

AN ANALYSIS OF MALE ROLES IN PRINT ADVERTISEMENTS
OVER A 20-YEAR SPAN: 1958-1978

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Abstract

Much attention has been directed by researchers at the roles portrayed by women in advertisements, whereas the roles portrayed by men have been all but ignored since 1958. The present study examined the roles portrayed by men in magazine advertisements over the last 20 years and found significant shifts in the working and nonworking roles portrayed by male models.

Introduction

Reflection theorists contend that literature reflects the societal norms and values and that changes in literature over time indicate external changes in society (cf. Geise 1979; Kassarjian 1977). Similarly, Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976) argued that advertising may carry and support the values and belief systems of a society, but it seldom seeks to change those systems. However, Belkaoui and Belkaoui's (1976) own analysis of the roles in which women were portrayed in magazine advertisements of 1958, 1970, and 1972 indicated that mass media advertising has not managed to keep up with the changes in women's roles in society. Other investigators have likewise complained that the roles in which women have been portrayed in television commercials and magazine advertisements are neither flattering nor representative (Courtney & Lockeretz 1971; Courtney & Whipple 1974; Drew & Miller 1977; McNeil 1975; Pingree 1978; Vernon 1975).

It is noteworthy, though, that the standard used by Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976) to evaluate any progress in the portrayal of women's roles was based on the roles of males as they appeared in magazine advertisements of 1958. Curiously, it appears that no systematic analysis of the roles portrayed by males in magazine advertisements beyond 1958 has been reported. The interest in male role-typing has understandably not been high among consumer behavior researchers given the concern for women's rights in recent years. However, if advertisers are to be judged by how they portray women, they should also be judged by how they portray men. More importantly, if the evaluation of the "progress" in the portrayal of women's roles is to be based on the role portrayals of men, then it would seem to be in the interest of accuracy to use comparison data that is not 20 years old.

The purpose of the present study is not to turn research attention away from the study of female role-typing, but to fill an embarrassing void in the study of male role-typing by analyzing male role portrayals in magazine advertisements for the years 1958, 1968, and 1978. The results of such an analysis should readily lend themselves to a more credible comparative examination of male v. female roles in advertisements as well as an investigation of male role changes over time.

Many critical events have occurred since 1958, and their predicted effects on male role portrayals seem somewhat obvious. For instance, due to such events as Vietnam, Watergate, race riots, consumerism, women's movements, and the oil crisis, it was predicted that the subsequent increased negativism toward the military, big business, and the "Archie Bunker" type male would be reflected by

decreased portrayals of males in these roles by advertisers. Also, the working man today is allowed to enjoy life and pursue pleasure without feeling guilty (Engel, Blackwell, & Kollat 1978). Thus, it was predicted that the portrayal of males in working roles would show a decrease since 1958, accompanied by an increase in the portrayal of males in nonworking roles. Finally, with the increased number of wives working outside the home it was predicted that, over time, males would more likely be shown in family and home roles.

Method

The procedures followed in the present study were purposely designed to closely reflect the procedures of Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976). The advertisements published in 1968 and 1978 from the following eight general interest magazines were analyzed: Life, Look, Newsweek, The New Yorker, Reader's Digest, Saturday Review, Time, and U.S. News and World Report.¹ Belkaoui and Belkaoui analyzed male roles portrayed in magazine issues coming from the second week of January 1958. In the present study, however, four issues of each magazine per year were examined. Those issues came from the weeks of January 12, April 8, July 20, and October 13. All advertisements containing at least one male model were included in the study.

Role Categorization

Following Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976), each male model's role was classified as either working or nonworking. Working roles were further subdivided into seven categories: high level business (e.g., executives, officers, directors, and top level management), professional (e.g., doctors, lawyers, CPA's), sports and entertainment (e.g., professional athletes, musicians), military, middle level business, public service (e.g., firemen, policemen), and blue collar (e.g., construction workers, cooks, and truckers). Nonworking roles were subdivided into family, recreational, and decorative roles.

Results

Table 1 exhibits the data from the present study for the years 1968 and 1978 along with the 1958 data reported by Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976). Chi Square analyses were performed on the data.

