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“It’s Just One of Those Gender Role Things; the Woman Does the Shopping, and the Man Fixes the Doors”: Irish Advertising Students and Postfeminist Gendered Discourses

Aileen O’Driscoll (Dublin City University)

Introduction

This doctoral project addresses how advertising students – considering that they are the next generation of advertising practitioners – understand and engage with questions of representing gender in advertisements. It aims to establish whether there is a need for specific modules in advertising education which address the ideological, political and ethical significance and impact of representing gender identities in particular ways. This empirical PhD study is guided by Sean Nixon’s 2003 study into advertising cultures, which was anchored on interviews with creative advertising practitioners. Nixon, in addition to other scholars such as Alvesson (1998) and Gregory (2009), found an adherence to discourses that promoted traditionally gendered and hypermasculine working practices and advertising organisational cultures hostile to gender equality. Building on these works, this research takes an inter-disciplinary approach in contextually foregrounding feminist critiques of postfeminism and the

impact of postfeminism on advertising imagery. In addition, this study highlights the underexplored and under-researched sphere of advertising education and gender. Central to the research is an exploration of student attitudes to representations of gender in advertisements, their internalisation or rejection of postfeminist gender discourses and constructions, their perceptions of advertising work, and their opinions regarding appropriate and desired roles in the industry. At its core also, this study is an investigation into the extent to which issues of gender are currently a consideration at the level of advertising education and training.

For the purposes of this article, several findings that are central to the study's objectives are presented. These include a discussion of how advertising students appear to view issues of sex/ gender and specifically the extent to which they exhibit an adherence to a postfeminist discourse of 'naturalised' and biologically-based differences between the sexes. Also outlined are findings regarding the level of concern that students display in relation to problematic portrayals of gender in adverts, and their perceptions of presumed agency to influence advertising campaigns. Finally, this article offers an insight into students self-reported desired roles in the industry, raising considerations of gendered understandings of creativity, as well as indications of assumed career longevity. Three central theoretical strands are explored in this article, namely gender issues in advertising work,

considerations of gender in advertising education, and postfeminist gendered tropes in advertising imagery.

Advertising Cultures

In considering the intersection of gender and advertising, one must be cognisant that the current climate of gender relations has been sharply influenced by various social changes that have emerged as a result of the gains made by second-wave feminism. However, a reconfiguration of the roles and dynamics between the sexes has also resulted in a social backlash. This counter-reaction against feminism mostly operates at the level of the cultural. This dominance of the cultural, rather than the political, in new gender formations and discourses is one of the reasons it is so important to scrutinise advertising (Tasker and Negra, 2007). Hesmondhalgh (2007) notes that, although advertising differs to other cultural industries, such as film for example, advertisers nonetheless are 'centred on the creation of texts and require the work of symbol creators' (p.13). As such, advertising represents one way that society's dominant notions about gender are constantly rehearsed and reconstructed. At the level of the cultural, the phenomenon of postfeminism¹, in particular, works to inform the contemporary gender and sexual zeitgeist.

¹ Postfeminism remains a slippery concept to define, but can broadly be understood as the 'era after feminism', or as a set of contradictory gender values. It is characterised by such features as ironic sexism, Lad Culture, and a 'Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus' gender essentialist narrative.

Consumers and advertisers may not consciously understand postfeminist gender discourses in the way that gender theorists do but almost everybody recognises them, speaks their language and knows how to use them.

In addition to considering adherence to certain gender discourses, understanding the degree of engagement with ethical concerns among advertisers and students is an important consideration. Drumwright and Murphy's (2004) research study involved in-depth interviews with advertising practitioners, exploring ethical responses among study participants. Although it did not specifically refer to considerations of representing gender roles and norms in particular ways, the study revealed advertisers' likelihood to acknowledge issues of an ethical dimension. The findings of the study suggest that, ethically speaking, participants fell into one of three categories, exhibiting the following characteristics: moral myopia; moral muteness; or moral imagination. Moral myopia is recognisable by a sort of blindness to moral considerations, which 'affects an individual's perception of an ethical dilemma' (Drumwright and Murphy, 2004: 11). Consequently, the authors note, it proves especially challenging for these types of practitioners to make ethical decisions. They identify the phenomenon of the 'ostrich syndrome', which involves sticking one's head in the sand and effectively ignoring obvious moral issues. Moral muteness, on the other hand, is characterised by the recognition of ethical issues. Yet,

despite such acknowledgment, the individual remains silent on them. The third and final category of advertising practitioner was one who exhibited a moral imagination. These are referred to as 'seeing, talking' advertising practitioners. They appreciate ethical concerns and make nuanced decisions and choices guided by these concerns. Such responses surely impact creative decisions, among others, in devising and designing advertising campaigns, and therefore are relevant in considerations of how to reduce the prevalence of gender stereotyping in advertising.

