

Running head: EFFECTS OF ADVERTISEMENTS ON PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Effects of Advertisements on Perceptions of Women's Leadership

Jennifer George and Michelle Uhlenbrock

Hanover College

PSY 401: Advanced Research Design

Winter 2010

Abstract

This study was designed to determine whether magazine advertisements in high fashion and beauty magazines affect people's perception of women's abilities in leadership positions. Participants answered a set of questions from the Gender Authority Measure (GAM) Questionnaire, which was followed by a series of ten advertisements from one of the following categories: sexualized, heroin chic, doll-like/artificial, neutral, or athletic. Upon completion of viewing the ads, the participants answered a second set of questions from the GAM. The researchers expected to find that after viewing advertisements from the sexualized, heroin chic, and doll-like/artificial category, participants would have a more negative view of women's abilities in leadership roles. Although no significant changes were found over time for any of the conditions, there is still reason to be concerned about this issue because popular high fashion and beauty magazines reach a large number of women each year.

Effects of Advertisements on Perceptions of Women's Leadership

Advertisements in beauty and high fashion magazines typically portray women in a negative light. Rarely can one open the pages of a popular magazine for women and see women in empowering advertisements or advertisements focused on boosting women's self-esteem. Instead, they see pictures of women who are depicted as sexual objects and dolls; have emaciated figures; and are overshadowed by men. Viewing these magazine advertisements can cause people to think negatively about a woman's capabilities. This can affect how people view women in leadership positions and perceive their abilities. Women already face a "glass ceiling" when rising to the top positions of a company (Morrison, White & Van Velsor, 1987). In a world where women are competing with men for prestigious jobs, stereotypical media advertisements do not help women excel in the workplace.

Gender Advertisements

In general, media advertising relies on and reinforces cultural stereotypes of women. For example, it is very typical to see women portrayed in television advertisements as cleaning, cooking, caring for children, or catering to a man (Coltraine & Messineo, 2000). In addition, women are frequently portrayed in a very sexual manner in magazine advertisements (Coltraine & Messineo, 2000). In 2009, Reebok released an advertisement for tennis shoes that features close up views of women's buttocks. Their most frequently seen advertisement shows a picture of the bottom half of a naked woman with a pair of tennis shoes in front of her. The slogan for the ad is, "Nice booty, great sole." This is just one example of many advertisements that use women's sexuality to sell products that have nothing to do with sex. The problem with these types of advertisements is that they cause women to be viewed in a very non-agentic way.

Past studies have shown that when primed with sexualized advertisements, men are more likely to view women in roles that are more traditional. Rudman and Borgida (1995) conducted a study in which men were primed with either sexist advertisements or non-sexist advertisements. Advertisements

were pre-tested by forty undergraduate students to determine if they were sexist or non-sexist ads. The undergraduates rated the women in the sexist ads as less intelligent, less powerful, less agentic, and less autonomous. After the participants were primed with either sexist advertisements or non-sexist advertisements they viewed a list containing sexist and non-sexist words. The men who viewed the sexist ads were quicker in recognizing the sexist words than the men who viewed the non-sexists words. These men were also more likely to think of women as sexual objects. The findings of this study suggest that viewing sexist advertisements have a negative effect on people's opinions of women. In another study done by Geis, Brown, Jennings and Porter (1984), female participants were asked to view either traditional sex-stereotyped commercials (i.e. the woman depicted as the "homemaker" and the man as the "bread winner") or role-reversed commercials (i.e. the man is the "homemaker" and the woman is the "bread winner"). This study found that the women who viewed sex-stereotyped commercials were more likely to deemphasize achievement and emphasize homemaking in their essays than women who viewed the exact same commercial with the male and female roles switched. Both of these studies suggest that advertisements that portray women in traditional, non-agentic roles have the potential to negatively affect women's advancement into leadership positions.

