but a number of both males and females are portrayed in less traditionally sexist settings.

In sum, our findings indicate little change in the level of sexism portrayed in advertisements featuring women in the past 25 years. The majority of print ad portrayals in the four magazines examined here still show women as decorations (sex objects), or in traditional wife/mother roles, even in supposedly feminist publications like *Working Woman*. Interestingly however, men fare worse. Portrayals of men in print ads are just as limited – and limiting – as portrayals of women. The print advertising medium is not merely sexist in its portrayals of women, it’s sexist period.

**DISCUSSION**

This study replicated the Pingree et al. (1976) and Lazier-Smith (1989) studies by applying the Sexism Scale to print ads featuring women for the period 2000-2001 in four magazines, allowing the portrayal of women to be compared across three points in time. In addition, our study extended earlier work by investigating the portrayal of men in advertisements in these same magazines for the period 2000-2001 and comparing ad portrayals across genders. Our findings suggest that the gender portrayals in print advertising media remain disappointingly sexist, stereotypical, and limiting.

However, these results seem to depend, in part, upon the type of publication in which the ads appear. *Working Woman* (like *Ms.* in earlier studies) showed significantly fewer Level 1 ads compared to ‘mainstream’ interest magazines *Time* and *Newsweek* and compared to *Playboy*. Because *Working Woman*’s readership is largely comprised of professional women, it is likely (and prudent) that the advertisers depict their target audience primarily in the workplace. Conversely, one might suppose that *Playboy* is purchased for visual entertainment and from an editorial viewpoint, women are placed in decorative roles. It is not surprising therefore to find the ads, too, reflecting decorative representations.

In comparing our results to the earlier studies, it is disappointing to observe that the overall level of sexism in the portrayal of women in print ads has not improved in the 13 years since the Lazier-Smith (1989) study. However, it appears that ads featuring women are moving toward the extreme levels of sexism. The large number of female ads in the 2000-2001 data that were either Level 1 or Levels 4 and 5 ads appears to reflect the current ethos of today’s so-called “third-wave feminists” – women in their 20s and 30s (prime targets for advertisers) who have grown up in dependably and reasonably feminist environments and don’t subscribe to the feminist ethos of the 1970s, women who can “discuss lipstick and liberation in the same breath” (Kuczynski 2001). We hope that more advertisers follow the trend we observed in *Working Woman* and increase the number of nonsexist
portrayals of women, even if they continue to use women (and men) in decorative roles.

With respect to men, our findings echo what Skelley and Lundstrom (1981) found in their examination of male portrayals. Male representations in advertising seem to be increasingly falling into Levels 1 and 2. Like women, men are shown more often as decorations, inserted into the ad as a sex object to be admired for his good looks (what Lippert [1997] calls ‘pecsploitation’) – or, they are portrayed in business attire or sports settings. Few male ad portrayals in our study depicted the greater involvement men have at home, especially related to childcare, in today’s world. In fact, depictions in mainstream publications (Time, Newsweek) actually portray men in Levels 1 and 2 more often than they do women. Perhaps these findings are due to the increased sensitivity and scrutiny given to female representation in the past two decades and the relative lack of concern about how men are portrayed in advertising.

To understand these images, it is useful also to examine who is responsible for producing the ads (e.g., Firestone 1971; Lakoff 1975). Now more than ever, advertising represents, on the surface, a fairly egalitarian industry. Women today make up the majority of students enrolled in media studies, communication, advertising, and graphic arts classes at U.S. universities (Becker et al. 2001), and they represent half of the people employed by advertising agencies in the U.S. (Elliott 1997) and the U.K. (Doward 2000). However, it appears that the creative influence and decision-making powers still lie primarily with men. Overall in the U.K., women are employed as account planners (54%) or media planners (49%) but in the creative arena, only 17% are women and 14% of art directors are women (Doward 2000). In the U.S., only 14% of art directors are females and only two women are creative directors of the top 20 agencies (Amos 2000).

On a global scale, out of the world’s hottest 100 directors for commercials of 2001 – only one was a woman (Dignam 2001). These data imply that the men are responsible for creating and approving images, so then why are men shown in traditional roles? In part, this may be due to the fact that the men doing the creating and approving are those businessmen depicted in the ads. Or, as lamented by Griswold (1993), men are still championed in society for their roles as breadwinners, not as caretakers or house-husbands.

Further, according to a 1995 survey by American Demographics magazine, the average age of a corporate advertising representative is 31 years, while the average age of an advertising agency account executive is 28 (Surowiecki 2002). Not only are the majority of individuals producing the ads men, the majority of these men are also young. Perhaps the ads we see simply reflect the ethos of the advertising industry’s male “cult of youth.”

