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Abstract

Everyday, we are inundated with advertisements. In our media saturated world, it is hard to remain unaffected by the thousands of ads that we see each day. Many studies have been conducted on how advertising affects our perception of gender. By applying research conducted on the feminine role in advertising to depictions of men, this paper argues that although gender roles are still defined in today's advertisements, there is a shift to portraying men more effeminately. This is particularly represented through music culture, as seen in advertisements included in Rolling Stone's glamorization of androgyny and thus defying rules of masculinity within American society. While it might seem that the feminization of men would "level the playing field" for women, this paper asserts that depicting men in media's prescribed feminine way is unhelpful to producing gender equality in the media, and that in fact, neither men nor women should be shown in these damaging depictions.

**Feminizing Fred: Exploring the Feminization of Men In Advertising As Seen in Rolling
Stone**

by Whitney Coulter

“People stared at the makeup on his face/Laughed at his long black hair, his animal grace/The boy in the bright blue jeans/Jumped up on the stage/Lady Stardust sang his songs/Of darkness and disgrace”—David Bowie (1972) Lady Stardust

In today’s media based, hyper-sexualized society, socially constructed gender roles are prevalent in every corner of media and are therefore produced in society. Many past studies of gender and advertising focused on the treatment of women in media and the construction of femininity in advertisements. Erving Goffman asserts in his book Gender Advertisements that femininity within advertising is depicted in objectifying and demeaning ways such as “the ritualization of subordination,” or men as the dominant and women as the passive and subordinate. Goffman also purports “licensed withdrawal,” or the vapidness and mental drifting seen in women through advertisements. Jane Caputi describes women’s exploitation and victimization in advertising.

While it is impossible to argue against these points as they apply to women, it is also imperative to study their application to men in today’s ads. Julia Wood argues that to be masculine in our society means many things, the first being “not feminine”. However, the feminization of men is no longer uncommon within the pop-cultural sphere. For example, invention and spread of the term ‘metrosexual’ is credited to the popular show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (Chicago Tribune, 2004). Moreover, the feminization of men has long been part of popular music—exemplified by androgynous figures such as David Bowie’s *Ziggy Stardust* (Ziggy Stardust Companion, 2006). This paper will argue that advertisements in the September 2006 issue of *Rolling Stone* glamorize male androgyny, show men engaging in a reversal of

ritualization of subordination, as well as licensed withdrawal, and even make men into Caputi's objects of violence, therefore defying Wood's first rule of masculinity within American society.

Male Androgyny

By looking through the September 2006 issue of *Rolling Stone Magazine*, male androgyny is epitomized. Of forty-four men in the magazine's advertisements, seven have distinguishingly effeminate features including but not limited to long hair, makeup, and fitted pants reminiscent of women's fashion. Many more advertisements within the context of the magazine could arguably be presented as what society would label effeminate, however sixteen percent of men portrayed in the advertisements of the September edition of *Rolling Stone* are portrayed as definitively feminine.

In an advertisement for Kool Menthol Lights Box cigarettes, a man is pictured in front of a softly lit background in blues and greens. He is turned three-quarters away from the observer, however one can determine that he is playing a guitar. On the neck of the instrument, a cigarette is lit and smoking. The copy below this image reads: "BE PASSIONATE"—signifying his duality and feminine side. The cigarette makes a trail of smoke behind it in which a distinct form can be discerned of two circles intertwined mirroring the double "o's" in Kool. The two circles can also be interpreted as the equal and interlinked sexes: a mirror of the man's feminine qualities. He has long hair, manicured hands, and a tailored suit that easily sanction him entry into the category of metrosexual or that of the feminized male.

An advertisement for Just Cavalli also vividly portrays three androgynous men. They are pictured in a triangular shape in route on a gravel pathway in front of a mirrored building. All three wear very tight fitted jeans adorned with bejeweled, ornate belt buckles similar to women's

jewelry. One of the men wears a flower print shirt; the flower is one of the oldest symbols of femininity. As Beverly Seaton explains about Greek mythology:

While flowers have sometimes been personified as men, they are far more frequently associated with women. This has been true throughout the history of Western culture in varying degrees. The myth of the nymph Chloris...transformed into Flora, the goddess of flowers... is one of the controlling narrative forms of flower personification. This myth not only personifies the great seasonal change, as warm breezes change the green landscape into one decorated with flowers of all colors, but also clearly associates flowers with women (1989, p. 680).

All three men have hair well past their shoulders. Their visages are ones of pouting discontent. Not surprisingly, women are often dressed and posed to incite the childlike vulnerability that these men display in their puckered, pouting expressions. Unequivocally, the men are effeminate.

