# **Gender and Advertising**

# How Gender Shapes Meaning

The emotional, sexual, and psychological stereotyping of females begins when the doctor says, "It's a girl."

—Shirley Chisholm

Men are dogs and women are cats. Women are from Venus and men are from Mars. Writers, filmmakers, psychologists, and advertisers all have used the idea that men and women are different to develop stories, create conflict, and provide persuasive imagery. Not only do advertisers view men and women differently, but men and women also bring different perspectives to advertising. Thus, we can assume that men and women create different meanings from the advertisements they see. Gender roles in our society have changed dramatically since the 1950s, and portrayals of men and women in advertising have been researched since nearly the same time. Researchers have consistently sought to evaluate these roles to examine whether advertising has kept up with societal changes. In this chapter, we examine the different ways men and women view advertising and messages, as well as some of the ways that advertising portrays gender roles today.

The last several decades have seen changes in the role of women in society, both as those who earn money and those who spend money. In 1940, women comprised about 20% of the workforce in the United States, while today that percentage reaches 50% (U.S. Department of Labor, 2000). In addition, the family structure in the United States has changed: smaller proportions of two-parent families and larger numbers of single parents were characteristic of the family structure toward the end of the 20th century (U.S. Department of Labor, 2000), and that trend continues today.

Internationally, the story is similar. It is estimated that worldwide about 70% of all working-age women now work outside of the home (Witel-Daugenti, 2011). Women make up the majority of professional workers in many countries, even in the Mediterranean, where women have traditionally held more menial jobs. In Spain, for example, the proportion of young women in the labor force has now reached American levels.

In addition to their changing roles in the labor force and in the family, women have also increased their power as consumers. Today, women wield incredible buying power: They purchase or influence the purchase of 85% of all consumer goods, including 91% of all new homes and 65% of all cars ("Marketing to Women Quick Facts," 2011). In the United States, women start 70% of new businesses. A study by Continuum (2011) found that women control 65% of global spending, a total of about \$20 trillion. By 2014, the World Bank predicts that the global income of women will grow by more than \$5 trillion (Wallace, 2011). Around the world, women are delaying marriage to increase their educational and career opportunities.

#### GENDER AND INFORMATION PROCESSING

As discussed in Chapter 2, advertisers provide messages and leave the meaning up to consumers to develop. Advertisers are interested in similarities and differences in how men and women receive and evaluate information. One difference involves the actual creation of meaning from a given advertisement. Men look directly at the primary message of a given advertisement (e.g., "buy this beer"). Women not only evaluate the primary message, but they also pick up multiple clues from the message and weave together threads to intuit and infer the inner meaning of the message (e.g., "buy this beer and you will be popular and trendy") (Popcorn & Marigold, 2000).

Once the meaning from an advertisement has been determined, men and women differ in how that meaning is used. These different decision-making processes are related to whether the process is linear or more nonlinear in nature. Men process messages and make decisions more quickly than women do, perhaps because men focus on the primary message of a given advertisement and take in little other information during the process. This is due to the observation that men have a linear thinking and reasoning style, and men tend to have a more task-oriented focus than women have. Women, on the other hand, process the information in an advertisement quickly and from many levels and sources, including music, visuals, voice-over, and text. Women also tend to evaluate and weigh the various sources to process the message and determine what steps to take next. Women's reasoning processes are less task-oriented and more compartmentalized than men's are. Women's decision-making processes are characterized as being incremental reasoning processes, where each piece of information builds on the previous information that is taken in. This nonlinear approach to reasoning allows women to think in terms of interrelated factors, not straight lines. The observation that women evaluate multiple sources supports this reasoning style (Fisher, 1999).

Women and men respond to entirely different stimuli when viewing and evaluating advertising messages (Popcorn & Marigold, 2000). Men respond positively to male imagery, and women respond positively to female imagery. This is why you rarely see hunters in advertisements for products directed to women or bubble baths in advertisements for products directed to men. Interestingly though, women will use products and respond positively to imagery that they perceive as masculine, although men do not respond positively to images or products that they perceive as feminine. Women and men also respond

differently to the same stimulus, such as athletic imagery: Women rarely think of themselves as athletes unless they are playing a professional sport, whereas men have images of themselves as athletes even if they do not play professionally (Wong, 2001). Therefore, an image of an athlete, regardless of gender, is likely to generate different responses from both men and women.

New types of research that involves neuroscanning techniques have shown that women and men use different parts of their brains when processing information. Women's processing is focused in the frontal lobes, where the brain also processes multitasking. Men's processing is distributed throughout the brain (Hotchkiss, 2008).

#### **GENDER AND STEREOTYPES**

Given that men and women differ in many ways, it should not be surprising that advertisements portray men and women differently. These different portrayals result in intended and unintended effects, which we discuss later in this chapter.

