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PORTRAYALS OF MEN IN CANADIAN TELEVISION ADVERTISING

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Abstract

The masculinity is under a redefinition process. During the last decades, diverse changes have modified the social constructions of gender. These changes have been widely studied by feminists, without paying attention to men issues. Television advertisements are a good mean to study male and female representations because they present symbols and codes, thus establishing images in the society. The Man is suffering an objectification of his body through the creation of new products and homosexual trends, changing from a Traditional Man image, based on physical strength and the patriarchal order, to a New Man conception where his affection, fashion and eroticism, challenges the old images of men in television.

INTRODUCTION

“Advertising may be described as the science of arresting the human intelligence long enough to get money from it”, stated Stephen Leacock. He was probably saying an undisputable truth as we now see our environment full of ads everywhere we are and everywhere we go. Advertising invites us into a world of appearances constructed through visual and verbal symbols used to associate these images with specific products (Barthel, 1999: 137). To do so advertisers had to “marry the product with something everyone, or almost everyone, thought of and wanted-sex” (Botson, 1999: 33), where in a male-dominated industry, sex was equated with women. When female bodies started popping up in advertisements “feminists cried foul” because of “women’s stereotyped and objectified images” (*Ibid*: 34).

With the rise of content and discourse analysis about gender in ads, feminists attempted to show how the female images were used as “passive objects of the male gaze” (Stern, 2003: 216). Since feminism deals with the oppression of women by men where “everything male was assumed to be the norm” (*Ibid*), men “were frequently treated as if they had no gender” (Kimmel & Messner, 1998). In the struggle of women’s submissive situation,

they forgot the fact that not all men are the same, hence they created an ironic “sex-role paradigm” (Stern, 2003: 215). Thus, the feminist movement set in motion the masculinist movement where men deal with the oppression of men by objectification.

Males in advertisements are a particularly good channel for studying gender depictions because “advertisers often position the product in relation to cultural symbols and values” (Rohlinger, 2004). However, researches on men are less frequent and most of them have been on print advertising (Seely, 1994: 95).

Canadians watch television an average of 22 hours weekly (Moscovitch, 2004). According to Harris (1989) it is estimated that the average child sees 360,000 advertisements by the age of eighteen ((Harris, 1989). Almost all ads include female and/or male bodies, thus portraying gendered roles in every ad. They are presented in different situations according to the product they are selling. Their attitudes, clothes, vocabulary, body exposure, and other features, are representative of the target audience. As “we use consumer goods to define and reinforce definitions of what is masculine and what is feminine to extend our power” (Barthel, 1999: 138) it is important to look at the different aspects and situations of gender portrayals to analyze the social construction of men and women in ads.

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During the last decade, the man has been changing his image in TV ads. Following the trend of the marketing strategies and creation of artificial needs, men are leaving “the ‘traditional’ masculinity based on dominance, homophobia and self-mastery” (Bancroft, 1998: 26) to a more flexible male image. According to Wayne, “television commercials have come a long way in how they depict men and male bodies. Over the last several years more and more naked men have been popping up in the television commercials, selling everything from cars to deodorants to shaving products to clothing to beverages” (Dotson, 1999: 50). Some scholars state that advertising has encouraged a “feminization” of culture, as it puts all potential consumers in the classic role of the female: manipulable, submissive, seeing themselves as objects (Barthel, 1999: 148). The feminization of culture is evident in men’s advertisements, where many of the promises made to women are now being made to men (Barthel, 1999: 148). This seems to be more visible on printed ads, but how is it evidenced on TV ads?

The aim of the present research is to find out how masculinity is presented in Canadian TV ads doing a comparison between the former “traditional” image of men and the new trends of consumption represented

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by the “new man”. I shall argue that the portrayals of masculinity in TV ads are not monolithic representations but multidimensional changing processes. In order to do so, I will do a content analysis of ads presented on TV through an evaluation explained in the methodology section. What I expect to find: 1) what are the main features of the different images of masculinity; 2) what is the importance of the New Man compared to Traditional Man; 3) do these images reflect a flexible view of masculinity, and; 4) If so, how is the flexibility evidenced in the ads?

My hypothesis is that new images of men are winning place to former images of men in ads, where advertisements are the New Man’s best friend by creating artificial needs, reinforcing the trends of new men’s consumption.