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Our findings show an increase in sexist portrayals in print advertising for both women and men for a select number of publications in the U.S.A. Future research might apply the Sexism Scale to a greater range of media, including across age groups (do levels of sexism hold across life stages?) and multicultural publications where people of color have often been depicted in stereotypical ways (e.g., Latina Lover; O’Shaughnessy 1999). In addition,
researchers could compare other gender-based media that are similar in content and purpose, such as men’s and women’s fashion magazines (e.g., *GQ*, *Vogue*), to discern if advertisements in magazines focusing on appearance are more consistent with Level 1 portrayals (i.e., appearance-related, decorative) and are consistent across gender.

Further, given that print magazines are increasingly reaching a global audience, it would be worthwhile to examine the portrayals of men and women cross-culturally. To what extent are these advertising portrayals created and transported worldwide? For example, *Cosmopolitan* magazine, founded in the U.S. in 1886 as a magazine for "first-class families," has now exported the notion of the “fun, fearless female” to more than 41 countries in 25 languages, making it the largest magazine franchise in the world (http://www.hearstcorp.com/). *Playboy* publishes 16 international editions in 16 different countries. Such cross-cultural applications could employ cultural theories such as Hofstede’s (1980) masculinity scale to categorize countries as masculine or feminine and then measure sexism in advertising within each of the countries. Initial research conducted with the Sexism scale in Japan (a ‘masculine nation’ according to Hofstede 1980) showed that Japanese women are portrayed mainly in traditional or decorative roles in high-circulation magazine advertising to a much greater extent than are women in the U.S. (Ford et al. 1998). One might expect that ‘feminine’ nations such as Denmark might show less sexism in advertising than the more masculine U.S. or Japan. An analysis of each *Cosmopolitan* or *Playboy* international editions’ advertising may provide additional insights.

Finally, consumer response to the various levels of portrayals could be assessed through in-depth interviews or in experimental settings. How do consumers in different life stages and different cultural regions interpret these portrayals – and to what extent are they effective? Given the increased awareness of sexism in advertising and the number of complaints from consumers worldwide, one might expect advertisers to be sensitive about what is portrayed in their ads. The U.K.’s Advertising Standards Authority reported that they received 487 complaints about sexist ads in 1999, up 12% from 1997 (Doward 2000). South Africa recently held a series of public hearings on sexism in advertising and the media (Taylor 2001) and France’s Truth in Advertising Office (BVP) has enacted new rules for the presentation of human images in ads (Speer 2001).

Perhaps it is up to us as consumers to voice our views about gender portrayals in advertising by supporting those companies whose ads reflect higher level gender portrayals and by boycotting products from the companies that just don’t get it. We’ve come a long way, baby, and we’ve got the spending power to do it!

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### Appendix 1

**Coding Scheme***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexism Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>Decoration/Fool</em>: portrayed as less than a person, two-dimensional image who looks good (e.g., sex object, model); not a spokesperson, no sense of person beyond ad, no contribution of information about product/company; portrayed as hapless, dumb, overwhelmed, or incompetent</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 2            | *Tradition*: traditional strengths and capacities, “gender roles”  
  a. *Females*: seen in the home, caring for others or in “feminine” occupations (secretaries, teachers, nurses); or in feminine settings (talking to friends, romantic dinner); seen struggling with any professional/business role  
  b. *Males*: professional businessmen, athletes, “workers” (blue collar occupations); seen in “manly” activities, settings (sports, home repair); seen as less competent in family roles |
| 1            | *Progressive*: two roles but traditional gender role is primary/most evident  
  a. *Females*: home and family come first; can be employed professional  
  b. *Males*: job comes first but family/relationships in evidence; portrayed as “helping out” at home |
| 1            | *Equal*: men and women equal; employed professionals, athletes, no discussion of home, family |
| 2            | *Nonstereotypic*: women and men superior in some respects, inferior in some respects; individuals not judged by sex |

*Adapted from Pingree et al. (1976)*
Table 1: Levels of Sexism in Advertisements Featuring Women, 2000-2001

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Sexism</th>
<th>Playboy</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Newsweek</th>
<th>Working Woman</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n)</td>
<td>(135)</td>
<td>(115)</td>
<td>(69)</td>
<td>(213)</td>
<td>(532)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>2.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std Dev.</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Comparison of Level of Sexism in Advertisements Featuring Women Across All Magazines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
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<tr>
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<td>121</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
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<td>215</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Total n)</td>
<td>(447)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(530)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std Dev.</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.37</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Levels of Sexism in Magazine Advertisements Featuring Men or Women, 2000-2001 (Total n = 963)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Sexism</th>
<th>Playboy (n = 284)</th>
<th>Time (n = 221)</th>
<th>Newsweek (n = 205)</th>
<th>Working Woman (n = 253)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Total n)</td>
<td>(149)</td>
<td>(135)</td>
<td>(106)</td>
<td>(115)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std Dev.</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1

Consciousness Scale for Media Sexism

Level V

Women and men as individuals

Level IV

Women and men must be equals

Level III

Woman may be a professional, but first place is home

Man may help out competently at home, but first place is work

Level II

Woman’s place is in the home or in womanly occupations

Man’s place is at work or at manly activities at home

Level I

Woman is a two-dimensional, nonthinking decoration

Man is a two-dimensional decoration