When looking at portrayals and imagery of men and women, it is important to examine a body of advertisements, not just one or two specific advertisements that have imagery that may be stereotypical or in other ways problematic. Stereotypes are created by the continual, extended exposure of consumers to patterns of imagery. It is also important to remember that, as discussed in Chapter 6, there are valid reasons that advertisers use stereotypes. In this chapter, we examine role portrayals of both men and women and provide numerous ads to illustrate our points. Please keep in mind that when examples of advertisements are included, they were selected as representative of advertising trends that appear in society, not just as a "sore thumb" or an aberration from typical messages seen in advertising today.

### **Role Portrayals**

Men and women today lead highly complex lives with multiple societal roles. Men and women are parents, businesspeople, corporate board members, friends, siblings, volunteers, and more. This differs from the *Leave It to Beaver* society of the 1950s, where societal roles were much more specific: Men were the breadwinners, and women were the homemakers. Today, though, society still clings to some of the values of the 1950s. Almost half of working mothers say they spend more time each day parenting than on their careers (compared to 19% of working fathers). On average, moms spend 3 hours more per day than dads do on parenting tasks (VTech, 2011). Indeed, advertising has firmly held on to this traditional portrayal of women as homemakers and uses this imagery to promote all types of products from household goods to computers and automobiles.

The website World Savvy Monitor (2011) cites an UNESCO report on the global status of women that suggests that, globally, media portrays women in one of four ways: "the glamorous sex kitten, the sainted mother, the devious witch, or the hardface corporate and political climber." The study also argued that most heroes and protagonists on television are men, and men's sports are far more visible than women's sports, which is potentially damaging to women's self-esteem.

Today, advertising portrayals vary based on the medium in which they appear and, for broadcast media, the times of day when the advertisement is appearing. During the workday, for example, the primary TV audiences are retired persons and women with children. During daytime programming, most of the women in commercials are shown in traditional homemaker roles (the woman pictured in the Carnation ad in Figure 7.1 is lovingly watching her son drink his breakfast). Men are rarely seen in the commercials as husbands, professionals, or spokespeople. During prime-time television, when the TV audience is more balanced, women are shown more often in positions of authority and in settings away from the home. Thus, during prime-time television, portrayals of men and women are more equitable (Craig, 1992). For example, the individuals enjoying a drink in the Hilton Garden Inn ad (Figure 7.2) are all business people: there appear to be no power dynamics evident, and so the portrayal could be considered equitable.

Internationally, advertising still conforms to traditional gender portrayals. A metaanalysis of advertising globally (Paek, Nelson, & Viella, 2011) found that women are much more likely to be pictured as dependent in advertising, and much more likely to be pictured at home than males.



Figure 7.1 A traditional mom in a Carnation Breakfast Essentials ad.

Notably, advertising in China shows equitable portrayals to some degree, as women were shown as workers rather than homemakers, contrasting with women in ads in other Asian cultures such as South Korean and Thai ads. Ads in China reflect cultural changes from the communist era, where the communist-led government in China made an effort to expand women's roles outside the family to become economically productive. Additionally, aspects of the Cultural Revolution minimized visual differences between men and women by requiring that everyone wore generic worker clothes or "Mao suits." Both these situations may influence portrayals of women in advertising in China today.

Today, we are seeing an increase in portrayals of women and men in ways that neither conform to nor conflict with stereotypical understanding. Several societal changes may have contributed to the growth of such portrayals. First, there are a substantial number of women holding positions at a range of media organizations. Many of these women are working professionally to present a more realistic view of women in the media. Advertisements today are also starting to portray more nontraditional images of

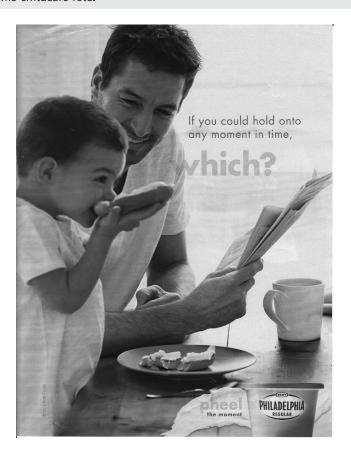
**Figure 7.2** An equitable portrayal of men and women in an ad for Hilton Garden Inn.



men. For example, advertisers such JC Penney and Philadelphia Cream Cheese have shown men taking care of children and doing housework (Figure 7.3). Some countries, such as Malta, have created guidelines on gender equity and portrayals in the media. Malta's guidelines read that "men and women should both be seen as making decisions to support the family and with regard to household tasks and home management" (Aquilina, 2007).

However, not all of these portrayals can be considered equality portrayals. Some advertisements present images of fathers who are "childish but lovable goofballs" (Crain, 2001) and irresponsible fathers and lazy foolish husbands (Sacks & Smaglick, 2008). As an advertising trend, this could be problematic if such images are not balanced with other images of men that show them as confident and capable in traditional homemaking situations. A study done by ad agency Leo Burnett in 2005 found that 80% of men believed media portrayals of men are inaccurate (Sacks & Smaglick, 2008).