METHODOLOGY

This paper analyses men in television advertisements in terms of masculinity. But masculinity will not be measured in terms of one static monolithic concept, but as “many and changing masculinisms” (Stern, 2003: 215) as part of different waves of the “social construction of sexuality” (Rohlinger, 2004). The masculinist framework is the one that arises as counterpart of women’s studies, using similar gender analysis in the aim of creating a gender identity. The evolution of a dialectical masculinist-feminist discourse presents men as oppressed subjects by objectification.

The sample used for the research analysis was taken from Canadian Television Toronto (CTVTOR) during the Prime Time (19:00-21:00 hrs) on November 20th. This day was playing two hours of Crime Scene Investigation, and half an hour of CTV National News and CTV Toronto News each.

As Stern (2003) points out, the “male gaze” (Stern, 2003: 216) refers to the situations where women are shown as passive objects of desire where men are evaluating and controlling wherever they look at. The “female gaze” (Stern, 2003: 216) refers to men as erotized, fetishized, and vulnerable objects of desire. This paper will use both “gazes” to identify the images of men in ads.

To find the performance of different masculinities and the trends of current advertisement I will use, as I mentioned before, two different concepts developed by scholars: the “Traditional Man” and the “New Man”. The Traditional Man represents the patriarchal order of dominance, homophobia

and self-mastery (Bancroft, 1998): reflects military and puritanical virtues - intransigence, decision and virtue (Barthel, 1999: 144); and it is characterized as a father-son relationship with lack of emotions (*Ibid*: 145). For Traditional Man, I mean a middle and adult age male, without a sense of fashion for his clothes, acting with the characteristics presented above.

The New Man is the representation of changing masculinisms (Stern, 2003: 215) breaking the patriarchal order. He has the freedom to express himself emotionally with others and finds “ways of self-expression and self-indulgence: a gift to advertisers” (Barthel, 1999). My definition of New Man is: Young, white, body builder male usually wearing fashionable clothes with a sense of liberty from the patriarchal order, expressing emotions to others and to himself, in search of body perfection through artificial needs created by advertisements.

As first filter, ads are catalogued as: female ads, male ads, or not specific when it is not gendered or when the presence of gender is not important for the analysis.

Using the male ads, I analyse the categories proposed by Seely’s to evaluate TV ads, which are (Seely, 1994: 95-96):

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- 1) *clothing and appearance*, indicators of self-image and the image perceived by others;
- 2) *employment*, setting standards of judgment;
- 3) *activities*, what he is doing suggests who he is;
- 4) *dialogue and narration*, the manner of what they speak, intelligence and sensitivity with others;
- 5) *relationships with other men and women*, subordinate, equal or superior to women and other men;
- 6) *Music*, image indicated by surrounding music;
- 7) *Situations*, suggest interests, lifestyle and employment.

These categories would be used to determine if the ad is presenting a Traditional or a New Man image according with the definitions previously provided. They will also serve to find the most suitable male stereotype and roles of the New Man. And finally, they will help to identify the situation with other men or women (superior, equal, subordinate) and the means of power (money, strength, intelligence, beauty) used by male characters to be in a superior position with others.

Stereotyping is a good way to measure the presence of different kinds of representations in advertisements. One problem related to their use is that there is not a clear definition of male stereotypes for TV ads yet. However,

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this paper uses Stern's male stereotypes for magazines and other stereotypes included by the author that are considered important for the purposes of the research.

The stereotypes proposed by Stern (Stern, 2003: 221-222) are:

- a) *The Superhero*, active and aggressive man who invades and dominates;
- b) *The male-bolder*, lack of emotional sensibility where the body is the arena of exercise and sexual performance;
- c) *The androgynous man*, passive, sensitive, neurotic, narcissistic and feminized man;
- d) *The phallogentric*, gay image associated with promiscuity and uncurbed lust;
- e) *The body-building*, focus on body perfection, weight, chest size and musculature, and waist size;
- f) *Black male*, subversive, different from and counter to images of white men.

The stereotypes introduced by the author are:

- g) *Family man*, protective and caring about its family;
- h) *Figure of authority*, man as source of evidence and information related to product's effectiveness;
- i) *Executive*, successful modern man in business and corporation activities.

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It is important to mention that both Traditional and New man can fit in any stereotype mentioned above since there is not a strict differentiation of what is traditional or new in these stereotypes. So, for example, the family man can be sometimes traditional when reinforcing the father-son relationship without emotions or New Man where emotions towards his children are well expressed. The advertisements catalogued as New Man could be divided into the following roles to see what role is the most present in the sample.¹

The roles are:

- 1) *Sensitive body guard*, in action, active but always protective;
- 2) *The adventurer*, alone, independent, responsible;
- 3) *Fashion*, body beauty expressed through fashionable clothes as extent of perfection;
- 4) *Submissive to a woman*, men depending on women needs and desires;
- 5) *Gay oriented*, homoerotic situations related to body exposure.