Erving Goffman's (1976) research on gender advertisements aids in educating about the different ways that the media reinforces the common stereotypes of women. Goffman outlined six visual cues for power that tend to be in favor of male dominance. The first of these cues is *relative size*, which suggests that the larger person in the photo is more important or influential. Similar to this cue is the *ritualization of subordination*, in which women are prostrated in such a way that they are physically lower than men are. *Feminine touch* shows the passiveness of women, because they do not forcefully grasp an object, but caress it. In advertising, men are typically depicted as in a supervisory role over women in the workplace, having a higher *function ranking*. Women are also portrayed as more involved in the family, whereas men seem more withdrawn and stand at a distance from the rest of the family.

Whereas men are depicted as withdrawn from the family, women are depicted as withdrawn from social situations. They are often looking around at the scenery and not engaged in the happenings around them. These six power cues, along with many others, provide audiences with a quick common understanding of how gender is viewed in society. They create stereotypes for both women and men, as well as indicate what types of statuses they should have.

Previous research suggests that a major consequence of traditional, sexist advertising is that women are seen as the inferior sex. These advertisements cause women to be stereotyped as weak, passive and subordinate to men. Such negative stereotypes of women carry over into the workplace and create beliefs about women in leadership roles. We will now turn to research on how such stereotypes affect opinions of women in leadership positions.

Gender and Leadership

Much research on leadership look at how gender affects how people perform in leadership positions. Many studies have focused on women in leadership positions and how they perform in these positions compared to how men perform. Eagly and Karau (1995) completed a meta-analysis researching how gender can cause a differentiation in the effectiveness of a leader. They found that men were more effective than women in leadership roles that required the ability to direct and control people. They also found that women were more effective than men in roles that required the ability to cooperate and get along with others. Therefore, women and men are considered to perform better in positions that are related to stereotypes about each gender. Media advertising reflects these stereotypes because women are rarely portrayed in advertising doing masculine jobs. Women are most commonly portrayed in feminine ways such as being with the family, cooking dinner, or trying on makeup and clothing. Media advertising reflecting these stereotypes could further hinder women's ability to climb the corporate ladder. In addition, advertising could negatively affect how people view

women's performance in leadership positions because they are enforcing the gender stereotypes previously mentioned.

Few women are found in high positions of a company. Women account for 49.7% of all workers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010), but only constitute 6.2% of corporate America's most highly paid executives in Fortune 500 companies, and only 2 % of CEOs (Catalyst, 2008). As previously mentioned, gender stereotypes can hinder a woman's success in occupations that require stereotypically masculine traits. For example, according to research done by Eagly and Karau (2002), many women hold supervisory positions or positions in middle management, but are underrepresented in top executive positions or elite leadership. Because women are stereotyped as more passive and less authoritative, they are not typically considered for these types of positions. However, Heilman (2001) found that if women possess the qualities that are considered masculine such as independence, forcefulness, decisiveness, and aggressiveness and are successful in the workplace, they might be labeled as bitter, cold, or an ice queen. Therefore, women are underrepresented in high-status jobs due to stereotypes and due to women not being accepted if they have masculine characteristics. If women are being labeled as bitter and cold for being independent and aggressive, this may deter them from expressing these qualities at work, causing them to be less successful. In addition, Rudman and Kilianski (2000) speculate that women who occupy male-dominated leadership positions may be disliked because they violate expectancies that men occupy powerful roles. There is a stronger association between men and authority than there is with women and authority so women may be disliked for being in leader positions that men are expected to be in. This suggests that even if a woman successfully performs in stereotypically masculine settings, she is penalized for not fitting the traditional woman's role. This means a woman can only be successful in a role that is considered to not have masculine characteristics, otherwise she will be penalized.

Past research has suggested that exposure to the media has limited society's idea of where women should be most successful (Signorielli, 1989). In television shows, married women are less likely than men to hold a job outside of the home; however, they are more likely to be a member of the workforce if they are single or divorced. Signorielli's work found that people who watched television were more likely to have sexist views of women than those who did not. This means that mass media can restrict what occupations women should be in by suggesting they should be spending time with their family instead. Those who are exposed to more media have more similar views and outlooks in regards to women's role in society. They typically believe women should focus on their role in the home and have a more limited involvement in matters outside of the home and family.