**Figure 7.3** In this ad for Philadelphia Cream Cheese, the man in the image seems comfortable in his childcare role.



Dr. Pepper is one of several companies using advertising to encourage men to be a "man's man." For example, in their ads for Dr. Pepper 10, they use the tagline "Not for Women." This technique was also used by Miller Lite in a series of ads where men and women saved men from unmanly behavior. Agencies believe such techniques won't offend men because they do not tie themselves emotionally to ads the way women do. Men are also more brand loyal and may relate to products that seem loyal to the "brotherhood." Is this the new wave of stereotypes in advertising?

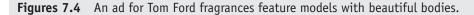
### **Beauty Stereotypes**

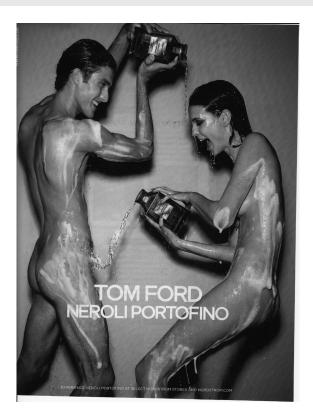
When we think of the people who appear in advertisements, we often think of men and women who are perfect physical specimens. They are young, with perfect skin free from acne and nary a wrinkle in sight; they are fit, with a six-pack stomach and no hint of cellulite, and they have full heads of glossy, thick hair. Women tend to be thin, and men tend to have well-developed upper torsos. An ad for Tom Ford fragrances epitomizes this trend (Figure 7.4). Now, we know in our heads that these people are professional models who are paid well to maintain themselves. We also know that advances in technology allow any flaws and imperfections to magically disappear from photographs. However, many view these images as presenting a standard of beauty and fitness that is in many cases impossible to attain, yet attempts are made to attain it anyway by purchasing products.

The cult of beauty is as old as the cult of the male warrior. Think of fairy tales from your youth: Girls and women tend to be portrayed either as good (Snow White, Sleeping Beauty) or bad (the Wicked Witch of the West, Cinderella's stepmother and stepsisters). The good women tend to be young and beautiful, and the bad women are either old or ugly (of course, examples such as the Snow Queen are exceptions to the rule). Similarly, good men are handsome princes, and bad men are ugly ogres. Both the ugly ogre (who kidnaps the princess) and the handsome prince (who rescues her) desire the beautiful princess. These myths from our childhood continue to resonate with us as adult consumers.

Theories of beauty are culturally constituted, primarily because of common socialization experiences. Thus, individuals in a society possess shared cultural ideals. One of these ideals is that we, as human beings, find specific facial and body configurations pleasing to view (Ashmore & Soloman, 1996). We have associated these pleasing feelings with an overall positive attitude toward beauty, and as a result, we have determined as a culture that beauty is good and preferable to ugliness (Wolszon, 1998).

Since our culture constantly undergoes subtle changes, beauty norms have also changed over time (Soloman & Ashmore, 1992). It has specifically been observed that societal expectations for beauty change with every generation (Jacobson & Mazur, 1995). The standard of voluptuous beauty of Marilyn Monroe in the 1950s changed to the standard of trendy beauty of Twiggy in the 1960s and to supermodels such as Naomi Campbell and Linda Evangelista in the 1980s. Regardless of the "beauty paradigm" currently promoted by society, individuals strive to attain the ideal of beauty that is prevalent in their culture (Englis, Soloman, & Ashmore, 1994).





Today, cultural norms in the United States continue to promote the importance of an individual's physical attractiveness, beginning in infancy and continuing through child-hood and adolescence (Martin & Gentry, 1997). For women, beauty has been institutionalized to the point where an entire industry devoted to beauty has been created. Beauty is tied not only to appearance but also to mental health and physical well-being (Brand, 1999). This beauty ideal is an overall "look" that incorporates one's physical features as well as a variety of products or services such as clothing and cosmetics (Englis et al., 1994). Striving to meet the cultural ideal is a key selling message used by many types of advertisers involved in selling beauty-oriented products (Jacobson & Mazur, 1995).

In the United States and in several other cultures, an important part of the beauty ideal today includes a thin body type, and several studies have demonstrated how the female body depicted in all media, including advertising, has become increasingly thin (Turner, Hamilton, Jacobs, Angood, & Dwyer, 1997). Research has indicated that women in advertisements tend to be young, thin, and white (Kuczynski, 1998). Women who do not fit into this category, such as black and/or older women, are either invisible (Gantz, Gartenberg, & Rainbow, 1980), presented as tokens (Bailey, Harrell, & Anderson, 1993), or are portrayed negatively (Plous & Neptune, 1997). There is a cultural taboo against large female bodies

(Wilson & Blackhurst, 1999), and advertisements often present large women as having bad bodies that limit both their wardrobes and their social engagements.