FINDINGS

The number of ads recorded during the time mentioned was 88, they were divided as follows: 16 female, 33 male and 39 not specific. The under representation of women is relevant because it shows the predominance of male images reinforcing the patriarchal order. According to Martin, “women and men are unequally represented in the mass media” as a result of a “patriarchal capitalists ideology, a society where the ideology supports the class system and the dominance of men in positions of power” (Martin, 1991: 92) She also states that “this serves to justify the society’s dominant social practices” (Martin, 1991: 92). Even though Martin’s thesis is correct with the findings about representation, it can be argued that on TV ads this respond to a specific target audience linked to the shows programmed.

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Men’s ads were catalogued using the mentioned categories, 39% (13/33) presented the Traditional image of Man, and 61% (20/33) presented the New Man. This shows the increasing influence of new styles of masculinities in our society where the traditional patriarchal order is being challenged and by new ways for men to express themselves. Ironically, even though mass media is a male-dominated place that supposes the reinforcement of the patriarchal order, it is now presenting new trends that are breaking that traditional order. However, probably for feminists it is the same as long as men are more frequent in mass media, it doesn’t matter the way they are presented.

Looking at the stereotypes can help us to understand better the differences between Traditional and New Man in TV ads (see figure 1). The most frequent stereotypes were the androgynous and family man. There is a close relation between androgynous-New Man, and family man-Traditional Man. This is evident in the sense that the androgynous stereotype represents a need to fulfill self satisfaction through the products presented in ads, which is one of the characteristics of the New Man. On the other hand, the family man is related with products for the whole family’s benefit when at the same time there is a representation of the Traditional Man as authority and leader. In other words, the New Man is more related with products for self-consumption and the Traditional Man with products for the family’s good.

The Traditional Man image was more frequent as Family Man, Figure of Authority and Male-Bolder. The characteristics of those stereotypes (lack of emotion, centre of authority) show the Traditional Man in its own nature.

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The difficulty to be flexible in its concept makes the Traditional Man not to appear as phallogentric, for obvious reasons; body building, because it has a sexual and homoerotic content that this man tries to stay away from; black male, because the Traditional order in media is represented as white (Martin, 1991; 93), while black people are outsiders; executive, because normally the executives presented in ads are part of the new masculinity that buys as part of success, power and self-indulgence (see figure 1.1).

The New Man image was presented in all the stereotypes –except as figure of authority- evidencing the flexibility of this trend. Its narcissistic and submissive behaviour made it more frequent in the androgynous stereotype. The other stereotypes showed a more balanced representation among them, and that is exactly where the “gift for advertisers” resides on. The new man has the ability to offer different sort of products in variable ways. In contrast to the rigid and limited Traditional Man, the New Man can be *flexible* and be useful for a whole bunch of new products creating artificial needs, having an effect on the consumption parameters. The New Man is like a joker card: it can be used in almost any product ad always open to new possibilities to experience new situations.

The New Man’s roles help to identify the different performances played in TV ads. In Figure 1.2 we can appreciate the predominance of Fashion as the main role, seconded by Gay Oriented. Because of the self-expression and self-indulgence the new man has for himself, Fashion, mainly related with ads of clothes or high-tech products, seems to be way where this statement is evidenced. Regularly, TV ads presenting fashion roles do so in a metrosexual way where Urban and Stylish clothes are used as well as other elements such as piercing, jewellery and trendy hair styles. Gay oriented roles were characterized by the exposure of naked bodies in a moderated way; it is, not as homoerotic to be classified as porno but not as normal to be part of a traditional male-bolder.

The relation between other men/women is important to distinguish how superior or submissive the character is being presented. The findings show that there is a relationship between Traditional Man-Superior and New Man- Submissive. This can be explained as the Traditional Man tries to reinforce the patriarchal order, when the New Man like androgynous is more passive.

In the ads analyzed the Traditional Man is: regularly superior in relation to women and less to man, equal to other male partners, and submissive to women. What is interesting is how the Traditional Man is presented as

submissive to insist on the “traditional” order, when, for example, his wife or mother buys clothes for him –a Traditional Man doesn’t matter what he is wearing because he is not interested in fashion- or they bring medicine to make him feel better.

On the other hand, the New Man was submissive more frequently to man and less to women, equal in terms of both sexes, and superior in relation to woman and less to men. Thus, there is a link between both Traditional and New Man, which is the superior position they stand on in relation to female partners assuring the hegemonic position.

By means of power I do not mean the ways both Traditional and New Man are in superior position than others around them, rather it means what are the visible features that make them seem so powerful and successful in their environment. The results show that the Traditional man bases its power on strength and a little of intelligence, showing the military aspects of this man (see figure 1.3).

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The New Man has also new ways of power. It is not strength but intelligence and money what makes him powerful. Intelligence here is used as the capability to use his mind and ideas to overcome situations, where money is the use of luxury or other means of wealth. Beauty applies as well for the New Man, especially when it comes to fashion issues where he can use his clothes and personal appearance to do and get what he wants. This use of “new powers” for men allows them to find and define their masculinity in a different way than the traditional aggressive behaviour. This is probably resulting of the increase of capitalism in our attitude, where money and the advantages it brings –as fashion and beauty- take an important place in the social construction of the New Man (see figure 1.4).

EXAMPLES

In order to illustrate the different sort of ads using both Traditional and New Man images, I now provide two examples to show how marketing strategies are aligned to portray masculinity according to the target audience. To make it clear, these examples could be catalogued as *extreme* for each image, so readers can get a better understanding about the purposes of this paper.

The first example belongs to The Home Depot. This ad presents men selecting and buying different gadgets to repair homes. The men are white, middle aged, overweight, without a sense of fashion using jeans and t-shirts

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with squares and a sense of dirty working man. They are proud to be able to fix problems by their own. This representation reinforces the figure of man as the ruler and fixer at home, needing no help from other people as he is strong and smart enough to do all by himself. He doesn't care what he is wearing or the way he acts, as long as his productivity is measured by the things he can build and fix.

On the other hand, in a Braun Shaver ad, a young, handsome, body built man is only using underwear. Even though the ad tries to show the advantages the shaver offers, there is a big focus on the men's body, simulating sweat all over his skin, with special close ups to his chest, abdomen and genitals. This representation clearly belongs to a New Man image, as his body is objectified as a sexual product for erotic and/or homoerotic purposes.

CONCLUSIONS

Social constructions of gender are represented in advertisements to maintain the male-dominated hegemony. When feminists worried about their representations on ads, they forgot the multidimensional concept of masculinity. This omission would set into motion a men's movement dealing with the objectification and feminization of men on advertisements.

The images of masculinity in TV ads are not monolithic and static, but rather diverse and changing. The Traditional Man, representation of the patriarchal order, is being challenged by a New Man image. This New Man is characterized by a rupture of the respectful father-son relationship, looking for freedom to express its emotions and with liberty to self-expression, self-indulgence and self-satisfaction. It is also the joker card as it plays in situations where the Traditional man cannot fit.

The findings show an under representation of women, reinforcing the hegemonic power of masculinity in mass media. The images of New Man were lightly more represented as it serves to promote more diverse kinds of products than the Traditional Man allows. The images of Traditional Man are based on Family frameworks and authority positions, reinforcing the patriarchal order. It didn't virtually fit in any other stereotype. For the New Man the stereotypes were the androgynous and superhero, being represented in an equal amount in the other stereotypes –except as figure of authority.

The roles for New Man were mainly Fashion and Gay Oriented. The first related to clothes consumption and the need to express self satisfaction

in the way they look. Gay oriented were related to the exposure of male bodies and the homoerotic influence of those images. However, these representations were in a *moderated* way, as they weren't as explicit as they are in Men's magazines where the use of naked bodies and homoerotic signs is a big business. Probably because Prime-Time is family friendly and it's not supposed to have very scandalous content.

Both images were represented as superior when they were with other women in the ads. The "feminization" of male images as some have suggested, doesn't mean Man and Women are in a same position of power in the social constructions of advertisements.

The power used by the Traditional man is physical strength, while the New Man uses its intelligence and new powers such as money and beauty –powers also created artificially through consumption.

The images of Man are changing, and the New Man has arrived to stay. It is challenging the old traditional man with new trends and images as it is by now more represented in the TV ads. This challenge to patriarchal order doesn't mean a rupture with a male-dominated industry as women remain under represented and in submissive positions. Further research should look at the impact of this whole era of Fashion, Beauty and Money in the consumption behaviour to evaluate how far the advertisements can control our lives.

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METHODOLOGY SPECIFICATIONS

This section provides few of the methodology specifications used for the research. As mentioned, the sample used was taken from Canadian Television Toronto (CTVTOR) during the Prime Time (19:00-21:00 hrs) on November 20th, performing during that time two hours of Crime Scene Investigation, and half an hour of CTV National News and CTV Toronto News each. The total number of *different* ads recorded were 88, taking out all ads that were repeated during that time.

To find the data previously analyzed, a sheet code was used to measure the different stereotypes and categories. The questions were: 1) Product advertised; 2) kind of image portrayed (traditional; new man); 3) if the ad was presenting the new man, what role did it play? (Sensitive body guard, the adventurer, fashion, submissive to a woman, gay oriented); 4) what clothes was he wearing?; 5) what was he doing?; 6) position in relation with other men/women (superior, equal, subordinate); 7) what was the

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situation of power?; 8) in what situation the character was involved?; 9) where can the character be better described? (superhero, male-Bolder, androgynous, phallogentric, body building, black male, figure of authority); 10) were any erotic elements presented? 11) were feelings demonstrated?; 12) was music playing on the background?.

Finally, when children were present with his father they were not considered, only was took into account the family man, which could be either Traditional or New man according to the ad itself. Elder men were considered as Traditional.

NOTES

¹ These categories have been taken from *Culture and media. Sociology Course Pack of CEGEP*. Champlain St-Lambert.

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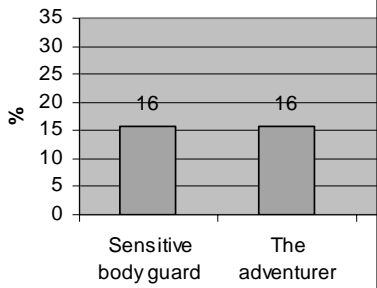
Figure 1.2

Source: Own production based in the sample of 88 tv. ads by Toronto ctv PrimeTime (19:00-21:00 hrs.) november 20, 2004.

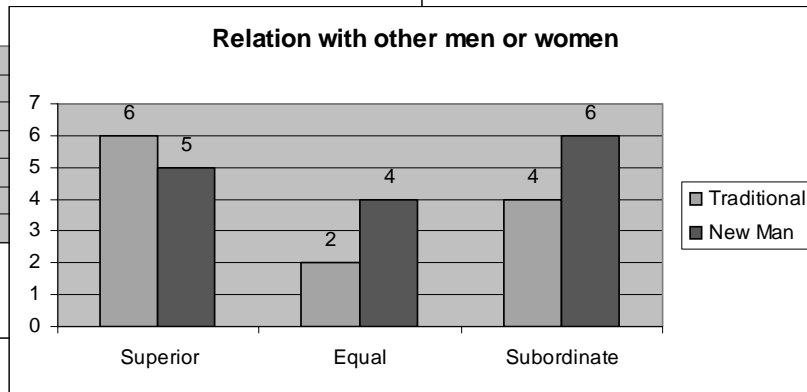
Figure 1.3

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New Man Roles (%)

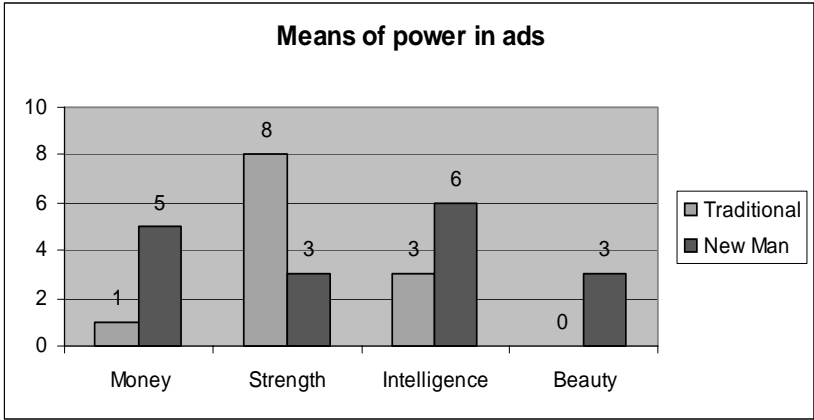


Relation with other men or women



Source: Own production based in the sample of 88 tv. ads by Toronto ctv PrimeTime (19:00-21:00 hrs.) november 20, 2004.

Figure 1.4



Source: Own production based in the sample of 88 tv. ads by Toronto ctv PrimeTime (19:00-21:00 hrs.) november 20, 2004.