Even in an advertisement in which the man is the dominant figure, an advertisement for the Samsung SCH-a990, the man is presented as feminine. In it, a man leans over a bathing suit clad woman, his cell phone in hand, poised to take her picture. She reaches up with her hand just barely on his wrist, her arm mirroring the bent angle of his, as she looks into the camera. Her lips parted, she is ready for her picture. His perfectly coiffed hair, baby smooth face, manicured hands, soft features and expertly waxed eyebrows make this man the epitome of 'pretty' and therefore feminine.

Ritualization of Subordination

The September 2006 issue of *Rolling Stone* also makes it apparent that the ritualization of subordination does not only apply to women, but to men as well. Of thirty-three women depicted in advertisements, four are shown as subordinate; a total of twelve percent. This is surprising, however, when compared to men. Of the forty-four men depicted in advertisements throughout the magazine, five are shown as subordinate--the men's total is an almost equal eleven percent.

In one advertisement for Schick Quattro Titanium razors, a female police officer leans over to speak to a male driver. Her height, accentuated by her high heels, puts the man in the submissive position of being below her. Her night-stick drawn and her expression stony, it is apparent that she is the active while the man portrayed is the passive. A rabbit is pictured on a patch of green grass in the bottom left hand corner. The rabbit represents the smooth and soft shave that the Quattro promises its potential consumers—an interesting reference considering the rough exterior that men are socialized to portray. The green grass represents the fertility of women. As mentioned above, Chloris, the nymph that would be turned into the personification of spring comes from the Greek word, *chloros*, or “Chloros,” meaning green (Seaton, 1989).

Another advertisement, a two-page spread for Calvin Klein Jeans, pictures a couple in two different poses. On the left page, the man is sitting shirtless, his gaze averted, and his arms supporting him in an awkward position. His female counterpart is on her knees, situated to heighten herself to a head taller than him. She drapes one arm across him protectively and glares directly at the onlooker. Here, the man is depicted as the weaker of the two—the protected. His arms behind him in his unnatural pose, he is unlikely to be able to fend for himself while she seems ready to spring into action at any second. The right page presents the same couple and they are standing in front of a nondescript background. The man is bent awkwardly backward at profile to make himself of a comparable height to his partner who once again looks intently at the viewer as she rests her arm on his shoulder as though she conquers him. He, however, is positioned to stare blankly to the side, pictured as an object belonging to her, and yet, one that does not even keep her attention. Interestingly, both are similarly dressed, setting them as equals at best.

A startling example of Goffman's ritualization of subordination is an advertisement for Dolce & Gabbana. Two alert women tower over a man who looks to be passed out. The woman on the left side supports the man on her knee while he is lying on his back, unconscious. She holds his head, his chin in her hands, putting him in the most vulnerable position seen yet. The woman on the right side of the picture stands with one leg raised with her knee bent in a position signifying one who has conquered. She looks on at the man, her hand extended and possibly reaching to unfasten his pants. The man in this advertisement is subdued in every way, ultimately painting a very violent and disturbing scenario, even for the 'dominant' sex.

Licensed Withdrawal

Examples of Goffman's licensed withdrawal are also readily available in the September 2006 issue of *Rolling Stone*. Interestingly, twelve women out of thirty-three in advertisements in the issue exhibit licensed withdrawal, or a wandering mind, while seventeen of forty-four men display the blank or blankly smiling faces. Comparatively, the men demonstrate slightly more licensed withdrawal at thirty-nine percent than the women, who sit at thirty-eight percent.

An ad for DKNY Jeans exemplifies this mental drifting. A couple is portrayed, the young woman on the left, the young man on the right. The two are walking together through some sort of urban setting, as concrete is the prevalent background. They are all dressed in dark colors, with similar hair colors and styles, and the same displaced blank stares. The woman vacantly gazes to her left while the man reciprocates her vacant look toward his right. His expression, mood, and thoughts are all indiscernible—the equation for licensed withdrawal.

Returning to the Calvin Klein Jeans ad, the left side of the spread undoubtedly shows licensed withdrawal. Again as the woman on the right side of the frame drapes herself over the subdued man, he stares into the void to the viewer's left. His eyes are downcast, giving him an

empty corpse-like look. Moreover, as we often see women covering their mouths or putting their fingers to their lips in examples of Goffman's licensed withdrawal, we see this man mindlessly holding an unidentified object reminiscent of a toothpick in his mouth representing his inability to speak.

