

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN MAGAZINE  
ADVERTISING ACROSS  
CULTURES

by

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## INTRODUCTION

There is a long history of research into the area of gender roles in advertising. The research shows that women are commonly placed in stereotypical roles, showcasing domestic skills and subservience to men (Ford, Voli, Honeycutt, Casey, 1998). This phenomenon has been found to occur worldwide, having universal effects on women's psyches. (Ford, Voli, Honeycutt, Casey, 1998) In contrast, men have recently been portrayed in a less traditional light (Zank, Youts, Stutts, 2003). The warrior, or breadwinner, concept has been thwarted due to the growing independence of women. (Zank, Youts, Stutts, 2003).

As concepts of gender change, marketers are challenged to accurately represent them in their advertisements.. Each country has its own methods for marketing to each gender. Cultural values have a way of influencing "advertising expression," or the way in which a company communicates value to their market (Unwin, 1974, p. 24). Although cultural values significantly affect advertising methods, it has been hypothesized that, in recent years, international advertising has become increasingly "Westernized" (Lee, Fong, Zanna, Dewhirst, 2008, p. 152). Westernization is defined as "conversion to or adoption of western traditions or techniques" (Merriam-Webster, Inc, 2003, p. 271). This concept has been found in Asian cultures and is perpetuated through advertising (Lee, Fong, Zanna, Dewhirst, 2008).

The purpose of this project is to analyze the differences between gender representations across cultures within the world of fashion and beauty products. *Vogue* Britain (read in the US) and Japan will represent the female population. *GQ* US and Japan will represent the male population. Using a content analysis methodology, this

project will compare the advertisements shown in these various magazines; analyzing differences among each culture's gender representations.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### *Gender Roles in Advertising*

Although women have experienced more success in business, education, and social equality over the years, advertising has done little to portray that success (Eisend, 2010, p. 418). However, the use of female stereotyping has decreased over the years “almost exclusively due to developments in high masculinity countries” (Eisend, 2010, p. 418). Studies warn that as female stereotypes become less mainstream, marketers will have to ensure they are accurately portraying gender roles, so as not to offend potential customers (Eisend, 2010). Even a country as traditional as Japan is steering away from gender stereotypes. Recently they have been portraying women as less demure, as well as giving men more obliging natures (Ford, Voli, Honeycutt, Casey, 1998). Models are going from acting as “Holly Housewives” to professional businesswomen, doctors, athletes, etc. Many modern advertisements portray women with independent and driven natures.

In the past, a stereotype associated with males in advertisements was the “sole man”: a lone cowboy or other independent person with a high level of competency and physical prowess. This depiction was most commonly seen in magazines such as *Esquire*, *Playboy*, or *GQ*, but has recently become less of the norm. There has been a shift to “warmer, nurturing” men shown in a less “cold and individualistic” light, in hopes of keeping with the changing nature of men today (Kolbe and Albanese, 1996, p. 3). For

example, renowned heartbreakers in popular culture have changed from the swarthy Humphrey Bogart and John Wayne to the polished and feminine Ryan Gosling.

In analyzing the differences between male and female representation in advertising, there are several items to consider. For instance, it has been found that, in television advertisements, female central figures “are more likely depicted as product users, are younger, [and are portrayed using domestic products in a household setting]” (Knoll and Eisend, 2011, p. 875). Whereas men are seen in various locations, taking on more independent roles, using non-domestic products (Knoll and Eisend, 2011). This is significant to understanding what women and men have come to expect in advertising representations of their respective genders. Women have been painted in a more domestic, demure light and are programmed to pay attention to advertising that alludes to that. Contrarily, men have been shown as breadwinners who make independent decisions that serve to provide for their families/livelihoods.

It is important to also analyze the ways in which the marketplace perceives these differences. For example, in one study it was found that male readers were more likely to “note” an advertisement if it contained a lone female model, as opposed to a lone male model or a male and female (Reid and Soley, 1983, p. 27). The same study found that, although female models are effective in advertising to men, they serve simply as attention-getters (Reid and Soley, 1983). A male reader’s attention must be firmly grasped if he is to read more about a product (Reid and Soley, 1983)

In looking into further research of these concepts, it is important to look beyond what has already been studied. Although knowledge of advertising gender stereotypes is helpful, we must look into what the new trends are today, as the world tends to move

away from them. We must also look at what factors are being used to represent each of the genders in advertising: age, attractiveness, product category, occupation, location, etc.

Lastly we must fully understand what the end viewers make of these advertisements:

What causes them to stop and really analyze a piece of marketing?