Critics point to women's fashion and beauty magazines as one of the most influential and potentially damaging media channels because they are directly concerned with the cultural ideal of beauty and provide a vehicle where advertisers can easily link their products to the process of trying to attain the beauty (Englis et al., 1994). The types of women portrayed in these magazines, both in advertising and in editorial pages, are parts of the unattainable beauty ideal. The average woman in the United States is 5 feet 3 inches tall and weighs 164 pounds (CDC, 2004), but the average model is 5 feet 11 inches tall and weighs 115 pounds (Tung, 2002).

Men, too, are subject to cultural ideals of beauty. While the exposure of the male body has historically been off-limits in advertising and other media, the past few decades have shown an increase in the use of the male body to promote products. Beauty standards have been set for men; for example, in terms of facial appearance, men are expected to have square jaws and full heads of hair. Male beauty is also equated with physical strength.

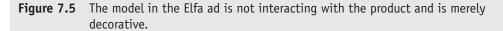
As media globalization increasingly provides a view of Western culture to Eastern countries, Western ideals of beauty are becoming popular (Jacinto, 2011). These ideals are often translating into risky and expensive actions: Chinese women, traditionally shorter than their Western counterparts, now chose to undergo surgical procedures to make them taller. In Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, women are undergoing surgery that "opens" the eye by reconstructing the eye socket to achieve a more Caucasian look. In India, cosmetic companies sell "fairness creams" to lighten the skin tone.

### **Decorative and Sexual Stereotypes**

Closely associated with the idea of a beautiful face and body is the idea of decorative portrayals. When people are portrayed in advertisements, they are either actively involved with the product or service being advertised or passively decorating the advertisement. For example, a model could be seen as having just finished drinking milk (an active portrayal), or the model could be holding the product without interacting with it (a decorative portrayal), such as we see in the Elfa ad in Figure 7.5. Decorative portrayals show the people in the advertisements as passive and disengaged, whereas active portrayals show the person interacting directly with the product. Many advertisements featuring beautiful men and women tend to feature them as decorations. A study of advertising globally (Paek et al., 2011), found that women are four times more likely to be presented visually without a speaking role) than males.

The fact that women tend to be portrayed in **decorative roles** much more often than men suggests that advertisements do not render a realistic depiction of the female gender role (Paff & Lakner, 1997). Specifically, many decorative depictions of women tend to show women in sexual or alluring positions. A sexual depiction is often an explicitly aggressive image of a woman that focuses on her lips, breasts, or groin area. An alluring depiction is less explicit and might feature a woman reclining submissively on a piece of furniture or on the floor or looking at the camera with her lips suggestively parted, as seen in the Kmart ad featuring Sofia Vergara (Figure 7.6).

Decorative roles are seen as arguably representing society's view of the appropriate place for women in society: taking a passive position (Paff & Lakner, 1997). A recent study





of magazines advertisements in Germany, Poland, and the United States found that both genders are frequently portrayed in decorative roles (Skorek & Schrier, 2009), with more women than men appearing this way.

When decorative and sexual imagery is used, advertisements often include nonverbal cues as an indication that women lack authority and possess less power than men (Simmons, 1986). Probably the most important scholar in the area of nonverbal cues is Erving Goffman, whose book *Gender Advertisements* (1979) explored a range of portrayals of women and men in terms of power. Goffman's findings include that women are generally pictured at a smaller relative size, especially height. Men tend to be pictured as taller than women, putting them in a position of power, authority, and rank (Figure 7.7) Body language often suggests that women are submissive toward products, such as the woman lying on the floor with her Burberry trench barely covering her body (Figure 7.8), whereas men are dominant over products (Figure 7.9).

Women are also seen as more tactile than men; that is, they more often are touching, cradling, and caressing objects. Goffman sees this type of touching as ritualistic, as opposed to more utilitarian aspects of touching such as touch that grasps, manipulates,



Figure 7.6 Sofia Vergara looks alluringly at the camera in this Kmart ad.

or holds. Again, this suggests the more passive nature of women in advertising. Similarly, women tend to appear removed from the social situation of the activity pictured in the ads. Often, their gaze is averted (Figure 7.10). Goffman (1979) refers to this as **licensed** withdrawal.

The overarching concern with decorative and sexual portrayals is that the individuals involved in such portrayals may become objects, similar to the objects that the people are trying to sell. With passive portrayals, there is a disconnection between the person and the object and possibly even between people (Kilbourne, 1999). Such feelings may pass on from the advertisement to the world, creating general feelings of disconnectedness among those who see the ad (Kilbourne, 1999).

#### **INTENDED EFFECTS**

In the previous chapter, we examined why stereotypes are generally used by the advertising industry. In this discussion of effects, we recap some of the key effects that relate

**Figure 7.7** Even lying down, it is clear that the man in the iComfort ad is taller than the woman and is in a position of power over the woman.