It was found that the portrayal of men in nonworking roles increased significantly since 1958 (42.38% in 1958, 57.29% in 1968, and 54.07% in 1978; $X^2(2) = 15.14, p < .05$), while the percentage of male models portrayed in working roles has decreased from a high of 57.66% in 1958 to 45.93% in 1978.

¹Life and Look were not examined in 1978. The Life and Look data of 1968 were not deleted because the exclusion of the data did not significantly change the results of the analyses.

TABLE 1
ROLES PORTRAYED BY MALES IN MAGAZINE ADS

	1958	1968	1978
Working Roles	57.66	42.71	45.93
High Level Business	17.90	18.24	7.85
Professional	3.00	14.86	7.27
Entertainment/Sports	7.20	20.96	27.33
Military	14.80	2.70	9.88
Middle Level Business	28.20	26.69	24.13
Public Service	3.10	0.68	2.62
Blue Collar	25.80	15.88	20.93
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00
Base n	128.00	296.00	344.00
Nonworking Roles	42.34	57.29	54.07
Family	24.47	18.39	20.25
Recreational	48.94	31.23	25.93
Decorative	26.60	50.38	53.83
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00
Base n	94.00	397.00	405.00

Note: The 1958 data were extracted from Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976). The entries in this table are column percentages.

Working Role Portrayals

The working roles portrayed by men from 1958 to 1978 have changed significantly, $X^2(12) = 78.35, p < .05$. For example, portrayals in high level business roles have generally decreased, portrayals in professional roles increased from 1958 to 1968 but dropped to 7.2% in 1978, sports and entertainment roles have been climbing to slightly less than 30% in 1978, military roles dropped to less than 3% in 1968 but have since risen to almost 10% in 1978, public service roles have remained below 5%, and blue collar worker roles have hovered around 15 to 25%.

Nonworking Role Portrayals

The nonworking roles portrayed by men have also shifted significantly over the past 20 years, $X^2(4) = 26.27, p < .05$. Men have been increasingly depicted in decorative roles primarily at the expense of recreational role portrayals. Portrayals in family roles, however, have not changed significantly over the 20-year span.

Discussion

The data indicate that the portrayal of men in magazine advertisements has changed since the standard data points provided by Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976). The changes that have occurred seem reflective of the changing times. For instance, the traditional emphasis on the working male shows signs of weakening. Over half of the roles sampled in 1978 magazine advertisements portrayed men in nonworking roles. Conversely, Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976) reported that women have been increasingly portrayed in working roles from 1958 to 1972, though the percentage for 1972 was still less than 25%.

The portrayal of persons in decorative (e.g., "sex-object") roles is no longer restricted to female models. As of 1978, over half of the nonworking roles portrayed by men were in the decorative area, a percentage comparable to that reported for female models by Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976).

Portrayals of men in high level business roles have de-

creased to about 8% in 1978, while entertainment/sports and military roles have shown recent increases to about 27% and 10%, respectively. The shifts in military role portrayals seem especially reflective of the times. For example, the low of 2.7% which occurred in 1968 could easily have been due to the anti-military attitudes predominate in the Vietnam years. Ten years later, the military apparently regained enough of its lost popularity that advertisers were somewhat more willing to portray men in military roles. Likewise the blue collar role portrayals follow a pattern similar to that of the military role portrayals. This correspondence might have been expected from the "love it or leave it" pro-military attitudes typically attributed to blue collars.

No significant changes appeared in the middle level business role portrayals, perhaps because this role is relatively noncontroversial and less susceptible to societal changes.

Interestingly, little change in family role portrayals was observed. With a greater than ever percentage of wives working outside the home, an increase in the portrayal of men in family roles was expected. It may well be, however, that men with working wives have not increased their family role activities. If so, the results for family role portrayals may simply reflect reality.

Overall, the data in the present study fill an important gap in the analysis of sex-role portrayals by providing updated standards on which to examine the roles of men and women in advertisements. The data generally indicate that the male role portrayals in magazine advertisements have changed with the times, perhaps not as fast as other societal changes, but certainly in pace with the female role portrayal shifts reported by Belkaoui and Belkaoui (1976).

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