As well as discussions of ethical sensitivity, advertising production is also influenced by the gendered dynamics in the working environments of advertising practitioners. Therefore turning to gender issues in relation to advertising work is paramount when considering that students are future advertising practitioners and will undergo a prolonged period of 'socialisation' into the ways of advertising practice during both the course of their training and when they have begun their careers in the industry. Providing unique insights into gendered advertising working practices and cultures, and gendered identities and approaches to creative work, the works of Nixon (2003), Gregory (2009), Cronin (2004), Alvesson (1998), and Nixon and Crewe (2004) have greatly advanced understanding in this sphere. In particular, their scholarly work has identified explicitly and implicitly hypermasculine working practices that thrive in the

organisational cultures present in advertising agencies. Working practices taking place within informal and relaxed work-settings and environments are commonly understood within the advertising industry to be most conducive to creative endeavours. However, in reality, 'old productivist ideas of work persist within the so-called 'creative economy' (Nixon and Crewe, 2004: 132), which – coupled with an imposed informality – can lead to untypical work practices. These practices seem to not only tolerate but promote hypermasculine behaviours. Boisterous interactions, showing-off, and mockery spill over into sexist banter with male, as well as female, colleagues. Throughout Nixon's 2003 UK study with advertising practitioners, it was noted that 'practices that would have been seen as unprofessional in other occupations were condoned within this area of creative employment' (Nixon and Crewe, 2004: 134-135).

Gregory's (2009) study discovered similar organisational environments. She euphemistically refers to the homosociability prevalent in the advertising industry as the 'locker room', where male homosociability is constructed as 'formal and informal communication, socializing and socialization... It may include teasing each other sexually and the sexualization of female colleagues' (2009: 131). Such hegemonic masculinity maintains the privileged nature of a particular form of masculinity. Consequently, if the working cultures of the advertising industry are predominantly

hypermasculine, then women are automatically excluded from even trying to fit the mould, and therefore have less scope to make an influential impact (Gregory, 2009). This also impacts on how their creative work is appraised. Windels and Mallia (2015) note that it is expected for women creatives to go above and beyond the creative standards that apply to their male colleagues. Furthermore, Gregory charges this reality with maintaining and reinforcing entrenched gendered relations in the workforce, which negatively impact on women and discriminate in favour of men. The locker room mentality accounts for, she maintains, extremely low levels of representation of women at managerial and decision-making level, and as such, career progression remains an issue for women in the industry.

Indeed, Grow and Deng's global 2015 study surveys the proportion of women in creative roles at horizontal (art director and copywriter) and vertical level (creative director). The authors also explore if various cultural dimensions and values play a part in women's advancing or not in those positions across countries. They found very low levels globally at both horizontal and vertical levels, which do not reach proportional representation (i.e. 35%), and that masculinist norms and values may be a factor contributing to this paucity. Considering the gender breakdown in the educational realm, Mallia (2008) notes that there has been a fairly even split between women and men graduating advertising. Thus, the question is asked: why are women not

represented at top levels of the creative ladder? One reason broadly posited to explain why women leave the industry or do not progress to top levels relates to work practices and the valorisation of typical masculine styles of working on creative campaigns. Mallia quotes Tess Alps, chairman of PHD media in London: *'Men create the standards by which ads are judged and then go around handing out awards to each other'* (Mallia, 2008: 12). Alps' tone of exasperation is echoed in Mallia's comment that exposing such prejudice is absolutely paramount, especially so for future practitioners:

Why does it matter? It profoundly impacts advertising education. Students need to know. They need to make an informed decision about embarking on a career where the potential for making it to the top is 80% less if they're female. Should we bother to teach women creative work?