### *Advertising Across Japanese and US Cultures*

It has been found that each country of the world identifies with a specific gender on the Hofstede Masculinity continuum. This continuum defines global cultures along a range from Masculine to Feminine. Masculine countries are known to see men as “assertive, ambitious, and competitive” whereas women are “supportive, nurturing, and deferent” (Collins, 2008, p. 8). Feminine countries have “fewer rigid gender roles,” more equality between the genders, and place greater emphasis on “interpersonal relationships” (Collins, 2008, p. 8).

Some countries, including Japan, see themselves as a masculine culture, whereas others, like Denmark, are more feminine. This concept affects not only the way in which people behave within these cultures, but also how they prefer their advertising. For example, “feminine societies exemplify a cultural preference for relationships for both genders.” (Milner and Collins, 2000, p. 70)

The various differences between the world’s cultures are not limited to language, social customs, and culture; they can also be seen in advertising. When compared to the United States, Japanese magazine advertising has been seen as more emotional as well as less comparative. However, there is little difference between information content of the advertisements presented by each country. (Wong, Muderrisoglu, Zinkhan, 1986)

Although these two countries differ, there is a trend towards “Westernization” of the Eastern world. Japan is a country that normally has identified with a masculine demeanor, valuing males as the dominant gender. This has been seen in their advertising throughout history: men are painted in a positive light whereas women are painted in a negative one. In recent years, however, the United States’ influence has reached Asia and managed to turn some of these stereotypes around. Japanese advertisements have begun to depict women who are more commanding in the household as well as men who are more obliging. (Ford, Voli, Honeycutt, Casey, 1998). This is important to marketers in understanding that the world is an ever-contracting place and people’s styles and preferences are becoming increasingly influenced by outside forces. By understanding these outside forces and using them to customize advertising across countries, marketers will be able to more effectively entice the world population.

While Japan is seeing a slight increase in representation of independent female figures, the United States is seeing an extreme one. There has been a “war” staged between the genders of America, with women showcasing their independence and daring men to match them. This can be seen in advertisements that take on an “in-your-face-attitude” and put men in demeaning positions similar to those women have had to endure in the past. For example, Hyundai ran a series of commercials featuring women commenting on a man’s choice to buy a powerful car as a way of compensating for something. (Leo, 1993).

Much research has been done in the area of cultural differences in advertising. Understanding that each country identifies with a specific gender will help advertisers to understand how best to present their products. However, we must find ways in which



that research has been disproven or upheld over the years, looking out for new trends that marketers will find useful. The concept of “Westernization” must be at the forefront of our minds as we look at world cultures, as each of them chooses to become more like, or shy away from, the United States.

### RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The stereotypes included in this study were constructed using similar categories to Emmanuella Plakoyianni and Yorgos Zotos’ 2008 study, *Female role stereotypes in print advertising*. Specifically, the female stereotypes to address were categorized into “women in decorative roles, women in traditional roles, women in non-traditional roles, and women portrayed equal to men” (Plakoyianni and Zotos, 2008, p. 1416). Decorative roles for women include being portrayed as a sex object or as a person concerned with physical attractiveness. Traditional roles for women include seeming dependent on men or having a “housewife”/demure image. In contrast, non-traditional roles for women include involvement in non-traditional activities (i.e. sports, business, etc.) as well as perceptions of being career-oriented.

Within this study, the male stereotypes were created using a similar framework of decorative roles, traditional roles, non-traditional roles, and men portrayed equal to women. Decorative roles for men include being portrayed as rugged or as sex objects. Traditional roles for men would include perceptions of independence and being a breadwinner. Non-traditional roles for men include being portrayed as a homemaker, sensitive, androgynous, or playing a supporting role to women. These stereotypes, along with the concepts of minority model representation and Westernization, led to the creation of the following hypotheses:

- *H1: The proportion of females portrayed in decorative roles in Japanese magazines exceeds the proportion of that in American magazines.*
- *H2: The proportion of males portrayed in decorative roles in American magazines exceeds the proportion of that in Japanese magazines.*
- *H3: The proportion of females portrayed in traditional roles in Japanese magazines exceeds the proportion of that in American magazines.*
- *H4: The proportion of males portrayed in traditional roles in Japanese magazines exceeds the proportion of that in American magazines.*
- *H5: The proportion of females portrayed in non-traditional roles in American magazines exceeds the proportion of that in Japanese magazines.*
- *H6: The proportion of males portrayed in non-traditional roles in American magazines exceeds that in Japanese magazines.*
- *H7: Japanese magazines are more likely to use minority models than American magazines.*
- *H8: The proportion of Westernization occurrences in Vogue Japan will exceed that in GQ Japan.*

#### METHODOLOGY

Content analysis was chosen as a method to make the research observations quantifiable and easy to generalize. Indeed, content analysis is a method commonly used to identify advertising stereotypes. Four magazines were selected as the basis for comparison. Only full-page ads were considered. All advertisements within an issue were not included but rather chosen randomly to develop a usable sample. Two coders then reviewed and analyzed each ad using a coding sheet.