Since the dawn of the women's rights movement, women have been pushing for equal rights and equal representation in the workplace. Today's women are constantly bombarded with negative media images that portray women in negative ways. Advertisements that portray women as sex objects, dolls, or in a heroin chic fashion are examples of ads that portray women negatively. If these negative images are having an impact, women could embody these and feel as if they are not competent enough to be in the workplace. Society could also look at these images and because of the negative ways in which women are portrayed, believe that women are not able to perform as well as men in elite leadership positions. Because these advertisements have the potential to hold women back from climbing the corporate ladder, we are interested in studying how they affect women's perceived abilities in leadership positions. Not all advertisements in magazines have a negative connotation. A popular type of magazine advertisement that portrays women in a more positive light is athletic advertisements. These advertisements show women participating in a sport or have them posed in an athletic stance. This type of magazine advertisement could be a result of trying to show women as powerful and equal, causing women to feel empowered.

We are interested in studying how magazine advertisements, specifically advertisements in women's fashion and beauty magazines, affect the perceived abilities of women in leadership roles. We feel beauty and high fashion magazines have an impact on women because they reach so many women. Five of the most popular high fashion and beauty magazines (*Cosmopolitan*, *In Style*, *Vogue*, *Women's Health*, and *Glamour*) reach over ten million women each year (Magazine Publishers of America, 2008) This is a lot of women who are viewing these magazines and the advertisements in them. We feel most of the advertisements in these magazines portray women negatively and could potentially affect how competent people think women are in leadership positions. We expected to find that both men and women who view the advertisements that depict women as sex objects, dolls, or in a heroin chic manner will have more negative attitudes towards women in leadership positions than those participants who view neutral or athletic ads. To test this hypothesis, 272 participants completed a pretest measure of attitudes toward women in authority positions, viewed a set of 10 negative, neutral, or athletic advertisements, and then completed a posttest measure of attitudes toward women in authority positions.

Method

Participants

This study included 272 participants (48 males, 220 females, and 4 who did not indicate their gender), ages 18-62. The average age of participants was 25. Eighty-eight percent of the participants in this study identified themselves as Caucasian. The remaining twelve percent identified themselves as some type of racial minority (African-American, Hispanic, Asian and Middle-eastern). Participants responded to an advertisement for a study on advertising that was posted on a website for online psychology studies (<http://psych.hanover.edu/Research/exponnet.html>). Because our study was advertised on the web, participants were not limited to Hanover College students.

Materials

The materials used for this study were 50 magazine advertisements, non-randomly selected from women's beauty and high fashion magazines. The magazines that were used include *Cosmopolitan*, *In Style*, *Vogue*, *Women's Health*, and *Glamour*. These magazines were chosen based on their circulation numbers, reaching an average of ten million consumers per year (Magazine Publishers of America, 2008). After selecting the advertisements, we separated them into five categories that we found to be most prevalent. We named these five categories based on what we saw in the advertising: artificial, sexualized, heroin chic, neutral, and athletic.

The *artificial* category includes ads that portray women as doll-like, mannequins, unreal or puppets. The *sexualized* category includes ads that sexually objectify women. Many of the women depicted in these advertisements are posing in a very sexual manner or have little to no clothing on. *Heroin chic* advertisements surfaced in the 1980's with the rise of heroin usage and its glamorous portrayal in the media (Durrant & Thakker, 2003). Since then, these types of advertisements have become increasingly popular. They are characterized by women with pale skin, dark circles underneath their eyes and jutting bones. In addition, these types of advertisements promote emaciated figures and depict androgynous women. *Neutral* advertisements depict women in neutral poses and serve as our control group. They do not fit into any of the previous categories described, nor do they display women in particularly powerful situations (i.e. women as executives or doctors). *Cover Girl* ads and *Aveeno* ads are examples of advertisements from this category. They both depicted the faces of smiling women, who were not posing in any particular manner. We used this group of ads as our control group to make sure that simply viewing women in magazine advertisements does not affect people's scores on the GAM. The final category of ads, the *athletic* category, consists of women engaged in some type of athletic activity.