(Mallia, 2008: 13)

Following from that, the question of whether the 'creative boys' club begins in the classroom was put by Windels, Lee and Yeh in their 2010 study of advertising students in a US university. Their survey consisted of two elements: firstly, students were asked to respond to the question of whether they perceived creative positions to be male-dominated or not, and secondly to select from a detailed CV who they deemed most competent to fulfil a role as a creative director. The researchers hypothesised that the male candidate

would be selected more often than the female, with alternating justifications that either education was more important to suitability to the role, or that experience was more pertinent. On the first question, just over 80 percent of students correctly believed that creative positions in the industry are male-dominated. However, in response to the second question concerning competence for the role as creative director, students' understandings of the actual dominance of men in these roles in the industry did not impact their selection choice. In fact, there was no discernible gender divide concerning the selected candidate, with most students choosing to privilege education over experience. In their discussion of the findings, the authors credit the lecturers of the students with the fact that students' knowledge of creative positions being skewed in favour of men did not impact on their understanding of creative competence. They tentatively conclude that it appears the 'creative boys club' does not begin in the educational setting, while adding a note of caution; being that theirs was a small scale study of one university, and that the results could be indicative of a particularly egalitarian approach within that advertising programme.

More generally, Louise North's (2010; 2015) work, which although researching in the area of journalistic practices and journalism education, raises interesting issues regarding educational reluctance to foreground gender within instructional courses or modules. In the absence of literature

that deals specifically with advertising education and the issue of gender, and also considering the fact that many advertising courses are positioned within JMC (journalism and mass communication) schools², this doctoral study draws on North's research, and allows for parallels to be drawn between advertising education and journalism education. North believes that to omit gender as a central issue of concern – whether that is a consideration for gendered practices of journalism work, gendered work cultures, and/ or the gendered content being produced – is to do a disservice to the students. For North, 'a more significant call must be made to hire academic staff qualified to teach gender and diversity issues' (2010: 112). It is imperative, she believes, that educators raise the issue of the unique gender challenges faced by women so that they may be 'much better prepared and able to challenge inequity or at least be aware that it is a structural problem rather than an individual failing' (2015: 177). This squares precisely with Mallia (2008), who appealed to advertising educators to be open with students about the bias in favour of male creatives working in the industry. However, the biggest barrier to moulding more gender-sensitive and gender-aware students remains, North believes, the relative

² However, this is not the case in Ireland, where the BA course and MSc course in advertising in Dublin taken as case studies for this research are both positioned within the business discipline.

paucity of academics with the requisite enthusiasm, knowledge and motivation to do the shaping.

The compelling case for sensitising advertising students to issues concerning representations of gender is predicated on the presence and extent of problematic imagery in adverts, as well as the continuing influence and dominance of postfeminist tropes in advertisements. Rosalind Gill's work on contemporary advertising, postfeminism and the sexualisation of culture is fundamental to an understanding of the impact of postfeminist tropes on advertising imagery. Gill (2007) identifies ten characteristics of the postfeminist advert. These are: *appeasement of women's anger; use of more edgy/ authentic-looking models; shift from sex objects to desiring sexual subjects; focus on being and pleasing ourselves; articulation of feminism and femininity in adverts; eroticization of male bodies; development of queer chic; use of gender reversals in ads; revenge themes; and attempts to re-eroticize gender difference*. Advertisers are much indebted to the simultaneously simplified yet contradictory manifestations of gender and gender relations that is so characteristic of postfeminism. Taking the last of Gill's ten characteristics of the postfeminist advert – attempts to re-eroticize 'naturalized' gender difference – this perhaps suits the needs of advertisers most. The 'repolarisation of gender identities is particularly evident in the dominance of an aggressive but allegedly ironic 'gender war' rhetoric, which

pervades all aspects of media culture, from *advertising copy* to radio quizzes' (Ging, 2009: 53; emphasis added). From questionable scientific studies, to popular self-help psychology books, to light-hearted commentaries on the relations between women and men, the growing trend in the past decades has been to rely on largely postfeminist sentiments that position women and men as opposites, and as inevitably thinking, talking, and acting at cross-purposes³. It is a discourse that assumes women and men need one another to perform separate yet complementary roles, and is therefore both prescriptive and reductive. Advertisements with a postfeminist sensibility have been central to selling the idea that such reductive gendered constructions stand for individual empowerment and agency.