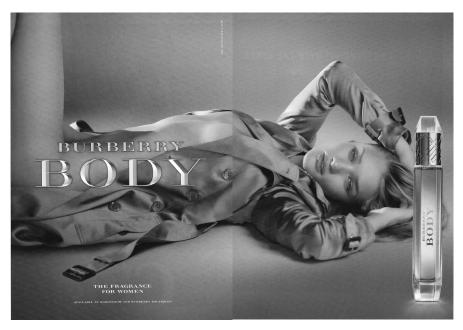


specifically to gender and advertising, as well as provide some additional intended and unintended effects regarding the types of portrayals we have discussed so far in this chapter.

# The Stage Is Quickly Set

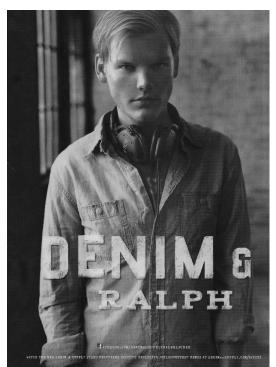
Advertisers are not alone in using stereotyped imagery. Television programs, magazines, feature films, and other mass-mediated content all provide a somewhat limited vision of men's and women's roles in society that has become familiar to us as consumers. Stereotyped imagery is effective by virtue of its familiarity: Images such as the busy homemaker, the brawny construction worker, and the buttoned-down executive are instantly recognizable. Given that they are working within time and space constraints, advertisers have almost always relied on stereotypes to establish rapport with consumers and move on to more important information about the product or service being advertised. It is efficient for advertising to use gendered stereotypes because the scene becomes immediately set.

**Figures 7.8 and 7.9** A submissive woman is portrayed in the Burberry fragrance ad. A man dominates the car, and the motor oil, in the Pennzoil ad.





**Figure 7.10** An averted gaze of the female model in the Ralph Lauren ad. Note the man's gaze is more direct.





# **Beautiful Things Are Appealing**

As social beings, we like to look at beautiful things. Even as babies, we are more attracted to beautiful pictures than to ugly ones. Advertising images capitalize on this idea of liking, as attractive men and women are often used to transfer positive affect from the model to the product (Gulas & McKeage, 2000). Studies show that this "affect transfer" works well. Seeing attractive people activates thoughts of "goodness," which extends to evaluations of other people and objects—such as the product the person is associated with (Psysociety, 2011). This affect transfer also relates to sales: Consumers report increased purchase intentions for the advertised product after seeing ads for the products that feature attractive people (Petroshius & Crocker, 1989).

A study by Phillips and McQuarrie (2011) goes beyond simple brand attitudes and finds that individuals reading gendered fashion ads in magazines like *Vogue* reported that they felt creative, interested, inspired, and enthusiastic. Such ads elicited happy moods, and individuals gained positive experiences. Ads for beauty products, while not eliciting the same types of responses, resulted in a "priming effect" in which an implicit reference to a problem to be solved brings an individual's preexisting feelings to the service. Thus, individuals who believe they have some physical flaw will relate well to a beautiful image in an ad to correct that flaw.

These predilections can be further explained by a theory called the **match-up hypoth-esis**, which suggests that attractive persons are highly effective endorsers for products that are used to enhance the consumer's own attractiveness. Effectiveness in this case was measured in terms of both consumer attitude toward the brand as well as their purchase intentions (Till & Busler, 2000). Moreover, attractive endorsers are often considered more appropriate and a better fit than unattractive endorsers, regardless of the product (Till & Busler, 2000).

### **Role-Product Congruity**

The idea that beautiful people can augment the persuasive ability of advertising for beauty-oriented products and services leads to the next intended effect of the use of some gendered stereotypes: role-product congruity theory. The role-product congruity theory simply suggests that advertising effectiveness can be increased when appropriate models are used. At first, it was suspected that female models were more effective in promoting feminine products than males, and vice versa (Kanungo & Pang, 1993). This suggests that beautiful women are effective at selling products to make women feel more beautiful. The role-product congruity theory goes beyond that simple suggestion to examine individual gendered role portrayals for different product categories. Research has shown that certain stereotyped portrayals of men and women are appropriate for specific categories of products (for example, a portrayal of a mom is appropriate for a product used in the home) (Ferguson, Kreshel, & Tinkham, 1990). This suggests that we as consumers have some idea of acceptable images that relates to the context of the advertisement.

The role-product congruity theory has also been used to examine relationships between images of spokespeople and products. Let us go back to the previous discussion that physically attractive models in advertisements have a positive influence on consumers' attitudes toward beauty-enhancing products (Kahle & Homer, 1985). One explanation for this is schema theory, which suggests that memory is a blend of specific memories as well as general abstractions about people, activities, and objects (Gwinner & Eaton, 1999). Paek et al. (2010), in a study of prime-time television commercials in seven different countries, found that product type was the most consistent predictor of prominent character gender and voice-over gender among numerous factors, meaning that the match up or congruence between gender-role portrayal and product type still matters. Advertisers across countries seem to practice widely consistent role portrayals of human models in their advertising to match the advertised products. The authors suggest that this is evidence of the continuing reliance on stereotypes in the advertising industry regardless of cultural values or changing gender-role identities worldwide. The researchers argue that these depictions are likely to limit women's roles in purchasing products (e.g., women will be less likely to learn about automobiles in preparation to purchase them if they don't see women in car ads).