Overall, 602 advertisements were analyzed in this study: 250 from *Vogue USA* (September 2013 and February 2014 issues), 157 from *Vogue Japan* (September 2013 and February 2014 issues), 108 from *GQ USA* (September 2013 and March 2014 issues), and 87 for *GQ Japan* (September 2013 and March 2014 issues). The number of advertisements observed in *Vogue USA* was limited in the interest of time (in reality, there are nearly 600 advertisements in one issue alone). Two separate coders were chosen to analyze the advertisements. A coder would independently evaluate each advertisement using the standard coding sheet (see Appendix). Independence from each other was crucial for the coders so that they could be objective in their evaluations. The coding sheet asked that they assign numerical values to several concepts. In terms of gender stereotypes, a coder would simply tally the total number of models who portrayed each stereotype. Lastly, for *Vogue Japan* and *GQ Japan*, a coder would indicate whether there was a presence of Westernization (slang, images, concepts, etc.) in the advertisement (no=0, yes=1) and, if so, how many (tally).

Percentages were used to either support or refute the hypotheses. To begin, the sums of models in each gender were calculated within each magazine (data for individual issues were combined). For the hypotheses pertaining to gender stereotypes (1-6), the first step was to sum the tallies for each stereotype. Next, each stereotype tally sum was divided over the sum of the models in its respective gender. Model gender sums were chosen as the denominator because a stereotype was only tallied in the presence of the gender to which it applied (i.e. concerned with physical attractiveness was analyzed only for female models). After finding the individual percentages for each stereotype in each magazine, they were then averaged with those that fit under their respective categories

(decorative roles, traditional roles, etc.). Finally, the gender stereotype percentages were averaged with their national magazine counterparts (i.e. men in decorative roles for *Vogue USA* was averaged for men in decorative roles for *GQ USA*). This resulted in proportions of stereotype occurrences for both Japan and America that were then compared in order to evaluate Hypotheses 1-6.

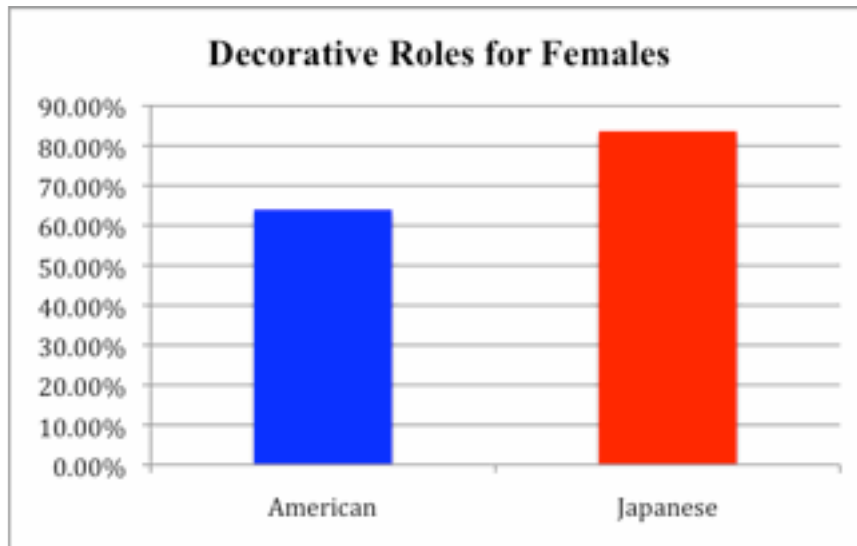
For Hypothesis 7, concerning minority models, the first step was to total the number of human models in each magazine. Next the number of minority models in each magazine was totaled. The sum of minority models was then divided by the sum of human models to find the proportion of minority models in each magazine. Again, these percentages were averaged with their national magazine counterparts. The result allowed for individual minority model proportions for both America and Japan that were then compared to evaluate Hypothesis 7.

Hypothesis 8 dealt with Westernization. It was analyzed using a similar method to that used for Hypotheses 1-6. The first step was to sum the number of times a coder observed Westernization in an advertisement (0=no; 1=yes) for each Japanese publication. Next, each Westernization tally sum was divided over the total number of coder observations (total number of advertisements x 2) in each magazine (314 for *Vogue Japan* and 174 for *GQ Japan*). This resulted in proportions of Westernization occurrences for each Japanese publication that were then compared in order to evaluate Hypothesis 8.