The study

The research is contextually positioned within a feminist critique of postfeminism since 'part of the significance of postfeminist culture lies in its pervasive presence not just in film, television, and popular literature but in *advertising*, magazines, music, and political discourse' (Tasker and Negra, 2007: 11; emphasis added). With this in mind, this study addresses how advertising students understand and engage with questions of representing gender in advertisements, particularly as it pertains to postfeminism. In

³ This type of gender ideological position is often referred to as 'gender essentialism' and is discussed further in the findings section of this article.

addition, the degree to which lecturers engage with and understand pertinent issues of gender and advertising needed to be addressed, as did an examination of course modules and components for the presence or absence of gender issues within the curricula. As such, these questions required that a qualitative methodological approach to the research be adopted, in order to seek to understand how students and lecturers negotiate their gendered subjectivity and to reveal the degree to which they are aware of gender representations in advertisements. Findings in relation to a number of these objectives are presented below.

The two chosen institutions for case studies, with one offering a BA in advertising, and one that offers an MSc in advertising, constitute a significant representative nationwide sample of advertising studies being undertaken by students at undergraduate and postgraduate level. In addition, industry practitioners and expert academics had anecdotally indicated that the MSc in Advertising, in particular, is an important feeder for new recruits into the advertising industry in Ireland. The research data involves a mix of in-depth questionnaires ($n = 107$), qualitative surveys ($n = 57$), semi-structured interviews with students ($n = 12$) and lecturers ($n = 2$), observational data from non-participatory attendance at three lectures focused on gender and media, and attendance at end of year student showcases, as well as a textual analysis of the components comprising

advertising modules. A thematic analytic approach has been adopted for this study, which facilitates an exploration of the dominant gendered themes and discourses exhibited by students and lecturers.

Findings and discussion

While still at early stages of analysis, tentative impressions are emerging following immersion and familiarisation with the dataset, as well as some more concrete findings resulting from analysis of the questionnaire data, outlined in the following sections. Among the 107 completed questionnaire respondents, comprising undergraduate BA students from 1st to 4th year ($n = 97$), and MSc students ($n = 10$), the breakdown among female and male respondents is almost evenly split; 55 male respondents and 52 female respondents. Generally, in relation to such issues as gender stereotyping in advertising, impressions of gender equality, and understandings of feminism and its continued relevance, answers exhibit a broad range of responses, from 'idealistic' to 'realistic' to 'sceptical' to 'antagonistic'. There appears to be a strong postfeminist discourse connected to notions of empowerment for women through consumption of beauty products, albeit with widespread critical awareness of 'unrealistic' beauty standards perpetuated through advertising imagery, and of women as victims to that social pressure. Moreover, many of the answers given - rather than critiquing why being considered beautiful should be a goal at all - reflect a sense that if women

had more achievable or attainable beauty goals⁴, this would represent an improvement and indicate progress in terms of representations of women and femininity in advertising. Overall there is a sense of optimism among students about going on to work in the industry, in particular an appeal with the creative aspects of the work. However, there is a wide recognition and understanding of negative public perceptions surrounding the industry.

The results of the questionnaires, along with the principle research questions of the study, drove the questions and topics covered during the 12 one-to-one interviews with students. Similar to questionnaire respondents, student interviewees ranged from 'idealistic' to 'realistic' to 'sceptical', in terms of their attitudes concerning the need to address gender stereotyping in the advertising industry. They demonstrate enthusiasm, excitement and optimism for working in the industry. And almost all show a degree of critical engagement with advertising content, especially in relation to gender portrayals. However, they seem far less likely to find the prevalence of women in domestic settings in adverts as problematic as sexualised representations of women.

⁴ For example, the Dove 'Campaign for Real Beauty' is frequently referenced.

A return to gender essentialism⁵?

I think men and women are naturally different, testosterone levels etc. Look at a group of men hanging out compared to women hanging out.

(male student, 3rd year, age 22)

Students were asked on the questionnaire to indicate whether they thought men and women exhibit naturally different characteristics because of their biological make-up *or* that gender differences are learned, and were invited to explain further their answers in the comments box. Students could tick both options, which many chose to do so.

Table 1. Please tick. Do you think ...? A. men and women exhibit naturally different characteristics because of their biological make-up. B. gender differences are learned. Explain / further comments

	Male	Female
Natural differences due to biological make-up	46%	36%
Gender differences are learned	24%	27%
Both nature and nurture	25%	29%
Did not answer the question/ left blank	5%	8%

⁵ Gender essentialism can be understood as a belief that women and men are inherently, innately and fundamentally different as a result of their biological and physiological make-up

The most considered and expanded answers were proffered by those who believe gender differences are learned:

Female student, 2nd year, age 18: Little girls are bought dolls and boys are bought cars. We learn how to behave, what is “socially acceptable”