# The Theory That Sex Sells

We have discussed that advertisers use attractive images to positively connect products to feelings that we already have. Before that connection can take place, the ads must get our attention. Often, sexual imagery is used to break through the ever-growing clutter in

the advertising environment. As Twitchell (1996) said, at a minimum, "sex doesn't sell, but it certainly captures attention" (p. 157).

A sexual appeal is a strong psychological appeal, second only to self-preservation. In humans, as in all animals, sexual desire is an instinctive reaction as we search for the perfect mate (Taflinger, 1996). Sexual imagery used in advertising for products like perfume, makeup, and clothing, then, can be explained or rationalized in part by this mating desire in humans: We want to look good to attract a mate and to propagate our species. However, sexual imagery has been shown to have a stronger persuasive ability for men than for women. It may be because men have a different set of criteria for selecting a mate than women do: Men traditionally tend to recognize that a woman who is young, healthy, and beautiful will be a good mate. Therefore, many advertisers use sexual imagery to get a man's attention and then associate buying the product with getting a mate (Taflinger, 1996). These types of messages focus on instinctual or physical types of meaning in messages.

For women, the persuasive power of sexual imagery works on a somewhat different level. A healthy, fit male model will attract the attention of many women and may even create desire for the product. Women, though, also pay attention to the long-term potential of a man—for example, his ability to be a good father and to provide them with money, power, and prestige. All these factors are almost impossible to put into any single advertisement (Taflinger, 1996).

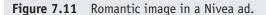
Arguably, then, it is difficult for advertisers to use sex successfully to sell to women. Instead, advertising uses romance to make a sexual connection with women. Romantic images are less blatant and more ambiguous than traditional sexual messages: They provide images of courtship, relationships, and the process of falling in love (Figure 7.11). Sexual imagery in advertisements directed toward women becomes much more intellectual than physical (Taflinger, 1996).

#### UNINTENDED EFFECTS

Given this range of intended effects of using different types of gendered imagery consistently in advertisements, it is not surprising that a range of unintended effects has also been identified and to some extent documented. Many unintended effects are based on an assumption that gender portrayals do not reflect the range of roles that men and women undertake in the world today. Instead, advertisements tend to reflect a more limited representation. Other unintended effects focus on the media's power to create and transmit "cultural meaning" (Ferguson et al., 1990). This power is a more serious concern because advertising is not only providing a limited view of gendered roles, but it is also creating negative portrayals. Such portrayals inaccurately depict men's and women's roles in society and may ultimately influence individuals to believe that the portrayals are accurate. Thus, negative stereotypes are created in a society where the portrayals do not really exist (Ferguson et al., 1990).

#### **Limited Social Roles**

If mass media depict only a limited range of roles for men and women, the societal roles that people assume are appropriate for men and women will subsequently be limited. Regarding advertising in particular, it has been suggested that advertising's focus on women





in the home may lead to women being excluded from many facets of life outside the home. In particular, a preponderance of female homemaker portrayals may cause both men and women to believe that women are unable to function outside the home without the guidance of men. In addition, advertisements may influence people to believe that women are unable to make decisions or exert power in any type of situation outside the home. The passive role of women in advertisements may suggest that women are dependent on others and unable to actively make decisions on their own. In the long term, passive portrayals in advertising along with the focus on the homemaker role may produce negative perceptions of women's abilities to perform competently in the workplace (Courtney & Whipple, 1983).

Similarly, the limited portrayals of men may result in men believing they are excluded from activities centered around the home. Men may believe that they are not equal partners in child rearing, household maintenance, and other activities. This may serve to reinforce the position of women as homemakers in that certain household tasks can only be successfully accomplished by a woman (Taflinger, 1996).

### **Value System Focuses on External Beauty**

Advertisements that focus on the beauty ideal may send a message that one's looks are the only aspect that is important to the individual and to society. Some critics argue, specifically, that advertisements reinforce a cultural history of determining worth, particularly a woman's worth, by physical appearance (Wilson & Blackhurst, 1999). Fashion magazines, in particular, have been charged with presenting a strict beauty ideal that communicates a specific type of beauty is more highly valued than others (Englis et al., 1994). Advertising and editorial imagery in mass media must both share the blame for this problem.

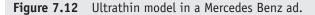
When individuals are valued for only one part of their selves, their other accomplishments and attributes are trivialized. In our society, for example, some women believe men value them primarily on how they look, and any accomplishments outside of this realm are insignificant. Women can find this offensive and demeaning (Taflinger, 1996).

