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by

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The Influence of Gender Schema on the Perception of Advertising

Schemas are used to organize knowledge about a stimulus or concept. They help to show what information should be notice or ignored, interpret between long-term memory and the current stimulus, and aid in efficiently storing information. Individuals' responses to decisions are guided by schemas. The process of eleviating cognitive dissonance between reality and existing schemas serves as their motivation (Ruble & Stangor, 1986).

Schemas are able to shape an individual's perceptions, and therefore, even their self-concepts (Bem, 1981). "The readiness with which an individual invokes one schema rather than another is referred to as the cognitive availability of the schema" (Bem, 1981). Individuals who are sex-typed are thought to use gender-based schematic processing. Gender schematic processing infers that information is processed based on sex-linked associations.

Sex-typed individual's behavior is, therefore, controlled by society's approved behavior of men and women. Schema theory relates to process, not content. These sex-typed individuals process information based on the two dichotomous variables, masculinity and femininity, which are on opposite ends of one continuum. Non sex-typed individuals can score high on masculine
and feminine without any conflict because they are two different scales (Bem, 1981). In 1974, the researcher developed the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) to demonstrate how masculinity and femininity were not dichotomous but instead separate scales (Bem, 1974). This scale was then adapted to measure sex-typing.

If sex-typed individuals organize their behavior according to gender schema, Bem (1981) hypothesized that they would show more clustering of gender-relevant items in free recall than non sex-typed individuals. The BSRI was administered to 48 male and 48 female subjects at Stanford University. The subjects were then shown 16 proper names (one-half female, one-half male), 15 animals, 15 verbs, and 15 articles of clothing. The animals names, verbs, and articles of clothing were equally distributed as masculine, feminine, and neutral as determined in a previous study. When asked to recall the items, it was found that sex-typed males had more gender clustering within categories; sex-typed females showed more gender clustering across different categories.

In order to show that self-concepts are assimilated into gender schemas, Bem (1981) had subjects respond to the 60 attributes of the BSRI. The attributes were flashed on a screen, then the subjects either pushed a "me" or a "not me" button. Response latency was recorded
for each item. The response latency differences showed that sex-typed subjects were significantly faster in making schema consistent judgments about themselves and slower in making schema-inconsistent judgments. Bem sees this as support for the gender schema theory because the sex-typed subjects were more ready to encode schema consistent information about themselves. Gender schema to Bem is very limiting and, she suggests that the goal of our society is not to be androgynous, but schematic. This would limit processing based on such a restrictive dichotomy (Bem, 1981).

Self-concepts can also be influenced by advertisements. There is a distinction in advertisements, as in society, emphasizing the difference between men and women’s behavior. The National Advertising Review Board says advertisements may, “tend to sell supplemental images as well, which may contribute to the maintenance of some undesirable aspects of the status quo in our society” (Whipple & Courtney, 1980, p. 53). Sexism is one form of stereotyping which limits the roles of women and men. Sexism in ads makes us more critical of appearances (O.A.S.I.S., 1982). Instead of advertisements supplying us with information which would help us make product choices, they deliver messages about how people should be, what they should look like, and how they should relate
to one another (O.A.S.I.S., 1982). They reinforce stifling roles.

Jennings, Geis, & Brown (1980) conducted a study which did not measure the explicit messages (selling the product), but the implicit messages (sex role expectations) in ads. They found that women participants, after having viewed non-stereotypic television commercials (those in which traditional male and female roles were reversed), had more self-confidence in giving a speech, and displayed more independence of judgment. Regardless of the type of ad or the sex of the character in it, the women reported low levels of identification with the character portrayals of women; this finding shows how the presented images were having an effect without the participants' conscious awareness.

This finding is supported by a later study by Geis, Brown, Jennings, and Porter (1984). Women who viewed traditional ads, as compared to those who saw reversed ads, deemphasized achievement in favor of homemaking. By reversing the roles of women and men in the advertisements, the differences between the two sexes in achievement levels were eliminated. The women's self-concepts were influenced by the sex role portrayals in the advertisements.

A sexism scale (Pingree et al., 1976) was used to examine the quality of women's roles in advertisements.
They argue that increasing the representation of women in ads will not decrease sexism unless the quality of the portrayal of women in the ads is also changed. The first level of their scale for the image of women is a sex object, the victim, a two-dimensional symbol. The second level holds traditional women's roles. She is a capable wife, mother, teacher, housekeeper, secretary, etc. Professional women are shown in the third level, but their profession is secondary to their primary home responsibilities. The fourth level is when women are shown as equals to men. The women do not rely on traditional women's roles for their selfdefinitions. Beyond stereotypes, where women can be seen as capable individuals, is the fifth level. They are judged by their own self-worth.