Male student, 1st year, age 18: No one is born misogynistic

Thoughtful and insightful answers were provided also by those students who sought to explain how both nature and nurture play a role:

Female student, 2nd year, age 20: We're told from day one what is the female and male norms. But it's socially acceptable to be interested in the others

Male student, 4th year, age 22: Both, naturally we are different but you don't see many males wearing dresses and make up due to how many people see what it is to be a man

For the most part, those who answer that differences between women and men are ‘natural’ did not respond further on the question; 79% of female

respondents and 68% of male respondents who answer in that vein did not add anything further. On the contrary, 93% of female respondents and 54% of male respondents who answer that gender differences are learned did expand on their answers and sought to explain their understanding and elaborate on why they took that position.

The differential between the male and female percentage here is perhaps meaningful and could point to the fact that women have had to internalise and reflect more on gender and its socialisation and attendant expectations and roles, whereas men arguably have not been so confined by their gender, and are – far more so than women – considered the ‘universal’ human being, or as being genderless.

The implications for gender equality of returning to gender essentialist thinking are compellingly iterated in an exchange during an interview with a 20-year old, 2nd year female student, who – in elaborating on advertising’s portrayal of women and domestic chores – said:

I think it’s nothing to do with advertising. Like I wouldn’t trust my Dad to go do the full week’s shopping ... It’s just one of those gender role things; the woman does the shopping, and the man fixes the doors... Naturally enough, if I had kids I would want to stay at home with them... (and) I wouldn’t trust a man to go into a shop and pick up the right things.

Sentiments such as this, coming from a young woman born in the mid-1990s at the height of postfeminism, are indicative of how utterly premature was the optimism of those surveying the gains made by second-wave feminism.

The 1980s briefly marked a period of social discourse caught up with the 'new man' of the era, who was supposed to encapsulate sensitivity, an aptitude for domesticity, and a much increased involvement in fatherhood and caring. However, rather than the 1960s and '70s sowing the seeds of irreversible change, the more accurate reality of a mostly unchanged domestic sphere was echoed by Hochschild in her 1989 book *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home*. She used the phrase 'stalled revolution' to describe the 1980s phenomenon that saw more and more women taking up their place in the labour market without a corresponding redress of the share of caring and domestic responsibilities in the home between women and men. The unequal burden of domestic and care work placed on women remains a central issue for feminists in contemporary campaigns.

Negotiating agency and humour as a defence

Although I wouldn't be comfortable doing it, I would do it anyway
because it was my job

(female student, 1st year, age 18)

The below question was asked of questionnaire respondents:

Table 2. If, in a professional situation, you were told by your boss to create a campaign that was deliberately sexist (whether ironic or to create controversy or both) how would you feel about that? What do you think you would do?

	Male	Female
Would do it	64%	35%
<i>Unequivocal/ undistressed responses</i>	<i>66%</i>	<i>33%</i>
<i>Unhappy/ anguished responses</i>	<i>34%</i>	<i>67%</i>
Would not do it	27%	44%
<i>Would offer alternatives</i>	<i>33%</i>	<i>39%</i>
<i>Reference to feeling uncomfortable/ or to it being morally wrong</i>	<i>20%</i>	<i>35%</i>
<i>Unequivocal responses (e.g. 'would refuse'; 'would quit')</i>	<i>20%</i>	<i>26%</i>
<i>Concern for reputation</i>	<i>20%</i>	-
<i>Reference to it being poor advertising</i>	<i>7%</i>	-
Depends or Don't know	7%	10%
Left blank/ too ambiguous to code	2%	11%

Mostly, respondents 'get' why a sexist brief is negative, or at least perhaps were prompted to do so by the question. Those who did not have a problem with it answer in terms that people are too sensitive or lack the maturity needed to not be offended by sexism in ads; or they felt it was part of the job, and that they would be just following orders. Likewise, those who did not exhibit any qualms commonly suggested that 'money is money' and that controversy is good.

Male student, 2nd year, age 19: I would create the campaign. People need to realise sexism isn't a thing. Diet Coke ads featuring buff men are not indicative of the male population but men do not brand it as sexist. But a topless woman is. How does that work?