Upon selecting the advertisements and placing them into categories, we scanned the magazine images into a computer and edited them using Adobe Photoshop. All of the words or product information that was on an advertisement was blurred out. We did not want participants to make associations with the brands or campaigns for the different products. We did not want feelings associated with products to be brought into the study because they could potentially affect the way participants were feeling and have an effect on their responses in the questionnaire.

In order to measure the perception of women in leadership positions, we administered the Gender Authority Measure Questionnaire developed by Rudman and Kilianski (2000). This questionnaire requires participants to read a series of statements and rate on a 1-5 Likert scale how much they agree or disagree with them. We changed the scale from 1-5 to 1-6 so that participants could not pick a neutral number (3). They either had to agree or disagree with each statement. A score of one indicated the participant disagreed with the statement and a score of 6 indicated the participant strongly agreed with the statement. Higher scores on the GAM indicate that a person has a greater preference for men than for women in high-status jobs. An example statement is: "If I were in serious legal trouble, I would prefer a male to a female lawyer." We added three questions of our own to the GAM so that participants had more questions to answer. An example of a question we added is "If I were working for a large company, I would prefer the CEO of the company be a man." The GAM was split into pre and post measures to increase the statistical power of our study.

Procedure

Participants gave their consent online before beginning the study. Participants were informed that it is an anonymous questionnaire and their identity would not be known by the researchers or anyone else. Once giving consent, participants were randomly assigned to one of the five categories of advertisements. Participants were asked the same questions in all five conditions. Participants first answered nine of the eighteen questions from the Gender Authority Measure questionnaire. After

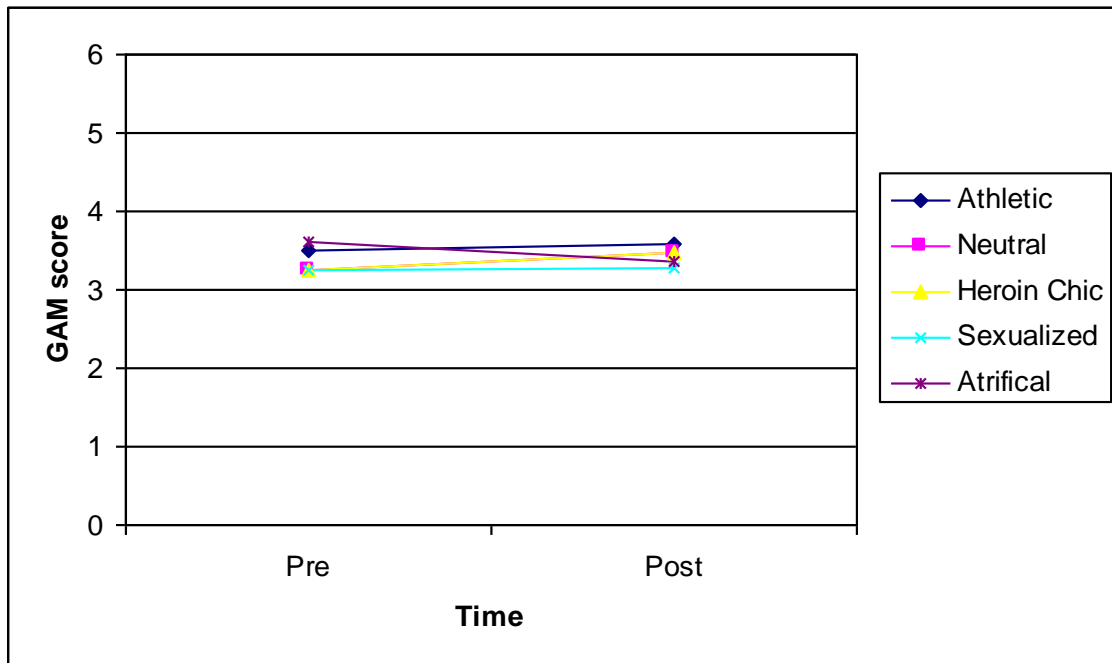
answering these questions, participants viewed ten advertisements from the condition chosen for them. While viewing each advertisement, the participant had to answer a question or give a response about each advertisement, such as: "Use three words to describe this advertisement," "How effective is this advertisement?" "What emotions does this advertisement make you feel?" "What product do you think this is advertising?" Participants were asked to respond to each ad to ensure the participants took a sufficient amount of time to view the ad and take it in. This data was not used in our analysis. Once the participant had viewed all of the advertisements, they completed the second half of the GAM Questions. Lastly, the participants completed demographic questions and viewed a debriefing page.