In an advertisement for Old Spice Signature, we see a close-up of a couple, a woman on the left and a man on the right. The woman is smiling, her back almost directly toward the viewer with her face very close to the man's ear and neck. Perhaps she has just whispered something into his ear or maybe she simply smells his cologne. The man stands face forward. His eyes are downcast and his smile is blank. The soft lighting and contrast of the black and white photograph further the distinction of feminizing him. His lashes look long and his teeth perfect. His distant look completes the package. Below him, a newly redesigned and elegantly simple—therefore feminine—bottle sits. Even Old Spice, cologne that has long been known as a rugged man's cologne, has not escaped the feminization of men.

Exploitation as Violence Objects

Although there are only two distinct representations of men as violence objects in the September 2006 issue of *Rolling Stone*, their implications cannot be overlooked.

Revisiting the Calvin Klein Jeans spread, the ad quickly gains a sexual connotation and takes on a new meaning. Since both the man and the woman are shirtless, and since we cannot discount their body contact, the advertisements must be considered in a sexual context. On the left hand side, the woman is dominating the man. She has one leg bent, already rising above him and is ready to pounce at any moment. Her arm draped suggestively across him shows that she claims him as her own. He looks away, disinterested. However in the next frame, he submits to

the woman. He leans backward, his pelvis thrust forward in a suggestive manner as she uses her knee to keep him in that position against his will.

The same ad displays phallic arrows and red “x’s” that must also be taken into consideration as symbols that sexualize the advertisement. On a fascinating note, the use of red on the particular picture is a visual stop sign as red connotes a stop sign or a traffic light. The red circle in grease pencil that encompasses the left hand photo is a photographer’s way of saying that a photo is unacceptable. The calm blue grease pencil square that outlines the right photo signifies an aesthetically acceptable image. The photo in which the woman is overtly dominant is outlined in blue pencil suggesting that the only acceptable image is the one of the woman completely dominating the incapacitated male.

The more severe and concerning image is by far the Dolce & Gabbana ad in which the man is completely passed out between the two women who are equally responsible for his violation. The already half nude man is nearly prone on a plywood chair, being both supported and constrained by a harsh looking woman behind him. Her knee is in his back and her arm less than gently supporting his head. She towers over him in her heels while she looks at him with an expression of contempt, her posture such that she could easily break his neck at any moment. Her female companion, as mentioned above, stands above him, also in high heels, as though she conquers him. Her reaching hand moves forward in a way that suggests that she will soon unfasten his pants. Taxidermied deer heads eerily hang on the wall behind the group look on expectantly at the two women as though to say that that the hunted have become the hunters. Finally, this advertisement seems to suggest that women can return the objectification that they have so long endured at the hands of men.

In Closing

Historically, men have tested the boundaries of androgyny since the days of Shakespeare. According to Phyllis Rackin, “[the] English Renaissance stage is an especially interesting subject for gender studies because women’s parts were played by boys” (1987, p. 29).

More recently, figures in the music realm of pop culture have brought feminine masculinity to the forefront of advertising within the musical arena. The Beatles, with their long shaggy hair and covers of girl-group-songs in the 1950s and 1960s have implied an “androgynous positioning on their part” (Bradby, 2005). The musical *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* in 1972 that featured a corseted Tim Curry as Dr. Frank-N-Furter (Sharmin, 2006), David Bowie’s fictional androgynous alter ego Ziggy Stardust (*Ziggy Stardust Companion*, 2006), and the hair bands of the 1980s are other gender-bending examples within the sphere of music.

According to the theories of Erving Goffman and Jane Caputi, as well as the obvious androgyny affected by men in the September 2006 issue of *Rolling Stone*, there are several examples of the feminization of men within this sphere. This is particularly in line with studies in gender and advertising. The reversal of Goffman’s ritualization of subordination puts the woman in the position of dominance and the man in the position of being subordinate. Licensed withdrawal is demonstrated over and over showing men as hollow and vapid. The opposite of Caputi’s ideas of women as exploited objects of violence; we see that men are now violently sexualized.

While it can be argued that these advertisements are more closely related to Katherine Sender’s theories on gay window advertising (1999) -- the subliminally gay undertones that advertisers place in ads to target gay and lesbian audiences -- the prevalence of couples in these advertisements and even more specifically, hetero-eroticism, overrule this write-off.

Moreover, it is very important that these examples be looked at on a larger scale as something more than innocuous and harmless advertisements. The inclusion of men in these distasteful and harmful advertisements should be seen, if anything, as a side-step rather than a step forward. The media can and has portrayed negative viewpoints of women and minorities in the past and can just as easily overcompensate to objectify the male gender. Moving the discriminatory focus from women to men is not a good or reasonable solution to the problem at hand. The negativity seen across advertisements as asserted by Goffman, Caputi, and Wood should not be shared between genders, but instead, removed from our marketing language.

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