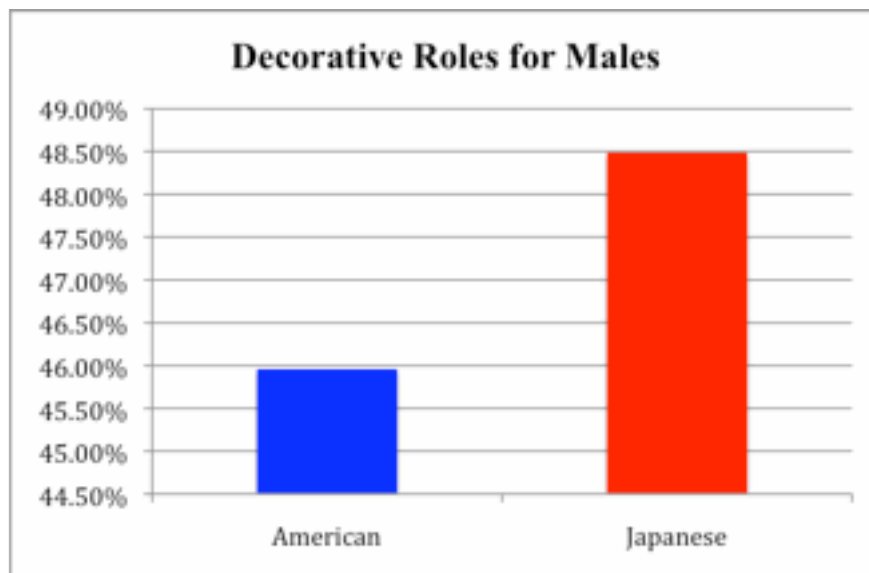
## RESULTS

The data generated from this study resulted in several key percentages. These percentages were then converted into the following visuals so that they could clearly

translate the disproof or validation of their respective hypotheses.

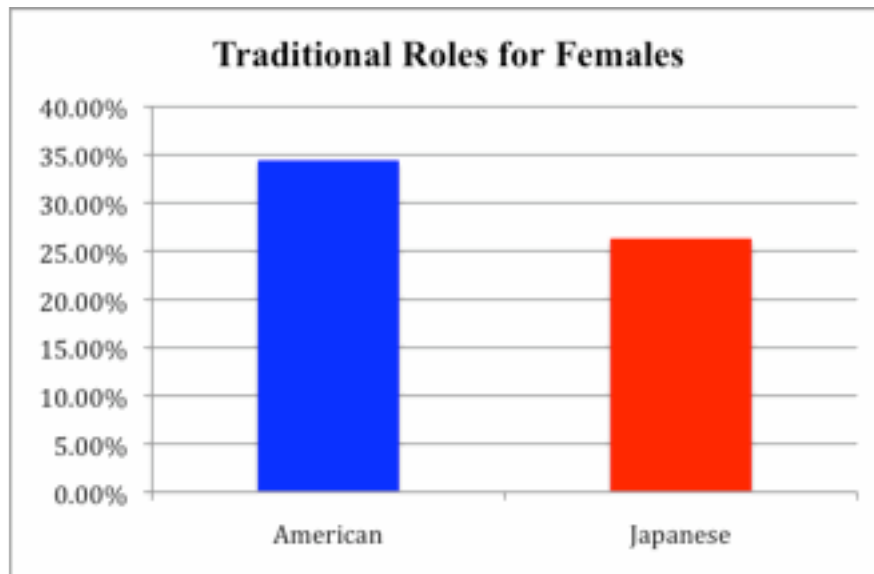


Hypothesis 1 states that the proportion of females portrayed in decorative roles in Japanese magazines exceeds the proportion of that in American magazines. The results of this study support this hypothesis; showing more women are portrayed as sex objects or as people who are concerned with their physical appearances in Japanese magazines.