Results

Participant's attitudes towards women in leadership positions were measured pre and post viewing the ads using the Gender Authority Measure questionnaire. The pre-test questionnaire had a reliability of $\alpha = .85$ and the post-test questionnaire had a reliability of $\alpha = .7$. These high alphas indicate that the items on the questionnaire were highly related to each other.

A mixed ANOVA was run between condition and time on GAM scores. The results indicated that there was no significant interaction between condition and time, $F(4,259) = 1.786, p = 0.132$. This means that there was little change in people's responses from pre to post in all of the conditions. There was also no significant main effect of gender on the GAM scores. As can be seen in *Figure 1*, the participant's scores changed very little from pre to post. The largest difference in pre to post scores was in the heroin chic category. Participant's scores in this category went up .2 from pre to post. This was the largest difference and this in the scheme of things is a very small change. Scores being higher in the post test for the negative categories do support our hypothesis but the change was so small that it was not significant.

Figure 1. Effects of magazine advertisements on Gender Authority Measure scores.



Discussion

Our hypothesis stated that participants who viewed one of the three negative categories of advertisements (heroin chic, sexualized, artificial) would have higher scores at post-test than at pre-test on the Gender Authority Measure questionnaire compared to those who viewed the neutral or athletic advertisements. This hypothesis was not supported by the results we obtained from our data. This indicates that there is little to no short-term effect of viewing sexualized, artificial, and heroin chic advertisements on people’s perceptions of women in leadership positions.

One possible reason for the lack of effect might be that participants are already desensitized to these types of advertisements, so that one more exposure to familiar types of advertisements has little effect. Showing these types of advertisements in a study could have elicited the opposite reaction we were testing for by bringing them to their immediate attention. By exposing participants to ads they are already familiar with, we may have brought these ads to their attention, causing them to examine them

more closely for flaws or negative features. Upon examining the advertisements, they may begin to realize that they are sexist, and feel more positively towards women in leadership positions.

Previous research in this area has studied the effects of television advertisements on the achievement aspirations of women (Geis, Brown, Jennings & Porter, 1984). It was found that women who viewed sex-stereotyped commercials were more likely to deemphasize achievement and emphasize homemaking whereas women who viewed the same commercial with the male and female roles switched were not. This study supports our hypothesis by showing that advertisements can have a negative effect on the perceived abilities of women's achievement. This study found significant results that support our hypothesis but we did not. This may have happened because their method of measuring attitudes was very different than ours. They measured attitudes by having the participants write essays about their life in ten years. Their measurement was more projective than ours and more flexible since participants could write down and express whatever they wanted to while in our study participants had to pick from a set of predetermined responses. The participants may also have been editing their responses in our study if they had figured out what we were studying.

One possible limitation of our study is that many of our advertisements could fall into more than one category. For example, some of our athletic advertisements could have been viewed as sexualized, however, we did the best we could to pick advertisements that could be easily classified. We could have tried to select ads that fit more exclusively into each category, but we felt that such exclusively categorized ads were so rare and so extreme that they did not represent the typical ads that a person would come across during everyday life. These negative magazine advertisements may also be affecting women in other negative ways that we did not measure. It may make women feel less competent about their own abilities in a high-status position. These negative images may also affect other attitudes people hold about women such as having an effect on traditional attitudes towards women. Another limitation of our study is that participants were shown a limited number of advertisements for a short

amount of time. Participants only viewed ten advertisements and this smaller number of ads may be some of the reason that no effect was found.

