



Gender and Sexuality in Advertisements

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KEYWORDS :

The [American Heritage Dictionary](#) says that to “advertise” is “To make public announcement of, especially to proclaim the qualities or advantages of (a product or business) so as to increase sales.” Advertising is the best known and most widely discussed form of promotion. Advertisements are the most powerful means of social communication. They are communicating very effectively with people. Advertising has very strong influence in our decisions as consumers. Is the aim of advertising to inform people of new product? The answer for this obviously is ‘No’, but to create a wish to possess the product. These advertisements are attracting consumers to buy and use them. Advertising not only informs but persuades and motivates the consumer about the advertised products, service or ideas. Advertising plays an important role in persuading the public to change their attitudes towards a product, service or idea. Advertisements are becoming more popular among people because they are using customs and the codes which are governing our society. Therefore advertisements are somewhere representing and reflecting our life and thinking process.

This paper traces representations of gender and to extent sexuality in television advertisements. The advertisements have a major role as an agent of social reinforcement because of its presumed power for molding opinions, attitudes and behavior of consumers. Most of us know by now that advertising often turns people into objects. Human beings are becoming commodities to sell the products. Women’s bodies and men’s bodies too these days, are dismembered, packaged, and used to sell everything. Most of the ads we watch contain female body, with direct or indirect projection of ‘perverted sexuality of women’. Portrayal of ‘gendered’ relationships is common in advertisements.

Advertising maintains the status quo in gender relations by reinforcing the sexual division of labor, there is no resistance and Subversion or any radical change on the part of women. Stereotypes abound in the advertisements as men are mostly shown advertising cars or business products like laptops (Compaq, Acer), job websites (naukri.com, monster.com). For the advertising world, the sari clad, large bindi, mangalsutra and sindoor sporting women has become the Indian symbol of marriage. Women are mostly shown advertising domestic products. Some common sights of women as seen in advertisements are as shown cooking in the kitchen. The advertisements also project women as the torch bearers of cultural heritage as advertisers have long been enamored with women and culture. Advertisements of ICICI Prudential life Insurance picture the transformation of the sindoor of woman into the company’s logo. Most of LIC advertisements picture the women left all alone, helpless, susceptible to exploitation if the husband does not have insurance. These advertisements seem to promote the idea of insurance as more important for women than the men.

In most of the advertisements in Indian media be it newspapers, or magazines, T.V. channels or otherwise, one finds that an essential ingredient is women. There is an advertisement of a premium whiskey that shows one man is taking first sip of that particular whiskey and the lady sitting in front him appears to be losing some inches of her dress after every drink the process goes on up to three drinks. After three sips of the drink he finds that the breasts of the previously over-clad lady have become quite visible and half clad and his own shirt has slipped from his shoulders. And the voice smuts- Kuchh Bhi Ho Sakta Hai (Anything can happen). In one advertisement of an after-shave lotion, a man comes out after shaving and using the particular lotion and the young girls in the vicinity start following him seductively. In one advertisement of a bike one individual is shown as

moving hand on the body of the bike and the image of a semi-nude lady props up instead of the bike.

In one advertisement of a deodorant spray young two-piece bikini clad females start flocking the man who has used that spray recently. In another advertisement two girls are using the telescope to watch, admire and get fainted out of infatuation by looking at the man wearing only a particular brand of underwear. Another advertisement of an underwear shows a young man kissed in almost every part of his body by the infatuated young girls in the ladies toilet. These are only some of the examples prevalent in our media these days. The depiction of women in these and other advertisement is actually insult to the women in general but we are used to enjoy them with little concern about the female respect and dignity, which used to be the salient feature of our ancient tradition. The advertisements in the hoardings, posters and wall writings etc. are no less offending. Advertisements have female body to sell underwear of men.

Advertising seems to be obsessed with gender and sexuality e.g. the Amul Underwear advertisement relates to man, woman and underwear. In this advertisement, a woman flourishes a pair of briefs and then washes the said garment. This ad shows exciting bosom heaves and finger wags where the woman is shown imagining about the man and his body parts. This advertisement created ripples and evoked strong responses from women’s groups; since it ‘showcased’ woman to sell a product used by men in a ‘cheap’ way. Similar other examples are advertisements of VIP Frenchie, McDowell’s. Advertising thrives on commodification of women and by reinforcing age-old stereotypes. The process of commodification in advertising brings out the paradoxical nature of the woman’s role as a consumer; she is the subject of a transaction in which her own commodification is ultimately the object. Advertising frequently commodifies women by exploiting their sexuality or by fragmenting the female body into eroticized zones such as hair, face, legs, breasts etc. Thus, in the exchange between the commodity and ‘woman’ in advertisements, a woman becomes a commodity, too.

Women are portrayed as sex objects who are probably caste to titillate the viewers by exposing their body parts. Women are shown wearing revealing clothes and take leaning and yearning postures – signs of incompleteness or lack of security. Women and their body parts sell everything- food, clothing, cars, computers, men’s shaving lotions and underwear. Even in commercials of the products consumed mostly by men alcohol, tobacco, cigarettes, briefs; women are used as models exposing their bodies.

Glamour dolls in front of cameras and ace photographers do the same behind the lenses, trapping thousands of teenagers believe in the miracle of the product.

Majority advertisements featuring children show boys in diverse, challenging and macho roles while girls are portrayed in a more stereotyped and objectified manner.