Male student, 3rd year, age 22: If my 'boss' asked me, I would do as he says. It will be his responsibility

Female student, MSc, age 22: I don't mind. The goal is to get noticed and get the message across - people should be mature enough to not take personal offense

More nuanced responses concern being uncomfortable with creating such an ad campaign, but it being outside of their individual control to resist. References to 'controversy' was sometimes framed in a positive light (e.g. all publicity is good), and sometimes negative (e.g. could lead to alienation of

potential customers). Responses on the more morally anguished and uncomfortable side range from problem-solving and purported individual agency to influence the outcome, either to change the brief entirely or to reframe the sexist campaign in humorous terms, indicating an internal moral negotiation or trade-off; others express concern for potential or possible damage to personal reputation; while a few suggest they would just quit the job altogether. Direct references to the 'boss' refer to the person as 'him'/ 'he'/ 'his'.

Male student, 1st year, age 19: I would make it. Try to make it funny

Female student, 3rd year, age 20: I think I would try to create it very ironic, so that everyone recognises that the ad is making fun (without models!) about sexism and doesn't support it

The differences in female-male percentages are significant; especially the figures that reveal that, of those students who would do the requisite work on the campaign, more men than women do not express ambivalent feelings about this. This is noteworthy since the phrasing of the question makes no explicit reference to the hypothetical ad campaign perpetuating sexism against either women or men, but suggests an understanding among

students that women are more widely and likely to be represented in sexist ways by advertising. As such, women are more conscious and concerned with perpetuating sexist images because of a more personal identification with its effects. In addition, recourse to humour among both male and female students as a way to purportedly dilute the sexism of the advert is important. Resorting to humour is hugely relevant when considered alongside gender stereotypes and sexism in advertising imagery. In Mallia's 2008 study, which surveys the 'best' TV ads over an 11-year period, as selected by the magazine *Adweek*, when broken down by ad type and style, women creatives were massively underrepresented in humorous ads, with humorous adverts most commonly given the award of 'best' TV ad. Notably, '(m)any have observed a "young male" sensibility exhibited in much award-winning creative work, evidenced by slapstick or mean-spirited comedy' (Mallia, 2008: 12). This style of humour can be traced to the 1990's, when postfeminism responded to the disruption caused to traditionally prescribed modalities of masculinity by feminism. This culminated in the pervasion of a form of ironic sexism that is the founding characteristic of postfeminist Lad Culture. Whelehan (2000) describes the 'gang mentality of this new/ old masculinity' (p.58-59) as saturated in humour and irony. The discourse surrounding the emergence of Lad Culture is recognisable for its bantering,

tongue-in-cheek tone. Such humour, infused with a rejection of feminism, remains a mainstay in advertising texts and imagery.

The answers to this particular question also raise issues of personal responsibility and perceived agency. Embracing or rejecting personal responsibility, as exhibited in student responses about taking on work to design a deliberately sexist ad campaign, can be understood using Drumwright and Murphy's (2004) research study, and their three categories of ethical response: moral myopia; moral muteness; or moral imagination. For instance, present within the category of moral muteness, there is the sentiment that the client is always right and that the advertising practitioner could not or would not challenge the client company on its desired direction. In the student responses, those exhibiting a 'moral muteness' were clearly aware of the ethically implications entailed in devising a sexist campaign, but rather than references to the client company, they made reference to a 'the-boss-is-always-right' kind of narrative. Some of the student responses demonstrate attempts to devise innovative and imaginative ways to get around the ethical concerns, and therefore fit the description of displaying a 'moral imagination'. For instance, one student responded: *I would advise against it and suggest ethical and moral views and how it could potentially damage brand image and perceptions* (female student, 2nd year, age 20).

Desired role in industry: gendered understandings of creativity

Something creative. Either art director or copywriter but I would also enjoy other roles such as creative director

(male student, MSc, age 27)

Students were asked to indicate their intended or imagined future career path:

Table 3. Do you hope to work in the advertising industry? If so, what role would you most like to have?

	Male	Female
Creative*	53%	23%
Executive**	29%	35%
Don't know/ left blank	14%	36%
Too ambiguous/ vague to code	4%	6%

* creative = copywriter; art director; creative director; more general references to an interest in the creative roles

** executive = account manager/ planner/ handler roles; media planner; events; CEO; client services; marketing; media

These results, which indicate a disproportionately male drive towards the creative roles as compared with answers from female respondents, appear to chime with Hesmondhalgh and Baker, who note that '(a)ssociations of various modes of masculinity with creativity ... serve to marginalise women from the more prestigious creative roles' (2015: 34). Nixon similarly identifies the ways in which the occupational culture of various agencies in

fact perpetuate gendered hierarchies, and construct the subjective identities of creatives in aggressively gendered terms in very similar ways. This is manifest in the ways they buy into individualisation and difference and rebellion. This aggressive genderisation of the creative type can be traced back to a time when art and culture were the sole preserve of men, with women excluded from those realms for so long (Nixon, 2003: 99). The figure of the 'artist' was and remains, invariably, male. The association of all things fecund with women meant automatic exclusion from the pursuit of higher and more sophisticated understandings and critiques of the world; something, arguably, these female students have intuitively internalised.