When Pingree et al. (1976) applied this scale to ads from Ms., Time, Newsweek, and Playboy, it was found that Playboy had significantly more ads in the first level and Ms., had more in the fourth and the fifth level. Time and Newsweek were found to be similar having most ads at the second level. In fact, the most frequently shown of all ads were the traditional ads of the second level. They were found to be 48% of those analyzed. Level one advertisements were the next most frequently shown ads. Twenty-seven percent of all the ads they analyzed were portrayals of 2-dimensional sex-
objects. The authors thought it was also evident that men's images in ads are somewhat degrading, and that the scale could easily be adapted for them (Pingree et al., 1976).

The preceding study acknowledges the existence of different qualities of sex-roles in advertising; it is important to show that the influence of sex-role stereotyping on ads has been examined by Alreck, Settle, and Belch (1982). This is important because it shows how sex roles portrayed in advertising can have a direct influence on consumers. They grouped their subjects according to those who are highly sex role specific, those who judge behavior simply according to people's sex, and those who are not. Sex Role Scales designed by the researchers measure six different domains of behavior to predict the 2 groupings. Reactions were obtained for a masculine and a feminine brand of soap. The more sex role limited men's behavior, the more apt they were to try the masculine brand and not to try the feminine brand. Women whose behavior was sex role specific were just as apt to try feminine and masculine products.

Researchers have found that the gender of a product should be consistent with the image held by the product users. The role setting for the model should match the environment where the product is used. For example, ads
should show liberated attitudes only to the extent that role settings and products are suitably adaptive. The use of real and natural images in ads is preferred to heavily stereotyped images. What the consumer likes or dislikes has been found to show product marketability (Whipple and Courtney, 1985). Whipple and Courtney (1980) studied two on air and four test commercials of which half used progressive roles and half used traditional roles. The roles used did not affect consumer recall. Progressive ads were seen as more effective. The traditional on air ads were seen by all as most irritating.

The women's movement has tried to raise social consciousness about those traditional ads. Lull, Hanson, and Marx (1977) argue that if the women's movement has done so, it is still not being reflected in the images of women in ads. Their subjects reacted to a variety of ads that were chosen because they represent female sex role content. Fewer than half of the subjects were able to recognize stereotypes in the ads. These stereotyped examples were thought to be clear by the researchers. It was found that college women are more sensitive than college men to female stereotyping. The men focused on male portrayals, even if they weren't the main focus of the ad or if they were just the unseen speaker. Men were most likely to be unaware of the restrictive,
traditional roles of women in the ads (Lull et al., 1977).

Although the previous study shows that students are not aware of stereotypes in ads, we are told that ads increase consciousness of self. People with low self-esteem seem more susceptible to persuasion. Self-esteem advertising tries to "appeal to consumer feeling of self-worth and self-confidence" (Durgee, 1986, p. 21). It is a strong emotional need. An ad can produce positive feelings if it challenges the viewer's self-evaluation and flatters the viewer. Young women are especially likely to buy into these persuasion techniques. Gould (1987) found females are more likely to be aware of their public self-concept roles than men. This suggests that women are aware of their place in society as social objects. They respond to external cues, such as advertising, as a guide (Gould, 1987).

This guidance is often negative and hard to achieve. For example, society has a strict definition of an attractive body for a woman and more recently for a man. These definitions are most definitely reflected in ads. Cash et al. (1986) found that women evaluate their body images more negatively than men. The results of their 30,000 subject sample are similar to a random sample of the adult population in the United States. These subjects were, however, more highly educated and 90% white. Men
and women, ranging in age from teens to twenties, who completed the Body Image Survey were most concerned about their appearance.

Ads contribute to the emphasis on women's physical appearance; they tell women that they need to stay young, slim, and beautiful. Body satisfaction, self-esteem, and sexual satisfaction were examined by Kimlicka, Cross, & Tarnai (1983). They found that women who were high in masculinity, according to the BSRI, also scored high on these attributes. These had nothing to do with their feminist views. Masculinity was found to produce a positive self-concept that improves women's self-perceptions.

The body images that are presented in ads are often times blatant. There is a great emphasis on the woman's role as a sex object. Females are shown without clothes or partially dressed more often then men (Solely and Kuzzbard, 1986). "Peekaboo is out. Take it off and get it on is in" (Trachtenberg, 1986, p.34). The blatant use of sex in ads is becoming part of our culture. Advertisers are trying very hard to get the consumer's attention. The sexual content portrayed in ads has not changed over the past years, but the number of these types of ads have increased (Solely and Kuzzbard, 1986). General interest magazines from 1964 and 1984 show more
sex oriented ads. Sexual illustrations are more overt, and they are more visual than verbal.