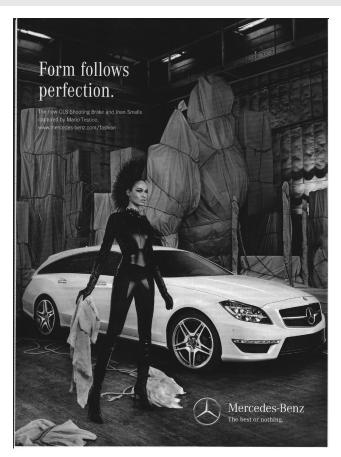
A value system focused on looks may lead to women developing issues with body image and self-esteem. Numerous studies connect exposure to beautiful, thin models with negative self-esteem among women. Waiflike, thin models (Figure 7.12) appearing in fashion magazines' editorial and advertising pages may make women feel helpless because these models present an image that is impossible to achieve. One research study, for example, showed that college students exposed to fashion magazines had different attitudes toward beauty and self-esteem than women exposed to newsmagazines (Turner et al., 1997). The women who were exposed to fashion magazines felt frustrated about their weight, felt guilty while eating, and were preoccupied with the desire to be thinner. They expressed these feelings more often than the women exposed to newsmagazines.

The consistent portrayal of thin women in all types of mass media, including advertisements, has been seen as playing a part in the cultural phenomenon of body dissatisfaction among women in Western societies (Johnson & Petrie, 1995) and is manifest in studies that relate exposure to attractive, thin models in media to increased amounts of depression and anger (Pinhas, Toner, Ali, Garfinkel, & Stuckless, 1999). Dissatisfaction is also related to decreased ratings of individuals' body image attitudes (Rebek-Wegener, Eickhoff-Schemek, & Kelly-Vance, 1998) and decreased perceptions of self-attractiveness among girls and women (Crouch & Degelman, 1998). These effects may in turn lead to increased levels of eating disorders (Pinhas et al., 1999), unhealthy dieting (Armstong & Mallory, 1992), smoking (Garner, 1997), and cosmetic surgery among girls and women (Burton & Netemeyer, 1995).

Many fashion magazines are read by girls who are 16 and younger, and many girls have reported that they frequently see ads that make them feel like they need to diet (Tsu, 2000). Girls in the fifth, sixth, and ninth grade were more critical of their body shapes after looking at magazine advertising than before looking at them (Bass, 1994). Teenage girls who watched television ads using appeals that featured sex, beauty, and youth as selling points were more likely to believe that beauty and popularity were desirable than girls who watched ads without such appeals (Bass, 1994).

We do not want to downplay the importance and concerns about eating disorders, but some clarification about these disorders is necessary at this point. Although exposure to fashion advertisements has been linked to eating disorders symptomatology, it is important to recognize that such diseases cannot be attributed solely to advertising (Andersen & DiDomenico, 1992). Advertising is part of a larger mass media process providing problematic images to women. In addition, while controlled experiments indicate that such imagery



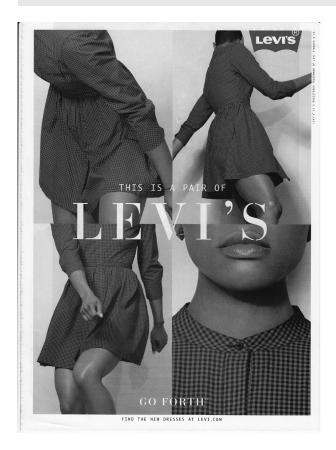


can have some negative effects on women, there is no research that links exposures to advertisements directly to such diseases. Twitchell (1996) explains that diseases like anorexia and bulimia are "multifactoral disorders more attributable to biology, environment and personality than to the appearance of scrawny models in Diet Coke ads" (p. 154).

# **Objectification**

Objectification is defined as any presentation emphasizing sexually suggestive body parts or not including the head. A focus on body parts results in individuals losing their humanity and becoming objects. In many cases, the body parts highlighted in advertisements suggest that the person becomes a sexual object (Figure 7.13). The process of objectification has been described as demeaning and dehumanizing. Often, objectification occurs at its worst when there is no role-product congruity, such as in the GoDaddy ad shown in Figure 7.14.

**Figures 7.13 and 7.14** Objectification in two ads: one for Levi's and one for GoDaddy.





#### ADVERTISING'S RESPONSIBILITIES TO MEN AND WOMEN

Advertising is one industry where one person's efforts and convictions can have an effect on the industry as a whole. With that in mind, here are some strategies and tactics to keep in mind.

### Don't Take the Easy Way Out

Advertising plays both a reflecting and a shaping role for men and women (Twitchell, 1996). It is important to recognize advertising's strength in this regard and to use the power of advertising to portray more realistic images of men and women. Stereotypes can quickly set the stage for advertising, but this does not mean that the same types of images must be used repeatedly. Any type of realistic, familiar portrayal can quickly set the stage and aid in the storytelling process. Research has shown that realistic portrayals can have positive results for advertisers and that certain types of imagery, including objectification of women, cause negative responses from consumers (Elliott, Jones, Benfield, & Barlow, 1995).

