Beauty, Brawn, Or Brains: Idealized Male Images in Advertising
Patricia Warrington, Purdue University
Anna Gourgova, Purdue University

Many agree that advertising presents idealized images of individuals and the American lifestyle (Richins 1995). Evidence indicates that men as well as women make social comparisons to advertising imagery and that these comparisons impact male self-perceptions (Gulas and McKeage 2000). The purpose of this exploratory study is to identify the types of idealized male images prevalent in contemporary print advertising from the perspective of the individual consumer. The results suggest that consumers tend to categorize idealized print images of men in terms of types of attractiveness that emphasize culturally desirable lifestyle characteristics.

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hopes and fears can include consumption decisions such as whether to purchase particular products (e.g. pacifiers), and whether to fit in with society’s expectations (e.g. gendered products and colors) but also the kinds of experiences highlighted within this paper such as the wish to breastfeed, yet the experience of difficulties in establishing breast-feeding.

Many of the decisions which women face at this time are likely to be influenced by the ‘ought self’ which are informed by discourses generated by social networks and public policy campaigns/health care professionals about what constitutes ‘a good mother’ as well as family members and the social networks of new mothers. The discrepancies and psychological distances between a range of selves (e.g. ideal/actual; ought/actual and undesired/actual self–see Higgins et al. 1987) clearly had an influence on the consumption experiences of our mothers as well as their overall well being. The research contributes, theoretically, to our understanding of possible selves relating this concept to consumption choices into public services. It also contributes to our understanding of identity formation processes amongst new mothers—how identities are acquired or imposed; and the consumption practices in daily life (Reckwitz 2002; Warde 2003) which underpin the acquisition of the identity of mother.

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Extended Abstract
A number of researchers have examined the influence of the media, particularly advertising, on American perceptions of physical attractiveness and beauty, and the implications of that relationship on attitudes and self-perceptions. Most agree that advertising presents idealized images of individuals and the American lifestyle (Richins 1995). Enhanced by special effects capable of minimizing the least imperfection, many models and actors project virtually unattainable levels of beauty and physical attractiveness. Some even suggest that the thin and beautiful female model so pervasive in cosmetic and apparel advertising contributes to the development of eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia (Richins 1991; Cattarain, Thompson, Thomas, and Williams 2000).

Social comparison theory (Festinger 1954) has been used to investigate the process by which people compare themselves with individuals in ads. Festinger (1954) proposed that humans have a drive to evaluate themselves through comparisons with others. Negative effects may occur when comparisons are made with others perceived as superior on a dimension of interest (upward comparisons) (Major, Testa, and Bylsma 1991), and these comparisons may be primarily automatic (Lyubomirsky and Ross 1997). Research indicates that for women, comparisons to idealized advertising images result in lower satisfaction with physical attractiveness (Cattarain et al. 2000; Richins 1991), decreases in self-esteem (Martin and Gentry 1997), and increases in moods such as depression and anger (Cattarain et al. 2000).

It appears that as men as well as women make social comparisons to advertising imagery and that these comparisons impact male self-perceptions. Gulas and McKeage (2000) demonstrated that idealized images of financial success negatively reduced male subjects’ level of self-esteem whereas idealized images of physical attractiveness had no significant effect. It may be then that men are subject to upward comparisons when idealized images reflect relevant features other than physical attractiveness. For example, media images that portray desirable characteristics such as athleticism or intellect may be influential in affecting male self perceptions. The present study represents an exploratory effort to identify the types of idealized male images prevalent in contemporary print advertising from the perspective of the individual consumer, both male and female.

Method
Male fashion photos were chosen randomly by the researchers from recent issues of men’s lifestyle magazines and retail catalogues. The selected photographs featured full-color, full-body shots of a single model (no other people or animals). All commercial text and graphics, including background and brand names, were removed using photo editing software. Eighty-six pictures were included in the final set. Participants were asked to sort the photographs into as many piles as they deemed appropriate on the basis of similarity of
appearance and to select the single photograph from each pile that best represented all of the photographs placed in that group. The participants were then asked to provide a word or short phrase of their own that best described the type of look depicted by each group of photos. Finally, each exemplar was rated in terms of overall attractiveness and a list of adjective descriptors (e.g., handsome, attractive, powerful) using a 5-point scale ranging from low (1) to high (5).

**Results**

Five distinctive clusters emerged from multidimensional scaling analysis.

**Classic/Elegant:** This category portrayed male models who were elegantly dressed, very well groomed, and with serious facial expressions. These images were rated high on descriptors such as sophisticated, intellectual, classy, confident and intellectual.

**European/Fashion Forward:** This cluster of images was described as stylish and bold in their commitment to make a fashion statement. The reference to Europe may indicate that the models were considered less typically American—though coming from the old continent of high fashion and extravagance. The images rated high on sophistication, mysteriousness, and intelligence.

**Trendy/Casual:** These images scored high on descriptors such as athletic, healthy, casual, outgoing, and rugged. This look was perceived as youthful and highly attractive.

**Guy Next Door/Athletic:** The guy next door appears to be the antithesis to the Classical/Elegant Look. These male images ranked high on friendliness, strength, and masculinity. On average, the models were perceived as attractive, but somewhat ordinary and regular.

**Macho/Masculine/Sporty:** Participants described this group as macho, strong, outdoosy, healthy, yet more stylish than the Guy Next Door. The models in this group were closely linked to sex appeal, power, good health and an outdoor lifestyle.

**Implications for Future Research**

The results of this analysis suggest that consumers tend to categorize idealized print images of men in terms of types of attractiveness that emphasize lifestyle characteristics. As such, men may compare dimensions other than overall physical attractiveness with that of the models depicted in advertising directed toward them. Further research is needed to better understand which comparison dimensions are most relevant in eliciting upward and downward comparisons for men and under what conditions. It may be particularly worthwhile to study the extent to which idealized male images negatively impact self-esteem for pre-adolescent and adolescent males.

**References**


**Image Consumption: The Study of Bridal Photography, Semiotic, and Feminine**

Jin-Tsann Yeh, Vanung University
Chyong-Ling Lin, Lunghwa University of Science & Technology

**ABSTRACT**

The growth of the bridal photography industry could be a miniature of Taiwanese anthrop-sociology development records. In the past, the conservative bridal photography showed exaggerative make-up and bridal costumes that represented a semiotic of contemporary fashion. However, along with the import of Western information, a new aesthetic awoke and educated Taiwanese women to reach an ideal state of self-confidence and autonomy. The research was drawn on the premise that the awareness of feminism was an effect of media exposure to women of new images and an overall development of anthrop-sociology as well. A researcher developed survey instrument and a visiting survey were designed and used to collect data from 550 randomly selected customers from the cluster of bridal photography salons. The finding revealed that modern Taiwanese women thought that they could be independent decision makers and were keen-witted and capable. They would ask for bridal photography based on the value of commemoration and self-expression and agreed that bridal photography represented beauty, romance, and happiness. Also, bridal magazines and friends’/relatives’ recommendations were the best information resources.