Citing the *Daag Achae Hail* campaign for Surf Excel, a detergent brand from Hindustan Unilever, she said that all their advertisements featured little boys in different roles, one as a protector – brother beats up a mud puddle to make his sister laugh, another as crusader, and yet another as a well-intentioned individual who gets into a mock fight to break up another. “Majority feature boys as dirty, naughty, rowdy, intelligent, cute or with celebrities making them appear even more desirable to parents,” she said, pointing out that when you do see two children in ads, it’s usually a boy and girl or two

boys and rarely is a family with two girls spotted. But in a recent ad of Home loan of a bank the girl is used to show single inheritor of the family. Yes this is a ground breaking change in advertisements but today people are interested in one child and they would be happy if the child is girl. The advertisements are just adopting prevalent ideologies and beliefs of the society and do not subverting them either way. The children, who are cunning and mischievous, are shown as intelligent, "G means Genius" caption of Parle- G biscuit and other advertisements.

There are a few new representations. Now we should agree that women are not just being projected as mothers at home but are being projected as successful working women out side of the home. So while the woman is now out of the home, she still lives within her skin. Anxieties have shifted from performing within the home to appearing outside, drawing attention to the growing number of ads that featured the "body as a traitor" by highlighting problems such as dandruff and body odor. Women who have long hair, fair skin and long lasting charm on her face (she has that charm just by using particular brand of cream, soap, body lotion or any cosmetics and not by yoga or by having a good life style.) So even after coming out of the four walls of the house she could not come out of her body, which must be beautiful in terms of stereotypical norms of fair is beautiful. Very unrealistic goals for ideal body shape. Make women that they are valued due to their body and therefore their self esteem is also based on how they look. Give messages to women that by changing their appearance they can get a better life.

The idea of stealing the consumers love for self and selling it back, as a product is "purely a market development strategy," Also, traditional roles had been upgraded, and it was not surprising to see the detergent mom being replaced by a washing machine mom, empowered by technology. Portrayal of the stereotypical near-nude female model as a sex image will continue to be featured where they've always been the most effective, in ads for men's products and services

Even when a man is not a perfect physical specimen, they are still showed as macho and lusty beings that are more often than not in control. That is unless it is the depiction of a whipped husband who is being dominated by his shrieky wife and looked down upon by his bratty children. That scenario is another stereotype. Men are either strong manly leaders, or are seen as wimpy undeserving fools. Where are the real men? The kind who we are married to and we love?

Commercials with children portray little girls as delicate creatures who need to be treated as princesses who will turn into future sexual objects. They are cute and sweet and all are pretty. They usually talk non stop and act silly. They are often dressed in miniature adult clothes that are often inappropriate for the age group. And we wonder why our girls are growing up so fast, they are bombarded with the wrong messages on how a female of any age should act and be.

Boys are treated in advertising as superior beings, who are not afraid of anything and they are played by boys of all shapes, sizes, looks, and personalities. A boy in the Lion Dates ad says "I want to have strength

of a lion" and not a girl. Even in 21st century in the ads of jewels the theme of marriage is so often used. One jewelry ad goes like this the father is talking with his daughter about her marriage and they are traveling in a car and she is with her mother. The wife asks her husband to stop the car and they enter a jewelry shop and the girl is attracted by the jewels in the shop and trials them. The mother says that she could not buy them because those jewels for marriage ceremony, she agrees to get marry. Are women such fools that they could push away all their plans and get marry just for jewels? And are our mothers so immature to show greed of jewels to their daughters to get them marry?

There are some advertisements in which male and female roles are reversed without actually focusing specifically on the issue of gender, but simply used as a way to reflect a more realistic viewpoint for most people. Men aren't at all stupid, sex-craved jerks; and they often cook delicious meals at the barbeque barely ever burning the food or blowing the whole grill heavenward; women are not all perfect size zeros with that devil-may-care attitude and cunning evasiveness as they are represented by the vast advertisers. Popular tactic uses explicit sexual images in advertising, even when the sexual image has little relevance to the advertised product. Men are having positive attitudes toward casual and recreational sex, whereas women value the emotional intimacy and commitment that can surround the sexual relationship.

"Contemporary 'advertising teaches us to consume, not the product, but its sign. What it stands for is more important than what it is. Advertising depicts woman as superwomen who manage multiple roles of wife, mother, and career woman and so on, and be glamorous as well. In advertisements of Whirlpool, Knorr Soups one observes the perfect multi tasking done by the modern women who take care of the domestic responsibilities and aspire to fulfill their professional commitments with great perfection and ease. Such depictions exhibit these women excelling in their professional commitments, meeting deadlines and achieving success. Do such characters create any pressure on women who often have to juggle to attend to their domestic responsibilities besides fulfilling their professional commitments? Do such advertisements project that it is very convenient to meet the demands of the two worlds without any physical, mental or emotional burden?

Advertisements that project women as working in and outside the house with contentment, raise expectations from a common woman? One also observes of the media promoting an obsession for having fair, un-tanned, glowing skin among women. 'Seeing is believing' claimed the Fair and Lovely soap. Should all women have a fair skin in order to be worthwhile? Are not the persons having other shades in their skin color unique in themselves? Don't many innocent girls get cheated with claims as these made by the advertisers? Million of vulnerable girls and women as a result of these advertisements often become obsessed with beauty and are seen spending hours on end to improve their appearances seeking every available cosmetic aid to catch the attention of men. Now Emami Fair and Handsome for men, Fairever seems to have caught the eyes of many men as well.

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