These sexual illustrations that try to serve as attention-getting devices have not been found to increase ad recall. Different levels of sex appeal in ads were studied by Richmond and Hartman (1982). They found that overt sex does not sell. Half of their sample responded incorrectly or not at all to those ads they classified as inappropriate. These ads tried to use sex appeal to capture their audience. The inappropriate ads were very exploitive and degrading, especially towards women. The ads that were found to be most legitimate and non-offensive were those that displayed a functional, fantasy, or symbolic use of sex appeal.

A study by Gentry and Harley (1982) showed a direct test of schema theory as it relates to advertising. It attempted to show gender schema as a predictor of ad recall. Subjects were classified as sex-typed or as cross sex-typed, those subjects who score higher on the scale for the opposite sex. Little support was found for sex-typed individuals being able to recall ads more easily than cross sex-typed individuals. Incongruent ads, those gender specific products which were presented by the opposite sex, were not recalled more easily by sex-typed individuals. When the subjects were grouped
according to gender orientation, it was found that the masculine schematics were more likely to recall ads, especially those for masculine products. The researchers state that their findings are support for further research on gender roles in processing advertisements (Gentry & Harley 1982, p.264).

In sum, Bem (1981) has shown that sex-typed individuals process information based on two dichotomous variables and they make schema consistent decisions more quickly (1982); Alreck et al., (1982) show that very sex specific opinions limit product choice decisions. The scale of sexism in ads (Pingree et al., 1976) generally places traditional ads, those that are more sex specific, on the first two levels. The more progressive ads, those that attempt to go beyond the stereotypes, are on levels four and five. The degree to which ads are liked or disliked influences their persuasiveness (Whipple and Courtney, 1985).

The present study will attempt to show the assimilation of gender schema through the perception of advertising. The point is to learn how gender schemas, self-esteem, intimate relationships, and body image intercorrelate and affect the perception of advertising. While sex roles in advertising have been examined, aspects of an individual's personality that create certain kinds of
responses to ads have not been.

It is hypothesized that subjects will recognize and like level one and level two ads if they are sex-typed and level four and level five if they are non sex-typed. Sex-typed individuals will incorporate gender schema, that is, evaluate ads via the limiting dichotomy of sex. Non sex-typed individuals will not incorporate gender schema and, therefore, will evaluate ads based on more variable schemas. Those with low self-esteem and poor body image are found to be more sensitive to cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity (Geis et al., 1984; Whipple and Courtney, 1985; Gould, 1987; Cash et al., 1986; & Kimlicka et al., 1983), so they should be similar to the sex-typed individual in preferring ads from levels one and two. Correlations of biological sex with ad preference and recognition, instead of with gender classifications of the BSRI will also be investigated.

Hypotheses:
1. Sex-typed individuals will recognition and like level one and level two ads.
2. Non sex-typed individuals will recognition and like level four and level five ads.
3. Low self-esteem individuals will prefer level one and level two ads.
4. Individuals with poor body image will prefer level
one and level two ads.

Method

Subjects

One hundred undergraduate students at a small, liberal arts university participated as subjects for partial credit in an introductory psychology course. They were asked to sign a consent form before participating in the study and were treated according to APAs' standards of ethics ("Ethical Principles," 1981).

Procedure

A group of thirty ads, which were made into slides, were shown to a group of subjects at a rate of one every two seconds. The subjects were asked to rate each ad as to whether it contains some abstract image (in this case, a dog). All of the ads shown at this point were those that had been previously assigned to levels on the scale for sexism (Pingree et al., 1975) through a pilot study. Inter-rater reliability for ads from all five levels of sexism for men and women were determined. The rating they gave was simply a yes/no dichotomous scale and had no real bearing on the study. The subjects then completed the various personality inventories (see materials section). Following this, 60 ads were shown, among them the thirty ads which were shown earlier.
Subjects were asked to identify those ads which they saw before. All the ads were then shown once more and the subjects rated them on a 5-point preference scale (1-like very much to 5-dislike very much) and a 5-point familiarity scale (1-very familiar to 5-not familiar at all).

Materials

Subjects will complete the BSRI (Bem, 1974), part of the UR Sexual Experiences Survey (Sholley/Lauder, 1985), Cash's Body Image Scale (Cash et al., 1986), and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). Subjects taking the BSRI are asked to describe themselves based upon 60 attributes which they rate on a 7-point scale. Of the 60 attributes, 20 have been found to be socially desirable traits for a man in our society, 20 have been found to be socially desirable traits for a woman in our society, and the other 20 are neutral qualities. A masculine and a feminine score are given. Those subjects who score above the median on sex-congruent scales and below the median on sex-incongruent scales are classified as sex-typed. If subject scores above the median on both scores, they are classified as androgynous; if they score below the median on both scores, they are classified as undifferentiated. Judging which of the 60 personality attributes of the BSRI are self-descriptive, the subjects
will be classified as sex-typed or non sex-typed. This classification will be used in the study instead of their names to protect their anonymity.