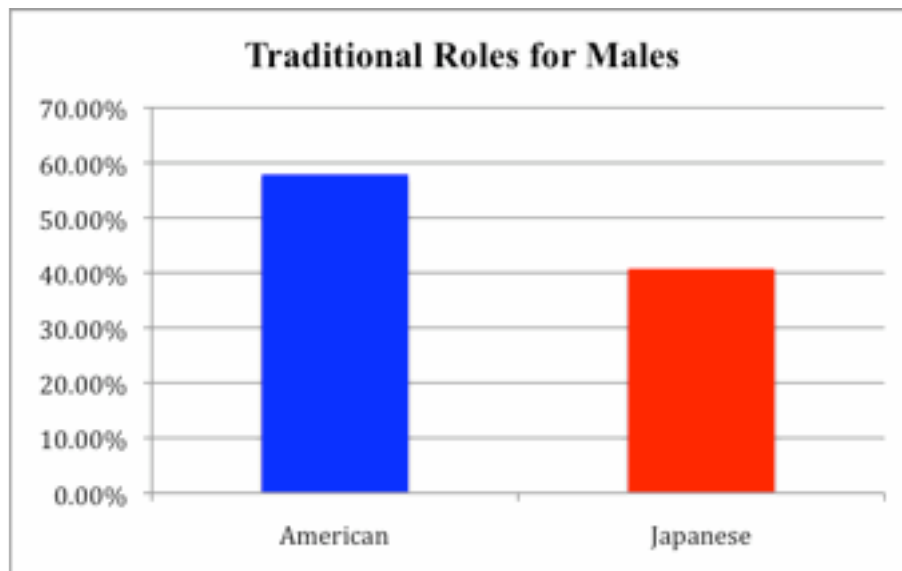


Hypothesis 2 states that the proportion of males portrayed in decorative roles in American magazines exceeds the proportion of that in Japanese magazines. The results

support this hypothesis; showing more men are portrayed as rugged or as sex objects in Japanese magazines.

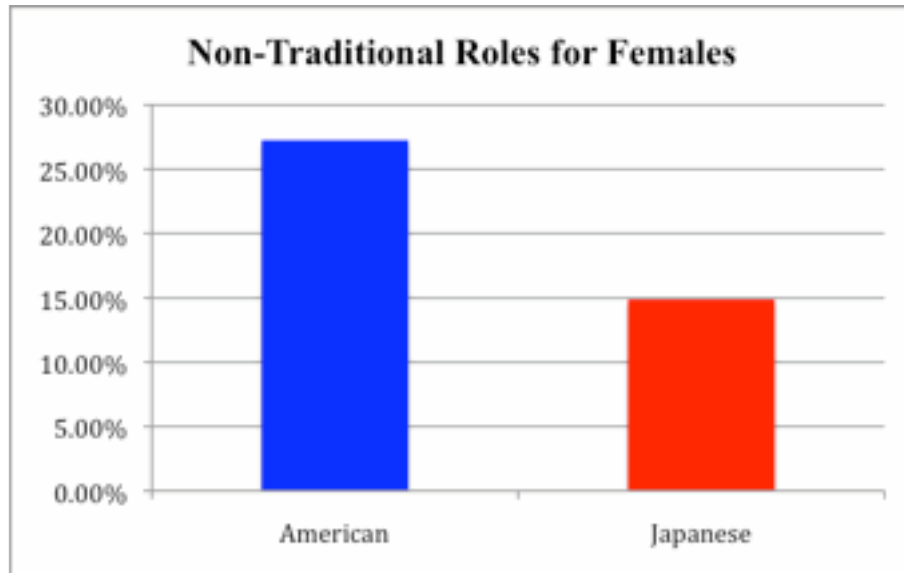


Hypothesis 3 predicts that the proportion of females portrayed in traditional roles in Japanese magazines exceeds the proportion of that in American magazines. The results of this study disagree; finding more women are portrayed in traditional roles of dependency and being homemakers in American magazines.

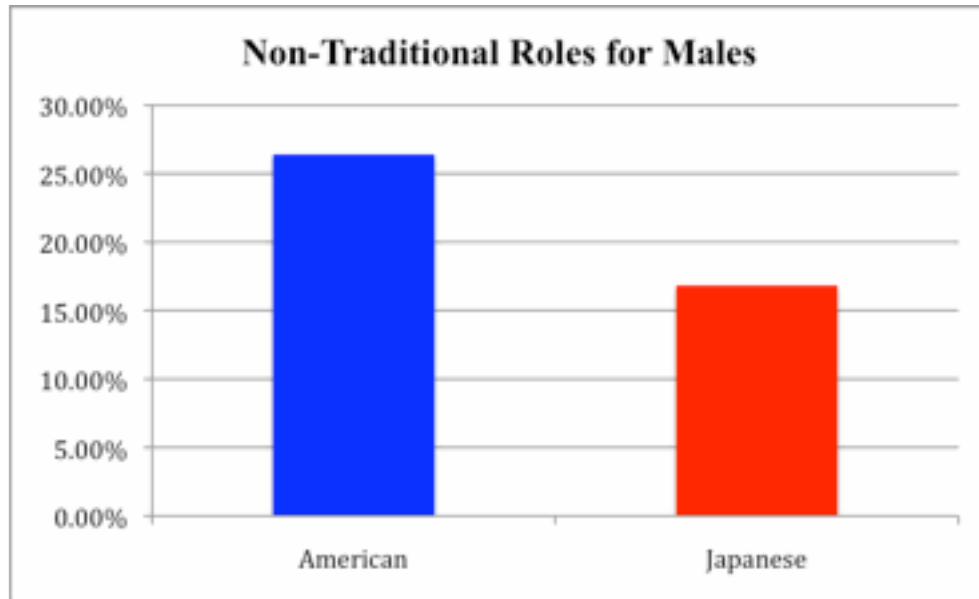


Hypothesis 4 states that the proportion of males portrayed in traditional roles in Japanese