Taking account of the high proportion of 36% of female respondents who answer that they do not know what roles they would like to take up in the industry or who leave the answer blank, thereby indicating as such, O'Brien (2014) is perhaps illuminating. She notes that contrary to the popular view that women choose to leave their work in media organisations to focus on motherhood and family-life, in fact the cards are stacked against their career longevity as a result of organisational culture, working practices (e.g. long working hours), 'old boy' networks, and lack of proper recourse to complaints procedures and processes. As such, women have little choice but to drop out of the industry. Although O'Brien's research focuses on media organisations such as public service broadcasters and television production companies, it

does resonate with research into the experiences of women in advertising agencies, particularly in creative departments and roles (Nixon, 2003; Gregory, 2009). Again this is a reality of which, arguably, young female students are instinctively aware. The crux of the issue is that all the possible barriers to advancement have apparently been removed and equal opportunities are supposedly open to all, in which case the poor representation of women in creative roles is merely a reflection on them, and nothing more. In the creative and media industries, the 'rhetoric of the meritocracy prevails and "not making it" is interpreted through a toxic discourse of individual failure' (Gill, 2011: 63). It is difficult to tangibly point to discrimination, and therefore it does not get articulated or spoken about. These issues are worthy of attention and need to be expressly communicated to students who are about to commence a career in advertising.

Conclusion

This article has traced gendered cultures in advertising practice and education within the broader context of the key shifts that have occurred in the socio-cultural 'genderscape' since the onset of postfeminism. The emergence of postfeminism in the 1990s continues to define popular cultural rhetoric, discourse and imagery, finding expression in contemporary advertising texts. Indeed, practitioners working in the advertising field rely

on already existing gendered tropes in popular culture generally, and advertisements in particular, to offer a steer for how to encode gender in their advertising campaigns. However, there is considerably little scholarship on the processes which produce these texts and a limited body of work on how adverts are understood. Of such studies that do exist, empirical research has discovered advertising creative departments to be homosocial environments, often hostile to women and, furthermore, that the concept of creativity and creative endeavour is very often understood in gendered terms and is reserved for a male sensibility and expertise.

Entrenched gendered practices in the industry are passed on to incoming practitioners through a period of adaptation or a 'process of socialisation' (van Zoonen, 1994; Windels and Mallia, 2015), which occurs both in the academic setting and during the initial period when a student transitions to professional practice. This is little understood, and there is a considerable dearth of advertising research, especially as it pertains to an express focus on gender and ethical concerns around gender and stereotyping. Additionally, the gendered experiences and identities of students and lecturers is rarely, if ever, a consideration in the classroom but potentially impacts on approaches to teaching and evaluation, engagement with course content and fellow classmates, and to understandings and constructions of creative work. Therefore, understanding issues of gender in educational

advertising cultures is paramount, since it is in the realm of education that there is perhaps most scope to challenge gender stereotyping.

Following preliminary analysis of the entire dataset and impressions gleaned from familiarisation with the data, it is suggested that there is strong adherence to contradictory notions of gender and feminism that are predicated on an assumption that gender equality has been achieved, as well as indications that existing educational cultures are strongly influenced by postfeminist discourses that potentially serve to disregard the need to foreground issues of gender within advertising modules and educational discourses. Furthermore, the findings presented in this article offer insights into the degree to which advertising students adhere to regressive notions about natural differences between women and men, and highlight the extent of concern with sexist imagery and where students see themselves positioned in the industry. As such, the provisional findings suggest that academics and educators may need to reflect further on the ways in which they might work to mitigate worldviews that are aligned to normative gender roles and behaviours and how such beliefs may influence the content of advertisements. As a result this study offers an opportunity to document attitudes, to ensure that, from an ethical, social justice and egalitarian viewpoint the advertising education sector reflects on how it may actively

work to reduce its rehashing of gender stereotypes, thereby affecting gender relations in society more generally.

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