### Rethink Your Own Ideas of Beauty

As a shaper of social roles, advertising can do much to affect the cultural beauty ideal that is prevalent in society today. One way to influence the beauty ideal is to produce advertisements featuring women who do not have thin, perfect bodies. We already see such magazines such as *Voque* promising to be "ambassadors for a healthy image" (Cohen, 2012). That magazine's "Health Initiative" promises to not include models with eating disorders or under the age of 16 in the editorial pages of the 19 international editions of Voque. The effort started in June 2012 editions of Voque, and worldwide editions all featured a theme of health, with U.S. Olympic athletes on the cover of the U.S. edition. Many hope that this decision about the magazine editorial content will influence portrayals in advertisements as well. Ben Barry, founder of a modeling agency in Canada, conducted academic research into how imagery affects a woman's likelihood to buy a product and found that women related more to advertisements where the models reflected their own size, age, and skin color (Gush, 2012). This confirms an earlier study that found the overwhelming majority of consumers wanted models in magazines to represent that natural range of body shapes. The majority of women in this study said they were willing to buy magazines featuring heavier models, even though most believe that clothes look better on thin models (Garner, 1997).

Figure 7.15 A Lane Bryant ad featuring a plus-size model.



### **Expand Expectations**

Sometimes advertisers make automatic choices without thinking through other options that might be effective. One is the choice of a voice for a voice-over on a television spot. Often, a male voice is featured because it is the default choice. However, agencies should take the time to consider both men's and women's voices for voice-overs. This can add to the perception of women as powerful in our society (e.g., the "voice of reason" or "voice of experience"). In addition, rethink the activity level of girls and women in advertisements, especially in categories where they tend to be portrayed as passive. Show both men and women in a variety of settings, using products, as well as being experts and helping others learn how to use products. In this way, the actual societal roles of both men and women can begin to be presented in advertising.

#### SUMMARY

A variety of portrayals of both men and women exist in advertising (and other mass-mediated content) today. Many of the problematic images are the result of the beauty culture in the United States, which is a culture that the advertising industry can choose to support or to effect change. In this chapter, we examined the intended and unintended effects of a range of portrayals and provided food for thought for current and future advertisers to consider.

In the next chapter, we will continue our examination of portrayals of people by looking at minorities in advertising.

#### **KEY TERMS**

Affect transfer	102	Licensed withdrawa	99	Match-up hypothesis	103
Decorative role	97	Objectification 107		Role-product congruity	103

# **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- 1. What are the issues with stereotyping from a micro, meso, and macro perspective?
- 2. What evidence of role-product congruity and the match-up hypothesis have you seen in advertising recently? Is this an effective tactic? Why or why not?
- 3. What evidence of objectification have you seen in advertising lately? Why does such a negative practice continue?
- 4. What is the difference between decorative portrayals and objectification? Is one more problematic than the other?
- 5. Have you seen examples of negative stereotyping of men, especially younger men, in media lately? How do you personally react? Do you think such messages are effective? To state another way, if the ads make you laugh, is affect transfer happening?

### **SEVENTEEN MAGAZINE**

The August 2012 issue of *Seventeen* magazine, a magazine that is targeted to middle-school-aged girls, announced that it would no longer feature thin young models in its editorial pages. The so-called Body Peace Treaty promises to "celebrate every kind of beauty" in its pages. In addition, the magazine promises to use real girls and models that are healthy and to never change girls' body or face shapes via photo manipulation. Any other type of alteration of an image (such as removing a mole or eliminating fly away hairs) will be posted in a "before" and "after" format on the magazine's tumblr site. This decision was due, in part, to similar efforts by *Vogue* magazine (described earlier in this chapter) and to an online effort by an eighth grader from Maine. The girl, Julia Bloom, collected more than 30,000 signatures online calling for the magazine to publish at least one unaltered photo spread per month.

- 1. You work at an agency that advertises a fashion brand to the tween market, and of course, *Seventeen* is one of your favorite vehicles. While the Body Peace Treaty does not extend to advertising—yet—you wonder if you need to rethink the images you use in your ads. Consider how changing your alteration policy has implications on the micro, meso, and macro level.
- 2. You currently use models that are a teen size 1 or 3. Should you include more real-sized girls in your ads?
- **3.** You currently use Photoshop extensively to make the clothes look better on the bodies and to make the girl's faces prettier (take out fly away hairs, erase traces of acne, that kind of thing). Should you stop doing this? Should you follow *Seventeen's* lead and post before and after pictures?
- 4. If you change what you do for your ads in *Seventeen*, should you change for all the magazines where you appear?

#### **FURTHER READING**

Abel, S., deBruin, M., & Nowak, A. (2010). Women, advertising and representation: Beyond familiar paradigms. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton.

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