

# Communicating with the Agentic Woman and the Communal Man: Are Stereotypic Advertising Appeals Still Relevant?

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In order to advance our understanding of the difficulties that advertisers face in communicating with male and female audiences, this paper first summarizes practitioner debate concerning sex-specific advertising strategies. Next, the academic marketing and social psychology literature concerning gender and sex differences in information processing are reviewed. The recommendations of academic theory are compared and contrasted with current advertising practice. Finally, an individual differences framework that treats aspects of gender identity independently of biological sex is proposed.

### **Sex-Specific Advertising Strategies: The Practitioner Point of View**

The attention that gender has received notwithstanding, not all practitioners agree on its importance to marketing strategy. On the surface, increasingly blurred role distinctions would appear to argue against the importance of gender as a marketing issue. However, the prominent position that discussions of gender occupy in trade and practitioner journals cannot easily be reconciled with the view that gender is only a minor consideration in advertising effectiveness. In fact, it is entirely possible that debate persists because gender has become of greater rather than lesser importance as male and female roles continue to shift.

### **Gender and Sex Differences in Information Processing: Evidence from Marketing and Social Psychology**

After the appearance of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (1974) and Bem's gender schema theory (1981), considerable attention was directed toward examining the manner in which individual differences in Masculinity and Femininity could explain behaviors and judgments of interest to consumer behavior. However, very little in the way of significant findings appeared. Just as this research stream had been largely discredited, Meyers-Levy proposed that sex differences in judgments could be explained by gender roles (1988). As first described, the selectivity hypothesis was grounded on the assumption that the male agentic role was characterized by concern for the self, while the female communal role typically embraced concern for both the self and others (Meyers-Levy 1988 1989). While females responded favorably to both agentic and communal appeals, only agentic advertisements were effective with male consumers. Subsequent research conducted by Meyers-Levy and her colleagues examined recall and recognition in conjunction with the manipulation of stimulus and task factors (Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran 1991; Meyers-Levy and Sternthal 1991). Females exhibited a lower threshold for message elaboration and made more extensive use of message cues than did males. Males were described as selective and heuristic information processors who relied on cues made highly available through salience or reference to the self. Research consistent with that of Meyers-Levy began to appear in the 1960s, with recent work proposing that males and females differ in the extent to which they develop self-concepts that are separate from or connected with others (e.g., Markus and Oyserman 1989). There are, however, good theoretical reasons for questioning the selectivity hypothesis and related theories. The most of important of these is the assumption that aspects of gender identity are determined by biological sex.

### **Communicating with Gendered Audiences: Advertising Practice**

Advertisers who have created gender-specific advertising campaigns do not necessarily follow the recommendations of the selectivity hypothesis. Agentic messages directed towards women are common and communal messages targeted at men are appearing with greater frequency. One might conclude that these practitioners are misguided, but it is also possible that they operate according to an alternative conceptual basis that distinguishes between biological sex and psychological gender identity.

### **Conclusion: Examining Gender in an Individual Differences Framework**

It is precisely this fundamental difference between biological sex as a fixed category and gender identity as a construct subject to change that the selectivity hypothesis fails to address. Accordingly, this paper recommends that the selectivity hypothesis be revisited in a manner that examines biological sex independently of measurable aspects of gender identity (self- and other-orientation). Is it in fact the agentic/communal distinction that contributes to observed sex differences in information processing or does another gender or biological explanation appear to exist? An explanation that disentangles biological sex and individual differences in gender would have important managerial implications. Such an account also would allow this research stream to move from time-dated and culturally specific prescriptions toward the development of theory that incorporates self- and other-orientation as possible moderators of ability and/or motivation for message elaboration.

## **Communicating with the Agentic Woman and the Communal Man: Are Stereotypic Advertising Appeals Still Relevant?**

One of the most widely used demographic segmentation variables, gender – or rather, sex – has proven problematic for advertisers who wish to communicate effectively with male and female target audiences. As one commentator remarked, “what’s good for the goose may gag the gander” (Dortch 1994). Focusing on the “special problem” of the female consumer, this paper first outlines recent practitioner debate concerning sex-specific advertising strategies. Next, the academic marketing and social psychology literature concerning gender and sex differences in information processing is reviewed. In particular, it is proposed that practitioners who construct sex-specific advertising appeals according to the selectivity hypothesis (Meyers-Levy 1988 1989; Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran 1991; Meyers-Levy and Sternthal 1991) are in danger of alienating the working female audience they wish to attract. Anecdotal evidence, primarily in the form of recent messages targeted toward women, demonstrates that many advertisers depart from selectivity hypothesis recommendations, especially when it appears that an independent and goal-directed female audience is targeted. Furthermore, advertisements that address a communal male are becoming more common. One might conclude that these practitioners are misguided, but it also is possible that they believe effective communication strategy distinguishes between biological sex and psychological gender identity. It is precisely this fundamental difference between biological sex as a fixed category and gender identity as a construct that can vary within sex or across time and place that the selectivity hypothesis fails to address. Consequently, existing marketing research can provide little more than temporary solutions to problems that shift as fluidly as the gender roles on which the theory is based. Accordingly, this paper concludes with the recommendation that the selectivity hypothesis be revisited in a manner that examines biological sex independently of certain aspects of gender identity.