Short-term exposure to negative advertisements did not have a significant effect on how people perceive women in leadership roles in our study; however, there is still reason to be concerned with long-term exposure to these types of advertisements. Long-term effects may be caused by prolonged exposure to advertisements that portray women in a degrading light. In life, women who read these magazines usually read one each month and view many ads in each magazine. Women who regularly read these high fashion and beauty magazines will have a very high exposure to advertisements over their lifetime. After being repeatedly exposed to these types of advertisements over a long period of time, attitudes may be influenced. For example, we fear that viewing sexualized advertisements over a long period of time may have an effect on objectifying women.

We suggest that future research focus on repeating our study as a longitudinal study to determine whether these magazines are affecting people's perceptions of women in leadership positions over a longer period of time. We also suggest that future researchers use different methods of measuring attitudes. While the Gender Authority Measure Questionnaire was a reliable measurement for our study, it may be interesting to see how people respond when given a chance to express their opinions in an essay or short answer questions. Participants may be able to express their perceptions of women in leadership positions better through open ended questions where they are not limited in their responses. It would also benefit future researchers to create more strict selection criteria in order to avoid overlap in categories. Finally, using different types of media such as television advertisements, movies and music in addition to magazine advertisements might be an interesting avenue to explore.

Conclusion

In summary, although our results did not support our hypothesis that short-term exposure to negative portrayals of women in advertisements leads to more negative attitudes toward women in

leadership positions, we feel that this is still an important area to continue researching. The women's magazines we used in our study were read by over ten million women in 2008 (Magazine Publishers of America, 2008). There is reason to be concerned because many of these readers are young consumers. Many of the advertisements in these magazines serve as templates for how young women are to look, act and function in society. How can we expect them to succeed and be taken seriously in an ever-changing world when they are constantly bombarded with sexist media?

References

- Catalyst. (2008). *Census of women corporate officers and top earners*. New York: Catalyst. Retrieved April 13, 2010 from http://www.catalyst.org/file/241/08_census_cote_jan.pdf
- Coltraine, S., & Messineo, M. (2000). The perpetuation of subtle prejudice: Race and gender imagery in 1990s television advertising. *Sex Roles, 42*(5), 363-389.
- Davies, P., Spencer, S., Quinn, D., & Gerhardstein, R. (2002). Consuming images: How television commercials that elicit stereotype threat can restrain women academically and professionally. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 28*(12), 1615-1628.
- Durrant, R., Thakker, J. (2003). *Substance use & abuse: Cultural and historical perspectives*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Eagly, A., & Karau, S. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review, 109*(3), 573-598.
- Eagly, A., Karau, S., & Makhijani, M. (1995). Gender and the effectiveness of leaders: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin, 117*(1), 125-145.
- Geis, F. L., Brown, V., Jennings, J., & Porter, N. (1984). TV commercials as achievement scripts for women. *Sex Roles, 10*, 513-525.
- Goffman, E. (1976). *Gender advertisements*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Heilman, M. (2001). Description and prescription: How gender stereotypes prevent women's ascent up the organizational ladder. *Journal of Social Issues, 57*(4), 657-674.
- Magazine Publishers of America, 2008. *Average Total Paid & Verified Circulation for Top 100 ABC Magazines*. Retrieved March 23, 2010 from http://www.magazine.org/CONSUMER_MARKETING/CIRC_TRENDS/ABC2008TOTALrank.aspx.
- Morrison, A. M., White, R. P., & Van Velsor, E. (1987). *Breaking the glass ceiling: Can women reach the*

top of America's largest corporations? Reading, MA: Addison–Wesley.

Rudman, L., & Borgida, E. (1995). The afterglow of construct accessibility: The behavioral consequences of priming men to view women as sexual objects. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 31(6), 493-517.

Rudman, L., & Kilianski, S. (2000). Implicit and explicit attitudes toward female authority. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 26(11), 1315-1328.

Signorielli, N. (1989). Television and conceptions about sex roles: Maintaining conventionality and the status quo. *Sex Roles*, 21(5), 341-360.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010). *News: The employment situation: March 2010*. Retrieved April 18, 2010 from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf>