Portrayal of roles and beauty types of females in magazine advertisements: A Hong Kong study

Kara Chan, Yolanda J Cheng, HKBU

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Background

- Advertising is a “distorted mirror” that serves the interests of the advertisers by portraying selected lifestyles and values that is beneficial to the advertisers.

- Gender stereotypes: portrayal of young and physically appealing women in decorative roles or as sex objects.
Literature review

- Traditional gender role ideology: men as superior over women
- Egalitarian gender role ideology: men and women as equals
- Egalitarian gender role ideology usually found in societies with high social economic development, high proportion of working women, and a greater degree of individualism (Williams and Best, 1990)
A meta-analysis of female images in TV ad in 11 countries (Furnham and Mak, 1999)

- Young
- In home setting
- In dependent roles
- Seek for social approval and self-enhancement
- Related with home and body products
- Less authoritative
Previous content analysis on gender portrayal in ads in HK

- Females less likely as product authorities, more likely as product users (Siu, 1996; Furham, Mak & Tanidjojo, 2000)
- Less likely as professionals, endorsing traditional beliefs that women improve her physical beauty to please the lover (Chau, 1997)
- In children’s TV ads, girls expressed femininity through housework and enhancement in beauty, less likely as voice-overs and absence of aggressive behavior (Wong, 1997; Chan & Yik, 2001)
Gender equality in HK

- Establishment of the Equal Opportunities Commission in 1996 and the introduction of Sex Discrimination Ordinance
- Women’s Commission to promote the well-being of women in 2001
- Female labor participation is 52% (cf. 56% in US)
- Equal opportunities in education and workforce
- Opinion survey showed that boys endorsed gender stereotypes more firmly than girls (EOC, 2003); 28% of the public considered that women could fully realize their potential (WC, 2003)
Research questions

- to examine the gender portrayal and beauty types of female figures in magazine advertisements

- to examine if the gender portrayal and beauty types differs between Chinese female figures and Caucasian female figures
Research method

- Select the NEXT magazine, one of the most popular general magazines in HK
- Select every 4\textsuperscript{th} issue for the odd months from July 2008 to May 2009
- Unit of analysis: each ad with at least one full page, and with at least one dominant female image
- Dominant female image: the one who takes up the most space in the ad
Coding

- For the ad: code the product category
- For the female image: code the race, age, beauty type, and occupational role
- Coded by one of the authors, 20% by another author
- Inter-coder reliability 0.92 to 1.0
Product profile (n=215)

- Cosmetics/personal care: 30%
- Beauty/slimming: 20%
- Clothing: 15%
- Retail/services: 10%
- Food/drug: 8%
- Appliances/electronics: 5%
Profile of female images

98% were adults; 1% youth, 1% children
Beauty type by race

- **Chinese**
- **Caucasian**

- Classic: Chinese - 70, Caucasian - 60
- Sex Kitten: Chinese - 10, Caucasian - 20
- Casual/Sporty: Chinese - 5, Caucasian - 10
- Cute: Chinese - 3, Caucasian - 5
- Trendy: Chinese - 2, Caucasian - 4
- Others: Chinese - 1, Caucasian - 1
Occupational role by race

- Decorative
- Celebrities
- Recreational
- Professional
- HW

Chinese vs Caucasian
Gender role stereotype

- Dominant beauty type: classic confirmed the importance of physical beauty to women, and the need to please both the female and the male audience
- Over-representation of Caucasian female models confirmed advertisers’ belief in white=beauty; an openness to foreign models shows an interest in globalized beauty
- Caucasian female models more likely in trendy beauty type suggests the glorification of Western fashion trend
- Dominant role: decorative (56%) and celebrities (31%) professional role (<5%)
Conclusion

- Magazines ads in Hong Kong support gender stereotypes
- Lack of diversity in beauty types
- Importance of physical attractiveness to females
- Further research directions: How females and males perceive these gender stereotypes and restrictive beauty types