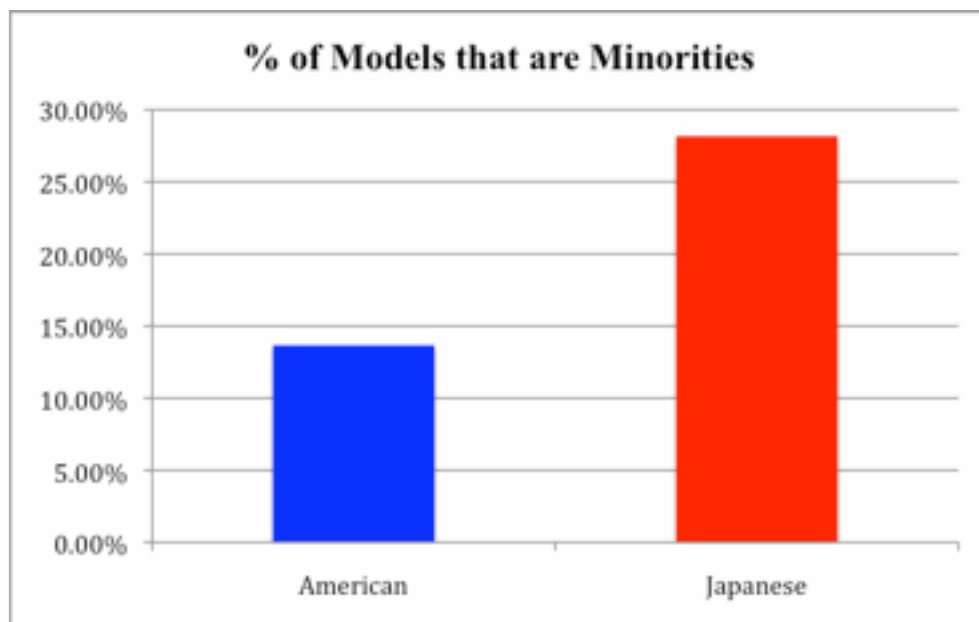
magazines exceeds the proportion of that in American magazines. Again, the research disagrees; finding more men are portrayed in traditional roles of independence and being breadwinners in American magazines.



Hypothesis 5 predicts that the proportion of females portrayed in non-traditional roles in American magazines exceeds the proportion of that in Japanese magazines. The results of this study support that statement: showing more women are portrayed in non-traditional roles of being independent and career-oriented in American magazines.



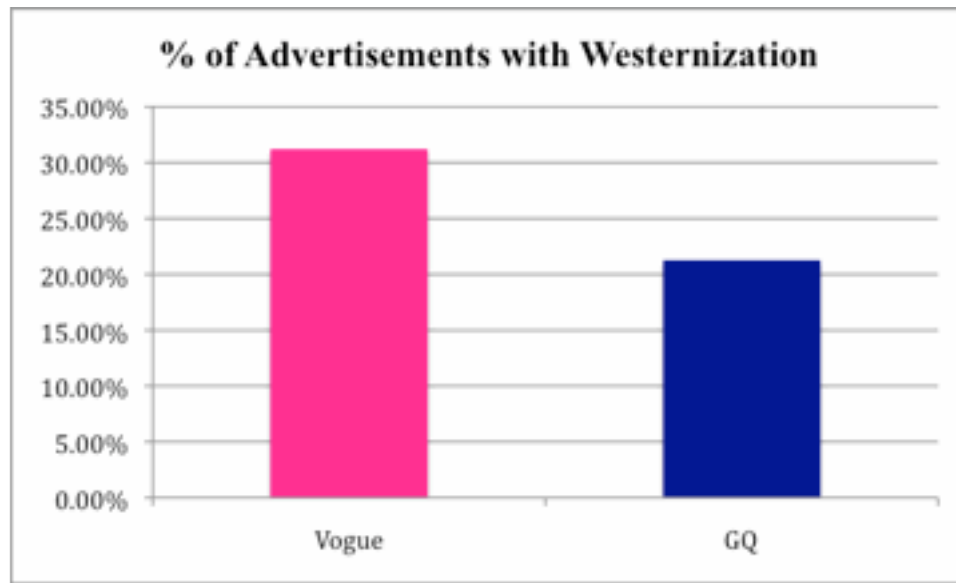
Similarly, Hypothesis 6 states that the proportion of males portrayed in non-traditional roles in American magazines exceeds that in Japanese magazines. Again, the results of this study support that statement; finding more men are portrayed in non-traditional roles of homemakers, androgynous, sensitive, and playing supporting roles to women in American magazines.