### **SEX-SPECIFIC ADVERTISING STRATEGIES: THE PRACTITIONER POINT OF VIEW**

The difficulties that gender role changes have posed for marketing strategy appear to have more to do with communication strategies than product development; trade journals reiterate the need to better understand male and female interests if effective advertisements that “translate” across gender lines are to be developed (Dortch 1994; Teather 1995). “Learning to match the right language with the right sex as gender roles blur” has become a key marketing challenge (“Beyond Gibberish” 1993, p. 17).

The attention that gender has received notwithstanding, not all practitioners agree on its importance to marketing strategy. Many firms and industry commentators insist that understanding gender is a key factor in marketing success, while others rank its importance below other segmentation variables such as age, income, education, and lifestyle (Bartos 1982; Burton 1995; Cleaver 1988; Kondo 1995; *Marketing* 1998; Pinkerton 1995; Rickard 1995; Serafin 1994). On the surface, increasingly blurred role distinctions would appear to argue against the importance of gender as a marketing issue. However, the prominent position that discussions of gender occupy in trade and practitioner journals cannot easily be reconciled with the view that gender is only a minor consideration in advertising effectiveness. In fact, it is entirely possible that debate persists because gender has become of greater rather than lesser importance as male and female roles continue to shift. Clearly gender is a long-standing source of confusion for marketers.

Practitioners appreciate the attractiveness of the lucrative female segment, but opinions concerning the best methods for communicating with women are sharply divided. Since the 1970s, one camp of marketing practitioners has argued that female role change necessitated adjustments in advertising strategies. “With women’s roles changing so rapidly advertisers are struggling to create new images which relate to the everyday experiences of American women” (Graham 1979, p.141). Marketers who ignored changes in female attitudes and perceptions, Bartos argued, would experience “marketing underachievement” while those who reexamined “outmoded assumptions” would “reap the benefits of discovering new opportunity markets” (1982, p. 66-67). More recently,

IBM US Marketing and Distribution has concurred that messages do need to be targeted toward women specifically, and has started to advertise in women's magazines (Pinkerton 1995). Strategists at MCI Business Markets agree, but report that reaching women can be a "vexing" and "touchy" task (Kondo 1995). Marketers voice mounting levels of consternation as female buying power continues to grow while their strategies to capture this lucrative market remain less effective than they desire (Leeming and Tripp 1994).

Other marketers maintain that male and female targets do not necessarily warrant distinct advertising strategies. Many are faced with the task of repositioning products previously considered more appropriate for one sex or the other (Bellizzi and Milner 1991), but believe that this challenge requires not so much separate advertising campaigns directed toward men or women as it requires replacing traditional gender positioning with a gender-neutral appeal. Certain firms who have experimented with gender-specific campaigns report disappointing results. Life insurance companies, for example, were among the first to create gender-specific marketing strategies during the 1970s (Graham 1979), but practitioners in these industries continue to debate the effectiveness of their appeals (Burton 1995). Problems with stereotyped graphics and copy have plagued the financial service industry's female-specific direct marketing campaigns (Cleaver 1988). According to Ogilvy and Mather Direct, income, age, lifestyle and family status are more important segmentation variables than gender alone. Women may like to see successful role models in ads, but are annoyed by "women only" tactics (Pinkerton 1995).

Automobile manufacturers also are anxious to compete effectively in the burgeoning female market (Candler 1991), but divided opinion concerning the need for gender-specific strategies characterizes this industry as well. For example, Ford has recently opened a Women's Marketing and Product Office with a mandate of being more sensitive to the female buyer in everything from advertising to product design. Strategists at McCann/SAS, the agency responsible for GMC Trucks, have argued that positioning cars with respect to gender is unnecessary, but Subaru and other manufacturers have created "role reversal" commercials to target the female consumer (Goldman 1993; Rickard 1995; Serafin 1994).

The latest gender-related marketing challenge concerns Web usage. As female Internet participation has increased, the age-sex gap between on-line (young males) and catalogue shoppers (middle-aged females) has narrowed (Briones 1998; Korgaonkar and Wolin 1999; Oberndorf 1999). Mosley-Matchett noted as early as 1998 that with women accounting for 40% of internet users, the relevant question had become one of attracting women to firm Web sites rather than one of encouraging internet participation. She argued that males and females did not differ in the need for "relevant information" and "compelling format" but added that on-line marketers had to emphasize "relationships, community and trust" when women were targeted.

## **GENDER AND SEX DIFFERENCES IN INFORMATION PROCESSING: EVIDENCE FROM MARKETING AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY**

### **Sex-role Self-concept**

Academic investigation of advertising and gender issues throughout the 1970s and early 1980s was dominated by content analyses and the documentation of stereotypic female representations (Artz and Venkatesh 1991). However, soon after the introduction of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem 1974) and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence, Helmreich and Stapp 1975), consumer behavior researchers began to investigate sex-role self-concept measures in marketing contexts (see also Palan 2001). These new scales offered exciting possibilities for researchers who wanted to better understand the implications of gender role change for marketing theory and practice. First, masculinity and femininity were examined as psychological self-concept categories distinct from biological sex. Second, these constellations of traits were treated as independent or orthogonal rather than bipolar in nature. Thus it was now possible for an individual, whether male or female, to endorse both Masculine (M) and Feminine (F) characteristics. In an era of emerging feminism, a vision of androgyny and sex-role adaptability had strong appeal.

Nevertheless, little support was found for the importance of sex-role self-concept with respect to attitudes toward products, perceptions of sex-appropriateness, and usage rates (e.g., Allison et al. 1980; Gentry and Doering 1977; Gentry, Doering and O'Brien 1978). Basing their predictions on Bem's 1975 findings with regard to sex-role adaptability, these researchers hypothesized that Masculine (Feminine) subjects would report more favourable attitudes and higher usage rates for products that they viewed as masculine (feminine), and lower usage rates for cross-gender activities and products. Androgynous and Undifferentiated subjects were expected to use and be more favourable toward products that were not necessarily gender-appropriate. In general, the relationships they found for sex-type were consistent with gender stereotypes. For all dependent measures, however, biological sex was a better predictor than psychological gender.

Although social psychologists first directed their attention toward the implications of sex-role self-concept for behavior, shortly thereafter the scope of scholarship broadened to address psychological gender as an individual difference variable in information processing. Both gender schema theory (Bem 1981) and self-schema theory (Markus et al. 1982) proposed that psychological gender's impact on cognition depended on the assimilation of gender schemata to the individual's self-concept. The two theories defined gender schematicity somewhat differently, but both hypothesized a greater readiness among gender schematics to process information on the basis of gender. However, the information processing predictions derived from gender schema theory and self-schema theory at best received mixed support following initial theory testing (e.g., Archer, Smith and Kilpatrick 1995; Deaux, Kite and Lewis 1985; Edwards and Spence 1987; Forbach, Evans and Bodine 1986; Markus, Smith and Moreland 1985; Payne, Connor and Colletti 1987). Now largely discredited, gender schema research in consumer behavior contexts produced so little in the way of significant findings that researchers concluded biological sex and psychological gender were linked so closely as to negate any predictive value associated with gender-identity measures (e.g., Roberts 1984; Schmitt, Leclerc and Dubé-Rioux 1988; Stern 1988).

### **The Selectivity Hypothesis and the Separate vs. Connected Self-Concept**

This was the point at which Meyers-Levy proposed that sex differences in judgments could be explained by gender roles (1988). As first described, the selectivity hypothesis was grounded on the assumption that the male agentic role was characterized by concern for the self, while the female communal role typically embraced concern for both the self and others (Meyers-Levy 1988 1989). Hence the advertising strategy implications were asymmetric. Because of their attention to both self and others, females were expected to respond favorably to both agentic and communal appeals. However, because the male agentic role did not incorporate communal concerns, Meyers-Levy hypothesized that only agentic advertisements would persuade male consumers. Results reported for two experiments supported predictions (1988).

At this time, the possibility that gender roles could be related to male and female memory for agentic and communal messages was not explored. Subsequent research conducted by Meyers-Levy and her colleagues on gender differences in information processing did examine recall and recognition, but not in conjunction with the manipulation of advertising messages according to agentic or communal information. Instead, the focus shifted toward investigation of gender differences in response to stimulus and task factors (i.e., Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran 1991; Meyers-Levy and Sternthal 1991). Females exhibited a lower threshold for message elaboration and made more extensive use of message cues than did males, while males were described as selective and heuristic information processors who relied on cues made highly available through salience or reference to the self. Meyers-Levy and Sternthal theorized that their communal orientation meant women were concerned with a broader array of information than were men. Also, their subordinate role in patriarchal culture implied a greater need and stronger motivation to pay attention to and understand subtle personal and environmental cues.

Social psychology research compatible with Meyers-Levy's conceptualization of male-female differences in information processing began to appear in the 1960s. Similar to selectivity hypothesis work, most of this theorizing assumes that gender identity is determined by biological sex. According to Bakan (1966) and Carlson (1971, 1972), the psychological orientations of males and females differ with regard to the dimensions of agency and communion. While the male agentic orientation is described by personality characteristics such as self-reliance and independence, the female communal orientation is characterized by interpersonal affiliation and harmony.

Feminist psychologists have put forth similar accounts. For example, Chodorow (1978, pp. 166-167) has proposed that masculinity is defined through separation but femininity is defined through attachment. Gilligan (1982, pp. 160-161) reiterates this theme, noting that women define their identities in the context of a relationship while the male "I" is defined in separation.

Theories describing males as analytical and logical versus females as subjective and intuitive (Broverman et al. 1968), or those arguing that women have "different ways of knowing" (Belenky et al. 1986), also can be incorporated within the selectivity framework. "Males may seem to be more logical because they selectively concentrate on the more focal and tangible available cues, while females may appear to be rather subjective because they comprehensively consider seemingly tangential and often subtle cues in concert with those that are more focal and apparent" (Meyers-Levy 1989). Finally, cultural traditions that assign dominance and assertiveness to males, and submission and passivity to females, also may contribute to observed sex differences. Consideration of all available environmental cues may constitute a survival strategy in a patriarchal social system (Janeway 1980). All of these conceptualizations of gender orientation (as determined by biological sex) are consistent with selectivity hypothesis predictions. That is, agentic males will use easily accessed self-relevant cues in a heuristic mode to facilitate information processing, while communal females will attempt to process all available information to form judgments.

Coinciding with the appearance of the selectivity hypothesis in consumer research, Markus' self-concept research moved from investigation of gender schematicity toward a conception of the self as either "separate" from or "connected" with others (e.g., Cross and Markus 1993; Josephs, Markus and Tafarodi 1992; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Markus and Oyserman 1989). Specifically, Markus and Oyserman propose that females are more likely than males to develop a self-concept in which important others are incorporated as representational elements of the self rather than as separate knowledge structures (1989). The male separate schema is characterized by autonomy and independence; distinct boundaries exist between knowledge structures related to the self and those concerning others. In contrast, the female connected schema is described as interdependent and interpersonal, with knowledge relevant to important others included within the self-concept. This connected schema is analogous to those developed by individuals in collectivist societies, in which the primary referent is the "self-in-interpersonal relationships" rather than the individual.

According to Markus and Oyserman, these differences in content and structure also imply differences in function. For example, because others are partially represented within the connected self-concept, when "those aspects of the self that articulate its connectedness are active" (p. 111), certain of the representations to which it is connected also are active. In a parallel manner, when schemata for important others are activated, so too is the self. This pattern of activation does not occur among individuals with separate schemata. Markus and Oyserman as well as Cross and Madson (1997) further propose that certain sex differences in cognition may stem from the manner in which male and female self-concepts are organized. They do not believe that sex differences in basic capacity, encoding, or retrieval processes are likely to emerge. However, they do argue that the connected schemata of women may allow more complex or elaborate encoding of interpersonal information, and therefore anticipate that women should demonstrate better memory about others than do men. Although very little empirical evidence concerning sex differences in memory exists, one meta-analysis of facial identification (Shapiro and Penrod 1986) found that females had superior recognition memory for faces, especially those of women. More recently, Josephs, Markus, and Tafarodi (1992) found that men better recalled information relevant to the self, while women had better memory for information about others.

Josephs, Markus and Tafarodi (1992) note that theorists disagree as to the source of these hypothesized differences in self-concept. Bakan's early conceptualization of agency and communion (1966) offered a biological explanation, while Chodorow (1978) proposed a developmental account. More recent theorizing, such as Eagly's gender role acquisition explanation (1987) or Miller's female cultural subordination theory (1986), concerns social structure. Meyers-Levy has since augmented her original gender role interpretation with the argument that sex differences in the processing of advertisement information processing also appear to have biological antecedents

in cortical organization (1994). Importantly, however, these researchers do agree that male and female self-concepts differ according to an independent-interdependent distinction – even if they dispute the source.

### **Questioning Theories that Assume the Equation of Gender and Sex**

Several theoretical arguments point toward the necessity of examining more closely the selectivity hypothesis and related separate-connected theorizing. The most important of these concerns the manner in which aspects of gender identity, whether agency and communion or separateness or connectedness, are tied directly to biological sex. Beginning with Bem (1974) and Spence et al. (1975), social psychology literature has demonstrated clearly that sex neither dictates psychological gender nor specifies the particular trait constellations that have been culturally stereotyped as “masculine” and “feminine”. Relationships between sex and self-schema also appear to vary with class, religion and ethnicity (e.g., Auerbach et al. 1985; Collins 1997; Crawford 1997; Hare-Mustin and Marecek 1988; Kim et al. 1994; Lott 1993; Markus and Kitayama 1991; Triandis 1995).

Furthermore, we must question the implicit assumption that relationships among sex and agentic or communal traits remain stable over time. Since the onset of the feminist movement, female roles have undergone considerable change. Decades later, further social and economic changes have cemented the importance of the female segment. According to the IRS in 1997, 40% of Americans with assets over \$500,000 were women (Del Prete 1997, p. 5). By 1998, Capital Publishing reported that women controlled 60% of U.S. wealth and that 85% of women would have sole responsibility for their finances at some point in their lives (Kerwin 1998).

Marketers also have noted important changes in male purchase behavior and domestic responsibilities. According to research firm GFK, men are starting to behave more like female shoppers. They are doing more grocery shopping than ever before and have become as brand-conscious as women. Men also are doing more household chores and spending more time with children (Teather 1995). Gender-related responsibilities and expectations that once were distinct “have become mingled and blurred” (*Men’s Health* 1989, p. 1).

Meyers-Levy acknowledges the problems inherent in a theory that relies upon the maintenance of traditional sex roles when such distinctions are no longer easily drawn (1989). However, she believes that the apparent expansion of the female role reflects “but another manifestation of females’ tendency to be communal and comprehensive as they more actively share in issues and views that previously were in a domain of concern to others” (p. 255). Thus she proposes that the sex differences predicted by the selectivity hypothesis will endure. Granted, gender is complex and multifactorial (Spence 1993). Evidence of shifts in male-female consumption and purchase roles, or in workforce participation and household responsibilities, do not necessarily imply changes in the extent to which males and females view themselves as agentic/separate or communal/connected. These structural shifts do indicate, however, that we should test rather than assume that strong links among sex, agency and communion still exist.

Second, selectivity hypothesis findings concerning message elaboration are somewhat at odds with the marketing and psychology literature. Certain anomalies, for example, were observed in the Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran results. The authors noted that it was unusual to observe subjects recalling information that they could not recognize, as with males in their low incongruity condition, but proposed that males shifted their processing strategy when prompted to do so by the higher cognitive demands of the recall task. Should task demands be this important a factor in retrieval, however, one would expect to see results of recall without recognition more frequently. One should also expect that if females do possess an enhanced propensity for elaboration relative to males, similar results would have been appeared elsewhere. However, subsequent tests of sex differences in information processing style and general motivation to process have produced null results (e.g., Peracchio and Tybout 1996). Nor are such differences documented in recent reviews concerning sex differences in cognition. In fact, cognitive differences within sex often are greater than those reported between sexes (e.g., Baker 1987; Caplan et al. 1997; Halpern 1992).

Third, we also should consider the possibility that the pattern of mixed and null results obtained in early sex-role self-concept investigations might be more properly attributed to inappropriate analytical methods than to the util-

ity (or lack thereof) of individual difference measures. Bem's original *t*-test scoring procedure designated those with significantly different M and F scores as either Masculine or Feminine (1974). Those with scores that did not differ were categorized as Androgynous. Spence et al. (1975) however, recommended a median split procedure to score their PAQ, with subjects assigned to Masculine, Feminine, Androgynous and Undifferentiated categories on the basis of the position of their M and F scores relative to the scale medians. Masculine individuals were those with M scores higher than the M median and F scores lower than the F median, while the Feminine category applied to those with scores in the opposite direction. Androgynous individuals had M and F scores above both of the scale medians while Undifferentiated respondents scored below the medians.

Extensive discussion ensued concerning the manner in which the scales should be used to categorize individuals. Bem eventually agreed to the Spence et al. median split method (1977), but the debate over classification issues appeared to obscure understanding of the fundamental distinction between the Bem and Spence et al. definitions of androgyny as well as the appropriate ANOVA model (Hall and Taylor 1985; Taylor and Hall 1982). While Spence predicted main effects for Masculinity and Femininity, Bem's original "balance" conceptualization of androgyny implied a two-way interaction. In either case, the appropriate model is one in which levels of masculinity are crossed with those of femininity. Problematically, gender schema and self-schema research in both marketing and psychology has been characterized by analyses that collapse the two factors into one four-level factor of sex-type. This is true of the consumer research studies described above. Researchers also have tended to incorporate males and females within the same analytic categories. Such a method does not allow statistically independent tests of masculinity, femininity, and their interaction. Nor does it allow for the possibility of sex by scale score interactions.

Jaffe's investigation of role portrayal was a noteworthy exception (1990; 1991; 1994). Importantly, her "modern" portrayal was in fact agentic ("You've been working hard and you're a success"), while the "traditional" copy was communal ("We're as concerned about your family's well-being as you are"). Because her sample was limited to females, Jaffe could not investigate either male response or the possibility of a sex by scale score interaction. However, she did report portrayal by Masculinity and Femininity interactions. Women with higher Masculinity scores reported higher ratings for the modern role portrayal, while lower M women showed no differences between modern and traditional positioning. Although modern positioning contributed to higher purchase probability for both high and low Femininity women, the modern positioning advantage was more important to low F than to high F women. Inconsistent with Meyers-Levy's earlier findings that women were equally persuaded by both kinds of messages, these results indicate the manner in which an understanding of individual differences in gender identity could augment the selectivity hypothesis. More recent evidence in support of an individual differences framework concerns the investigation of separate and connected appeals in a cross-cultural context (e.g., Wang and Mowen 1997; Wang et al. 2000). While individuals with low scores on a Separateness-Connectedness scale preferred the relationship-oriented theme, those with high scores preferred the "separated" theme. Thus, the general move away from individual differences in gender research may have been ill-advised.

## COMMUNICATING WITH GENDERED AUDIENCES: ADVERTISING PRACTICE

The confounding of sex with aspects of gender identity also has important marketing implications, one of which concerns the maintenance and perpetuation of stereotypes in advertising. To be sure, the sex-specific communication strategies prescribed by the selectivity hypothesis function at a much more subtle level than those that revolve around female preoccupation with white wash and clean floors. Nevertheless, selectivity hypothesis recommendations make it clear that marketers should make use of what are essentially longstanding stereotypes that attribute independence to men and affiliation to women. As Bonelli argues with regard to sex-role stereotyping in fragrance advertising, women are depicted as "externally or 'other' oriented". To reach men, advertisers use "simple, ego gratification emotional appeals. These appeals stereotype men as internally or 'self' oriented, concerned primarily with themselves" (1989, p. 268). In a similar vein, the recent Platinum MasterCard print ad campaign targeted females with a communal message and males with an agentic theme. The communal appeal features a woman and her mother seated in a pub, with the following copy: "plane tickets to the town where she was born:



\$1,200...train to the house where she grew up: \$63...pints at the pub where she met your dad: \$8...finally understanding where your mother was coming from: priceless". In contrast, the agentic ad depicts a narrow gravel road in the Italian countryside over which is superimposed the shadow of a man holding a bicycle. The copy reads: "18 speed bike: \$1,225...shipping bike to Italy: \$235...map of tuscany: 9,000 lira...seven days without e-mail: priceless".

In general, the traditional approach to targeting women relies on the "unspoken assumption" that their primary role is to care for the emotional and physical needs of their husbands and families (Bartos 1982, p. 245). Health service organizations appear to believe that the communal appeal is useful for encouraging compliance among women. For example, the American Liver Foundation ran print ads that featured a jaundiced woman saying, "After I picked up hepatitis A on vacation, I felt terrible. When I learned I could spread it to my family, I felt even worse." The financial services industry also has taken advantage of a relationship-focused appeal to reach its presumed female target, as this example from IEEE Members' Life Insurance demonstrates: "Our term insurance can protect your entire family – you as a member, your spouse and eligible children" (Nelson 1994, p. 23). Tri-mark's Mutual Fund campaign directed toward women used a similar strategy: "Life would be simpler if the only person you had to look after was you. But would it really be living? Your family means everything to you."

According to the 5th Annual Starch Automotive Advertising Study, women are much more likely than men to respond to ads that focus on relationships and how an automobile will fit the family's lifestyle (Seraphin 1995). Chevrolet's Tried, Tested and True campaign took advantage of this tactic. A motion-blurred image of a woman, tugging her violin-toting child along by the hand as they run, sits alongside copy that touts the safety features of the 1996 Cavalier. These include ABS brakes, roadside assistance, front and rear crush zones, and child security locks – "well of course". The 1997 Chevrolet Malibu advertisement reiterates this theme: "The biggest reasons for buying a new Malibu are the little ones."

When the target audience shares this assumption of feminine nurture, a communal appeal may be very effective. For example, the California Milk Processor Board ad that featured a grandmother cooking "with love and milk" was well received and resulted in increased sales among their Hispanic female segment. "Very traditional and reminiscent of the '50s", these ads placed emphasis on "the nurturing relationships of grandmothers, mothers and daughters, on family values, on honoring the mother's caregiving role in the home" (Maso-Fleischman 1997, p. 14).

However, when a professional or working target is sought – especially one that is single – the equation of "female" and "communal" appears to break down. Quite possibly agentic rather than communal in orientation, this woman may not be persuaded by other-oriented stereotypes. Anecdotal evidence and practitioner commentary demonstrate that at least some advertisers believe it is important to address this market segment with self-oriented advertisements. When trying to reach the 90s woman, Nelson recommends, advertisers should emphasize benefits that appeal to self-interest and remember that she "responds to advertising that appears to be talking to her alone" (1994, p. 10). Executives at Young and Rubicam agree: "Single women respond to advertising messages that respect their intelligence, honour a myriad of lifestyle choices and affirm their self-esteem and independent spirit" (Jones 2000). Metropolitan Hotels appears to have such women in mind. Their 1999-2000 print ad campaign promoting their weekend spa facilities is written in the style of a personals ad and describes a "single urban professional" whose "hobbies include work, work and more work...married to her work...seeks self".

In addition to using the communal format, advertisers for financial services also are targeting women with agentic appeals. An advertisement for the Private Issue credit card, which offers an automatic 5% rebate on travel, depicted an attractive woman in a business suit, walking across the tarmac toward a plane. The copy included: "Mother asked why I charged Jack's ticket to my credit card. And I told her it's a Private Issue" (Nelson 1994, p. 53-55). Similarly, Connor Clark's 1999 print ad for their financial services describes a "financially independent" woman who wants her investments to grow "as substantially as possible".

Car manufacturers also have used agentic appeals to communicate with women. For example, Volvo's All-Wheel-Drive ad featured the tag line of "Life. Liberty. And the Pursuit of Just About Anything You Please." Mazda's memorable launch of the Miata roadster in 1989 was another such appeal. "Before the spouse, the house, the kids, you get one chance....You should know how it feels to have the sun on your head and a growl at your back as you flick through five gears with no more baggage than a friend." More recently, Eagle's 1997 Talon print campaign warned readers "power and control are the ultimate aphrodisiacs. Choose your passengers carefully". Few would be surprised at Eagle positioning this male sexual rhetoric of "pure rapture" in men's magazines, as indeed they have done. However, Eagle also saw fit to run this campaign in *Shape*, a fitness magazine that consistently emphasizes agentic values throughout its editorial and advertising content. Hence this message of power and control was appropriate for *Shape*'s energetic, goal-directed, and presumably agentic readership.

Other commentators have remarked upon the trend toward powerful action-women in movies like *GI Jane* and *Aliens*, or television shows such as the *Xena: The Warrior Princess* (Miller 1997b, p. 1). Mainstream marketers are taking advantage of this trend, with Diesel showing a woman karate-chopping a table in half, and Coca-Cola featuring a mother who transforms herself into a superheroine. Evian Water also exploits this theme and adds a communal component: "Within me lives a superhero who is swift and comes to the rescue of those who need her." According to Tim Rothwell, Universal's vice-president for domestic sales, the "take charge kind of woman" exemplified by Xena is one with whom "a lot of girls and women identify" (Miller 1997b, p. 7). Media buyers also perceive important differences between the audience for fashion and beauty magazines and readers of newly launched sports magazines for women. While *Cosmopolitan* describes their reader as focused on relationships with men, *Sports for Women* and *Sport/Women* are "about a woman's own feelings of self-worth" (Pogrebin 1997, Section 3 p. 1).

When appealing to the new "actionwoman", as Barthel describes her, sports clothing advertisers are often "much more straightforward and serious, the sort of technical rhetoric usually reserved for products aimed at men" (1988, p. 136). They also tend to target women with agentic or self-oriented appeals, as a Nike running shoe advertisement demonstrates: "ALL YOUR LIFE YOU ARE TOLD THE THINGS YOU CANNOT DO. ALL YOUR LIFE THEY WILL SAY YOU'RE NOT GOOD ENOUGH OR STRONG ENOUGH OR TALENTED ENOUGH....THEY WILL TELL YOU NO, AND YOU WILL TELL THEM YES" (Nelson 1994, p. 92). Nike's Spring 1996 advertisement for climbing shoes was similarly agentic in tone: "Can I? And let your body answer: Yessir, you bet, aye aye Cap'n. Just do it." Their 1996 "If You Let Me Play" campaign also promoted self-reliance and independence: "I will like myself more; I will have more self-confidence if you let me play sports....I will learn what it means to be strong" (Rubel 1996, p. 10). Anecdotal evidence suggests that these messages are indeed effective in creating brand awareness. Feminist writer Naomi Wolf comments that the Nike ads present women with images of "competition, even victory, and a motto of self-reliance", and she reports that when young women are asked to describe a version of feminism that is compatible with their aspirations, they cite Nike and the Just Do It advertisements with "striking unanimity" (Wolf 1994, 44-45).

The communication strategy adopted by New Balance running shoes further supports the contention that practitioners distinguish between agentic or communal orientation and biological sex. During 1996 and 1997, they addressed males with agentic appeals and females with communal messages. However, women also were targeted with an agentic message in which a female runner countered "naysayers" who laughed about early hours, bitter cold and pouring rain, saying "Nothing's worth that at all!" "Obviously you don't know me, then," the woman said. "For if you did, you'd know that I am." In direct contrast to the Meyers-Levy recommendations, New Balance also constructed a communal message for male runners that addressed the many roles they juggled over the course of a week, including father, husband, banker, friend, and runner.

The male consumer has received much less attention from marketers preoccupied with female role changes but strategies for reaching male targets are in need of reevaluation. Existing theory clearly does not accommodate a communal male, yet these kinds of messages are appearing with greater frequency. For example, a television ad in Chevrolet's Tried, Tested and True campaign featured a father who helped his son complete his newspaper de-

liveries during a downpour. Tylenol's 1999-2000 print campaign, with a man holding his sleeping daughter, tells fathers there is "nothing to add but a kiss," while ScotiaMcLeod's message features a young father tossing his son in the air and copy that urges consumers to invest in what they value most.

Are advertisers who employ communal appeals to reach male audiences making grave strategic errors? Why is it that Nike's agentic advertisements strike such a resounding chord with feminist women? Neither the selectivity hypothesis nor separate-connected theorizing can explain why these departures from existing theory might be effective. These kinds of advertisements do make sense, however, when we think about agentic and communal orientation as individual difference variables that are independent from biological sex rather than assumed as its direct result.

### **CONCLUSION: EXAMINING GENDER IN AN INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES FRAMEWORK**

A logical first step for the advertising and gender research stream concerns the extension of Meyers-Levy's initial findings (1988). Is it indeed the agentic/communal distinction that contributes to observed sex differences in information processing or do other gender or biological explanations exist? The agentic/communal theory can be tested by investigating differences in information processing with respect to self-ratings on measures of self- and other-orientation. If differences in psychological gender are related to individuals' response to agentic and communal advertising appeals, we should expect two-way message by orientation interactions. Specifically, individuals who rate themselves as highly self-oriented should respond more favorably to agentic messages than do those who are low in self-orientation. Similarly, those who are high in other-orientation should react more positively to communal messages than those who do not rate themselves highly on this dimension.

Next, the asymmetric nature of the 1988 Meyers-Levy results raises the possibility of a three-way interaction among self-orientation, other-orientation and message. While males (assumed to be agentic) responded more favorably to agentic than to communal message manipulations, females (assumed communal) were persuaded by both kinds of appeals. Importantly, the measurement of self- and other-orientation as two independent factors will permit this interaction test. Unresolved debate concerning gender as a main effect versus balance model also underlines the need to examine scale score interactions.

Finally, although Meyers-Levy did not collect memory data in her early message manipulation investigation (1988), researchers who revisit the selectivity hypothesis as it was first conceived should consider both recall and recognition measures. It may be the case, for example, that individuals demonstrate better memory for messages that are consistent with their own psychological orientations.

The investigation of selectivity hypothesis predictions concerning threshold for message elaboration also must be re-opened. As with the extension of the gender role and judgment investigation, the examination of task and stimulus factors should proceed in conjunction with the measurement of self- and other-orientation. In addition to measuring aspects of psychological gender, do self-orientation and other-orientation also tap individual differences in cognition? Perhaps highly agentic individuals are selective and heuristic information processors, while those who are highly other-oriented attempt to process all available information.

Because they make direct links between gender, self-concept and biological sex, the selectivity hypothesis and related separate-connected theorizing cannot accommodate differences in self- and other-orientation within sexes, between cultures or over time. Should self- and other-orientation predict differences in judgment and memory in a manner that interacts with or is independent from biological sex, our understanding of the role that these factors play in information processing would be greatly enhanced. In addition to establishing the relative predictive power of these variables, we also would begin to determine whether the advertising effectiveness implications of self- and other-orientation differ according to biological sex.

Apart from its theoretical contribution, an account that separates the effects of sex and self-concept orientation also would have important managerial applications. Existing theories that tie aspects of gender identity to biological sex neither admit the possibility of a communal male nor provide insight for the growing number of advertisers who wish to reach homosexual consumers by advertising in gay periodicals (Associated Press 1996, p.13; Koss-Feder 1998). Such theories also will have increasingly questionable utility for practitioners if commentators such as Nelson are correct in describing the “twenty-something” group as the “most gender-rejecting target that advertisers of products unrelated to gender have ever faced” (1994, p. 171). In contrast, an individual differences framework holds the promise of real practical value for current and future practitioners. By disentangling aspects of psychological gender from biological sex, the gender differences research stream in advertising can move from time-dated and culturally specific prescriptions toward the development of theory that incorporates self- and other-orientation as possible moderators of ability and motivation for message elaboration.

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