Cash’s body image scale is a 54-item version of the Body-Self Relations Questionnaire. It covers weight concerns, eating patterns, feelings about one’s sexuality and psychosocial well-being. The 3 main scales of the test measure self-evaluation of appearance, physical fitness, and health; each main score has 3 orientation scales as well. These show how personally important body image is and how much attention is paid to improvement or maintenance of appearance, fitness, and health.

The Self-Esteem Scale is a 10-item Guttman scale. Items were selected for the scale that deal openly and directly with positive or negative attitudes about oneself. Subjects rate the items on a 4-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The part of the UR Sexual Experiences Survey to be used includes questions about respondents’ beliefs concerning intimate relationships. It encompasses relationships with the opposite sex, sexual attitudes and adjustments, sexual behavior, and emotional adjustment. The subjects were debriefed and told that the results will be presented later in the semester.

Results
Determining reliability in the pilot study for level 1, level 2, level 4, and level 4 and 5 ads revealed 92%, 83%, 69%, and 71% agreement among the subjects, respectively. There were 10 ads in level 1, 6 in level 2, 4 in level 4, and 11 in levels 4 and 5 together.

Median splits were used to classify the BSRI’s because that is the scoring method suggested by Bem (1981). The median masculine score was 97 and the median feminine score was 103. Subjects scoring above the median on their sex congruent scale and on their sex incongruent scale or scoring below on both these scales were labeled non sex-typed. They were not shown to use gender schematic processing for their self-identification. The others were classified as sex-typed. There were 32 sex-typed individuals (23 female and 9 male) and 22 non sex-typed individuals (15 female and 7 male). The means and standard deviations for the self-esteem, body image, and sexual experience tests can be seen on Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Regression equations with sex, sex-type, self-esteem, personal appearance attention to information, personal appearance behavior and actions, and sexual adjustment as predictor variables were unable to contribute to the
variance of any of the criterion variables. See Table 2 for R scores of familiarity, recognition, and preference conditions for level 1 and 2 and level 4 and 5 ads.

Insert Table 2 about here

When sex and sex-type were used in an analysis of variance, they did not significantly contribute to the variance of any condition. The two-way interactions of familiarity for levels 1 and 2 and levels 4 and 5 are $F(1, 33) = .54 \ p > .05$ and $F(1, 33) = 1.5 \ p > .05$. Similarly, recognition is $F(1, 49) = 1.9 \ p > .05$ for levels 1 and 2 and $F(1, 49) = .66 \ p > .05$ for levels 4 and 5. Respectively, preference showed $F(1, 32) = .26 \ p > .05$ and $F(1, 32) = 1.7 \ p > .05$.

Discussion

The present data do not support the hypotheses of this study. No differences were found between sex-typed and non-sex-typed individual's preference, recognition, or familiarity with specific kinds of advertisements. Either these subjects did not have active gender schemas or the strength of their schemas was not enough to influence their decisions. In addition, self-esteem and body image were not able to predict preference, recognition, or familiarity with the ads.
It is assumed that the small sample size of this study greatly contributed to its inadequacies. Cell means were unequal in all cases; there were not enough subjects to use in a proper regression equation. Problems may have also arose because of violations to the assumptions of linearity and homogeneity.

This study relied on the legitimacy of the BSRI as a measure of gender schema; this is still debated among researchers. Some argue that Bem’s use of 400 subjects to define the 60 sex appropriate attributes is an empirical approach which has limited criterion validity and doubtful construct validity (Pedhazur & Tetenbaum, 1979). Many researchers (Waters, Waters, & Pincus, 1977; Bledsoe, 1983; Pedhazur & Tetenbaum, 1979) have found that the characteristics "masculine" and "feminine" accounted for most of the variability and suggest it is, therefore, easier to ask for the subject's biological sex. Yet, biological sex did not account for differences in the familiarity, recognition, or preference conditions of this study either.

Perhaps the focus of this research should be on the pilot study. Subjects were able to perceive and identify advertisements which showed sex objects, 2-dimensional symbols, and traditional roles. It was easiest for the subjects to recognize ads which have been found to
stifle achievement in women (Geis, Brown, Jennings, & Porter, 1984) and limit the roles of both women and men (O.A.S.I.S., 1982). These young "educated" students who are tomorrow's leaders have retained yesterday's visions. The importance of increasing the number of progressive ads in our society cannot be stressed enough. They could possibly lead to the partial elimination of damaging stereotypes or, at the very least, the acknowledgment of more positive portrayals.
References


Ruble, D. N., & Stangor, C. (1986). Stalking the elusive


Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation Statistics for Self-Esteem, Body Image, and Sexual Adjustment

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Table 2

R Scores for Familiarity, Recognition, and Preference

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