Hypothesis 7 predicts that Japanese magazines are more likely to use minority models



than American magazines. Not surprisingly, the results of the study support that statement.



Finally, Hypothesis 8 predicts that the proportion of Westernization occurrences in *Vogue Japan* will exceed that in *GQ Japan*. Again, the results of the study support that prediction.

### DISCUSSION

The majority of this study's hypotheses were supported. Both *Vogue Japan* and *GQ Japan* prominently display men and women in decorative roles. This could be attributed to the difference between Japanese and American cultures. As Puritans founded the United States, most of our culture upholds prudish values and avoids using sexual situations more than those in other countries. In contrast, Japan is known for its laissez-faire attitude toward sex, often using it in their everyday advertising.

Although America strays away from portraying models as sex objects, it does tend to favor showing them in traditional roles. Both *Vogue USA* and *GQ USA* had images depicting demure women with soft expressions. Similarly, both magazines had

many rugged men, sporting hardened expressions and leather jackets. I had been expecting the Japanese publications to be more inclined toward these traditional roles, as they are a male-dominated society. However, it seems that America has not fully detached from the housewife and cowboy motifs.

However, the American publications did counteract these high levels of traditional role portrayals by having a much higher percentage of models portrayed in non-traditional roles. They embraced sensitive, androgynous men that played supporting roles to independent, career-oriented women. The only hope is that magazines continue toward this trend of accepting the avant-garde.

The Japanese publications featured minority models more often than the American publications did. This may not be surprising due to the simple fact that Asians are a minority in the modeling world. However, due to the effects of Westernization, only 31.21 percent of the models featured in *Vogue Japan* were minorities.

As predicted, *Vogue Japan* had more images of Westernization than *GQ Japan* did. These images include Anglo-Saxon models, American slang, and other American ideas. It seems that the world of women's fashion advertising has become more homogenous than men's fashion.

There were also some observations found outside of the formulated data. First, Americans love their advertisements. Each issue of *Vogue USA* has nearly six hundred advertisements. In contrast, it was hard to find advertisements in *GQ Japan*. Most of those issues consisted of articles and advice columns. The Japanese publications seemed more inclined toward the written word: with copy making up most of the magazines and even including headlines for their advertisements.

Second, women love their advertisements. *Vogue* surpassed *GQ* in the use of advertising within each country's issue. This could be attributable to the fact that women's fashion is so versatile. *Vogue* featured advertisements for products ranging from fragrances to couture, from lingerie to business suits. *GQ*, however seemed to give the most attention to men's professional fashion, fragrances, and watches. The limitations of men's fashion do not lend themselves to generating hundreds of advertisements per magazine.

#### *Implications for Marketers*

Advertising and Marketing managers can use the results of this study to better understand American and Japanese consumers. They can use the knowledge of Japan's preference for men and women in decorative roles while selecting models. For example, since Japan tends to portray women as sex objects, they could choose well known sex symbols, such as Rhianna or Scarlett Johansson, to represent their products.

Knowing that Americans are more likely to portray men and women in traditional roles could help managers in determining the themes of their advertising. For example, an advertiser would be inclined to portray the concepts of traditional relationships: heterosexual men and women, where the woman plays a supporting role to the man. However, the fact that American publications more prominently feature non-traditional roles for both sexes shows that Americans are inclined to accept the avant-garde. Advertisers could portray models in an unexpected, modern light (male models selling kitchen products, female models selling cars, etc.).

The study found that, although minorities are more prominently featured in Japanese publications, there is a strong trend towards using Anglo-Saxon models.

Similarly, Westernization is prevalent in Japanese (specifically women's) advertising. Advertisers must understand that the world is becoming smaller. People are looking to the West for inspiration and consumer preferences. Managers can harness this knowledge and place emphasis on Western concepts in their advertisements.

#### *Limitations and Further Research*

One limitation to this study is the magazine selection. Looking into country-specific magazines could be more informative, especially for analyzing Japanese advertisements. Through the use of Japanese translators, researchers could see what subjects are discussed in those highly used columns. Also, analyzing other big international magazines such as *Marie Claire* or *Glamour* could give the research more depth. Finally, looking into magazines that are dedicated to products other than fashion could provide a varied perspective on the differences between these two cultures.

Another limitation to this study is that more aspects of the advertisements could be analyzed. Other factors such as socioeconomic status or stage in life of each model could help us to understand what customers in each country admire. Another factor to analyze could be the type of clothes advertised. There could be cultural differences between customer preferences in clothing.

