

Consumer Attitudes Toward Gender Binary Stereotypes and Androgynous Advertisements Based on Media Exposure

Ivana Markova and Victoria Yao-Hue Lo, San Francisco State University

Keywords: Gender binary stereotypes, androgynous fashion, media exposure

The conversation of sexuality as it pertains to gender equality has been growing in recent years. Sex is not based on biological make-up, but it is based on sociocultural factors, such as media. Stepping away from a traditional binary perspective has shown an influence on fashion with the development of androgynous designs. Consumers are becoming more aware of the harms of gender stereotypes (Schmitt, 2017); they are also becoming more open-minded, thus androgynous fashion is gaining more momentum (Reis, Pereira, Azevedo, Jeronimo, & Miguel, 2019). However, the issue of gender stereotyping in advertising is still prevalent. The harms of gender stereotypes starts instilling through media in young age. For example, Disney Princess movies express binary gender roles, which are instilled in girls until their adulthood. An individual shifts his/her behavior according to perceived role-based expectations (Burke, 1991). Research has demonstrated the negative effects of media exposure to stereotypical content (Ruble & Martin, 2009). The concern for misrepresentation and promotion of gender inequality through advertisement has become a larger concern to the point where the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) started cracking down on gender stereotyping. The ASA recognized the crucial part advertisements have on the developing human mind, and are even starting to focus on representing the LGBT+ community on screen and in print (Vizard & Roderick, 2017). There is an enormous shift in promoting gender neutrality and pushing out outdated gender stereotypes. A study revealed that a majority of parents in Britain want marketers to stop promoting gender stereotypes (Hobbs, 2016), which indicated a clear shift away from traditional gender values. The concept of androgynous, inter-gender, and/or unisex fashion are not new concepts. However, today androgynous fashion is not just a style seen on the daring and bold iconic celebrities, but it is offered to the public. With this consumer attitude shift, the education and promotion of androgyny is at an all-time high. As consumers' interests are expressed through social media and protest, over 60 brands are creating collections and advertising campaigns toward gender equality (Szymdke, 2015). High-end brands, such as Gucci, Pitti Uomo, Giorgio Armani, Marc Jacobs, and Givenchy to fast-fashion brands, such as H&M and Gap Inc., have all launched collections marketed toward a neutral gender market. Eisend (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of the research on gender roles in media (e. g., TV and radio advertising) based on 64 primary studies. The results provided evidence that stereotyping is prevalent in advertising, and exposure to such advertising has consequences on society. The current research takes a more focused look at the role of binary gender stereotypes and androgynous advertisements seen in a variety of media (Movie, TV, and Print).

Framework and Method. Cultivation theory was applied in this study. Cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1969) posits that long-term exposure to mass media messages and images impact

Page 1 of 4

Published under a Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

ITAA Proceedings, #76 - <https://itaonline.org>

people's views of social reality. Images that promote binary gender roles accumulate over time and eventually result in the internalization of those ideals. Young people may believe that the real world actually corresponds to media images. The sample consisted of 150 respondents from three different generational groups - Baby Boomers (6%, n=9), Generation X (3%, n=5), and Generation Y (89%, n=134). The majority of respondents were female (61%, n=91), followed by male participation of 34% (n=55), and a gender non-specific category participation of 6% (n=4). Statistical analyses were conducted with SPSS using descriptive statistics and correlation testing.

Results and Implications. Findings did not fully align with the cultivation theory, as the correlation matrix results indicated no significant relationship between exposure to media (TV, print, movies) and gender roles stereotypes. However, respondents did believe that media is skewed toward specific stereotypical gender roles, which in turn affects their knowledge and opinions on androgyny. The majority of respondents agreed (76%, n=115) that both men and women should be able to wear gender-neutral clothing shown in advertising. Respondents were split on whether a male model wearing make-up represents the gender well, with 33% (n=50) disagreeing and 46% (n=68) agreeing. Two print ads were presented to respondents with models wearing androgynous clothing. The first ad depicted a female model wearing a pantsuit, and 85% (n=127) of respondents indicated it was socially acceptable for a female to be dressed this way. However, when a second ad was presented with a male model wearing elements of clothing mostly seen females wearing, such as high heels and fluffy scarf, only 56% (n=83) of respondents indicated it was socially acceptable for the male model to be dressed this way. The majority of respondents agreed (93%, n=139) that fashion advertisements market toward certain genders and are not gender-neutral. More than half of respondents (63%, n=94) believed that fashion advertisements influence their view on gender stereotypes. It is evident that it is more socially acceptable for female models to wear traditionally male clothing, but not for male models to wear traditionally female clothing. Because of majority of media promotes binary gender roles, most consumers are not as comfortable with androgynous fashion toward males. To break these gender stereotypes, the industry should focus on gender neutrality in their media.

References:

- Burke, P. J. (1991). Identity processes and social stress. *American Sociological Review*, 56, 836–849.
- De Vries, M. F. (2015, May 4). The sexual 'cloud' in the executive suite. *INDEAD The Business School for the World*. Retrieved from: <https://knowledge.insead.edu/blog/insead-blog/the-sexual-cloud-in-the-executive-suite-3990>
- Eisend, M. (2009). A meta-analysis of gender roles in advertising. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 38(4), 418-440.
- Gerbner, G. (1998). Cultivation analysis: An overview. *Mass Communication & Society*, 1, 175.
- Hobbs, T. (2016). British parents want marketers to stop pushing 'outdated' gender roles. *Marketing Week*. Retrieved from: <https://www.marketingweek.com/2016/09/15/british-parents-call-for-marketers-to-stop-pushing-outdated-gender-roles/>

- Reis, B., Pereira, M., Azevedo, S., Jeronimo, N., & Miguel, R. (2019). Genderless clothing issues in fashion. In G. Montagna & C. Carvalho (Eds.), *Textile identity and innovation: Design the future* (pages of chapter). London, UK: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Ruble, D. N., & Martin, C. L. (2009). Patterns of gender development. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *61*, 353-381.
- Schmitt, D. P. (2017, November 7). The truth about sex differences. *Psychology Today*. Sussex Publishers. Retrieved from: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/articles/201711/the-truth-about-sex-differences>
- Szmydke, P. (2015, December 18). Going gender – neutral: Androgyny has become a hot-button topic on runways and beyond. *Women's Wear Daily*. Retrieved from: <https://wwd.com/fashion-news/designer-luxury/top-stories-of-the-year-going-gender-neutral-10299373/>
- Vizard, S., & Roderick, L. (2017). Greggs, L'Oréal, gender stereotyping. *Marketing Week*, (1-2). Retrieved from: <https://www.marketingweek.com/2017/07/21/greggs-loreal-gender-stereotyping-5-things-mattered-week/>