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APPENDIX

**Magazine Advertisement Data Coding Instrument  
Spring 2014**

**1a. Advertisement No:** \_\_\_\_\_

**1b. Coder No:** \_\_\_\_\_

**1c. \_\_\_\_\_ Magazine:**

- 1 = *Vogue* USA
- 2 = *Vogue* Japan
- 3 = *GQ* USA
- 4 = *GQ* Japan

**2. \_\_\_\_\_ Primary Type of Product/Service Advertised:**

*Hedonic*

- 1 = Recreation and travel
- 2 = Cosmetics and personal care products
- 3 = Clothing, shoes and apparel
- 4 = Entertainment and entertainment supplies
- 5 = Automobile and automobile related
- 6 = Sporting goods, toys and games
- 7 = Publications
- 8 = Movies
- 9 = Retailers
- 10 = Electronic appliances/products
- 11 = Non profit organizations

*Utilitarian*

- 12 = Food and beverages
- 13 = Alcoholic beverages
- 14 = Tobacco products
- 15 = Over the counter drugs/medications
- 16 = Household and lawn and garden supplies
- 17 = Diet and exercise products
- 18 = Furniture
- 19 = Home computers and computer supplies
- 20 = Office equipment and supplies
- 21 = Pets, pet food and pet supplies
- 22 = Banking and financial services
- 23 = Telecommunications services
- 24 = Transportation services

*Miscellaneous*

- 25 = Miscellaneous products

26 = Miscellaneous services

### 3. General presence of minority models

- a) general presence of male models \_\_\_\_\_ (0=no; 1=yes)  
 b) general presence of female models \_\_\_\_\_ (0=no; 1=yes)

### 4. Number of human models in the ad

- a) total number of human models \_\_\_\_\_ (9=9 or more)  
 b) total number of male models \_\_\_\_\_ (9=9 or more)

a) \_\_\_\_\_ Age of primary male

- 1 = child
- 2 = teenager or 20s
- 3 = 30s and 40s
- 4 = 50 and over
- 5 = Code 9 if no model

- c) Total number of female models \_\_\_\_\_ (9=9 or more)

a) \_\_\_\_\_ Age of primary female

- 1 = child
- 2 = teenager or 20s
- 3 = 30s and 40s
- 4 = 50 and over
- 5 = Code 9 if no model

### 5. Perceived Importance of Characters

(1 = major role; 2 = minor role; 3 = background role; code 0 if not applicable)

- a) Perceived Importance of male models \_\_\_\_\_  
 b) Perceived Importance of female models \_\_\_\_\_

### 6. \_\_\_\_\_ Setting

- 1 = Business Setting
- 2 = Home Setting (indoor or outdoor)
- 3 = Outdoor/natural scenery
- 4 = Social setting outside the home



5 = Other

**a. \_\_\_\_\_ Male Models Relationship to Others in the Ad**

- 1 = Family context
- 2 = Social context
- 3 = Business context
- 4 = Impersonal context
- 5 = Nobody else in the ad
- 6 = Other

**b. \_\_\_\_\_ Female Models Relationship to Others in the Ad**

- 1 = Family context
- 2 = Social context
- 3 = Business context
- 4 = Impersonal context
- 5 = Nobody else in the ad
- 6 = Other

**7. Westernization (for *Vogue* Japan and *GQ* Japan)**

“Americanized” concepts (Anglo models, American slang, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_ (0=no; 1=yes)

How many? (“Americanized” words, images, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

**8. Stereotypes**

Variables for Stereotypes (to be assigned 1 point for every occurrence within the ad)

• **For Females**

- *Women in Traditional Roles*
  - Dependency \_\_\_\_\_
  - Housewife \_\_\_\_\_
- *Women in Decorative Roles*
  - Concerned with physical attractiveness \_\_\_\_\_
  - Women as sex objects \_\_\_\_\_
- *Women in Non-Traditional Roles*
  - Women in non-traditional activities \_\_\_\_\_
  - Career-oriented women \_\_\_\_\_
  - Voice of authority \_\_\_\_\_
- *Women Portrayed as Equal to Men* \_\_\_\_\_

- **For Males**
  - *Men in Traditional Roles*
    - Independence \_\_\_\_\_
    - Breadwinner \_\_\_\_\_
    - Rugged \_\_\_\_\_
    - Men as sex objects \_\_\_\_\_
  - *Men in non-traditional roles*
    - Homemaker \_\_\_\_\_
    - Sensitive/Androgynous \_\_\_\_\_
    - Playing a supporting role to women \_\_\_\_\_
  - *Men Portrayed as Equal to Women* \_\_\_\_\_

## ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the differences between how male and female models are portrayed in magazine advertising within the Japanese and American cultures. It analyzes the prevalence of minority models, Westernization, gender stereotypes, and progressive gender concepts within *Vogue* and *GQ*. As the world becomes more interconnected, it is important for marketers to understand the ways in which customer preferences are changing, often blurring with one another, so that they can successfully promote products.