

“Menvertising” and the Resistances to New Masculinities in Audiovisual Representations

MARÍA JESÚS PANDO-CANTELI
MARIA PILAR RODRIGUEZ
University of Deusto, Spain

This article introduces an innovative definition and a method of enquiry for “menvertising” audiovisual commercials. Inspired in prior “femvertising” campaigns, it explores recent campaigns that question stereotypes and portrayals of men traditionally associated with hegemonic masculinity. The article presents a literature review of the study of gender portrayals in advertising and of the notion of hegemonic masculinity, and explains the three principal reasons to explain men’s lower identification with commercials that promote new portrayals of masculinities that deviate from or subvert hegemonic masculinity (resistance, reactance, and masculine gender role stress). It offers a methodological framework for the study of menvertising and applies it to three different international commercials which show different levels of commitment to the advancement of gender equality versus a commodification of what the brands at times perceive as an advantageous approach to gender portrayals.

Keywords: “menvertising,” hegemonic masculinity, resistance, stereotypes, audiovisual advertising

For the past seven decades, scholars consistently have been exploring gender representations in advertising. The use of stereotypes in the portrayals of women and men has been prevalent in advertising; the first academic studies already noted the significant presence of stereotypes in the 1970s (Belkaoui & Belkaoui, 1976; Goffman, 1979; Hawkins & Coney, 1976; Lundstrom & Scigliimpaglia, 1977; McArthur & Resko, 1975). As Grau and Zotos (2016) note, transformations in social structure, in family configurations, and in the labor force have provoked significant modulations in both female and male roles and in the manner in which they are portrayed in advertising (p. 761). The study of the presence and changing manner in which stereotypes have been used, contested, negotiated, and resisted in advertising and in which the audiences and users have reacted to these progressive changes has received considerable attention in communication studies, and efforts have been made recently to provide meta-analyses and reviews of such evolution in academic terms (Eisend, 2009; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Wolin, 2003).

Maria Jesus Pando-Canteli: mpando@deusto.es

Maria Pilar Rodriguez: maria.pilar@deusto.es

Date submitted: 2020–03–19

Copyright © 2021 (Maria Jesus Pando-Canteli and Maria Pilar Rodriguez). Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No Derivatives (by-nc-nd). Available at <http://ijoc.org>.

It has been noted that there is a culture lag between advances in terms of participation of women in society and the slower manner in which such changes are portrayed in advertising:

Sexes for a long period of time were depicted in advertising in more traditional roles. Women were presented in an inferior manner relative to their potential and capabilities, while at the same time the data indicated a shift towards more positive role portrayals. (Grau & Zotos, 2016, p. 761)

In the following decades, issues such as the degree in which gender stereotyping is present in advertising, transformations of gender stereotyping over the decades, and the nature of the relationship between gender stereotyping in advertising and role changing developments in society have been preoccupations for researchers in the 1980s, 1990s, and in the past two decades (see, among others, Akestam, 2017; Courtney & Whipple, 1983; Furnham & Mak, 1999; Wolin, 2003; Zawisza & Cinnirella, 2010).

Grau and Zotos (2016) mention four areas in which present and future research are particularly prominent and promising in terms of innovative creation of knowledge. First, they indicate the move from research focused on print and television gender portrayals to online platforms. Second, they note the attention paid to a previously largely ignored segment of the population—the lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender (LGBT) consumers. Third, they refer to the recent trend which has been named “femvertising” to describe the type of advertising that aims to empower women, and, finally, they write about the most recent trend, which is the increasing attention to male roles in advertising (pp. 768–769). This article advances the knowledge around these areas, focusing on the concept of male advertising and formulating a new definition and a methodological approach to the study of “menvertising.” The next section briefly summarizes the concept of femvertising as a required precedent to better understand the focus of this article, menvertising, and changes in the understanding of masculinities. These changes will be analyzed by first exposing the growing relevance of masculinities in the media and specifically referring to the concepts of hegemonic masculinity, reactance, and gender role stress. Then, a method of analysis is proposed to identify how menvertising works. This method is applied to the analysis of three commercials, whose results are discussed critically.

Femvertising

The term “femvertising” has been coined to refer to female-targeted advertising that opposes inequality and stereotyping. Femvertising exhibits qualities of empowering women, feminism, female activism, or women leadership and equality (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2019; Becker-Herby, 2016; Drake, 2017; Rodríguez Pérez & Gutiérrez, 2017). It is a new form of advertising that responds to a progressive reduction of the gap between the real development of women in the labor force and in the family and their representation in advertising; therefore, more realistic portrayals of women in commercials can be seen. Three principal factors may be mentioned as plausible explanations for this tendency to move toward a type of advertising that rejects traditional stereotypes associated with femininity and which seeks a portrayal that exhibits an intersectional approach, which promotes diversity and which aspires to empower women and to oppose inequality (Becker-Herby, 2016).

First, the changes in the stereotypical representation of women are connected to the fact that, in these past decades, women have also increased their power as consumers. In the United States, as Rodríguez Pérez and Gutiérrez (2017) note, women account for 85% of all consumer purchases, either directly or by influencing the decision to buy a certain brand or product (p. 340). Second, the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is essential to understand that in a time when political and social issues are part of our daily experience, "companies are expected to not only sell products, but also weave goodwill and ethical behavior into their daily practices" (Abitbol & Sternadori, 2019, p. 22). Many companies are achieving this by supporting social causes through socially relevant messages, making strategies based on CSR. However, such commitment has to be perceived as genuine, because consumers are aware of what is known as "commodity feminism," a term first introduced by Goldman, Heath, and Smith (1991) to describe the manner in which advertisers have been attempting to tie the emancipation of women to the sale of corporate goods and services. In such cases, feminist ideals such as independence, freedom, and sexual agency are conveniently reframed for advertising in a way that, far from contributing to gender equality, they often reinforce stereotypes and prejudices against women. In other cases, if the message is truly linked to a feminist cause but is seen as a mere strategy to win the public, the response may be detrimental to the company. Finally, the third and final reason for the increasing presence of femvertising commercials in the audiovisual advertising industry is that, as Drake (2017) convincingly argues, women are critical of the portrayal of their gender roles in advertising and sensitive to their portrayals. She adds,

These depictions can have a direct impact on business outcomes for a company; significant correlations have been found between perceived female role portrayal offensiveness and purchase intentions for a product, with women reporting that they are less likely to purchase a new product that uses offensive depictions in advertisements. (p. 593)

Several articles have analyzed audiovisual commercials internationally, and the studies show that there are different levels of commitment on the part of the companies to gender equality as well as different reactions from users to what was perceived as commodity feminism or a real attempt to move toward gender equality (Drake, 2017; Kapoor & Munjal, 2019; Menéndez, 2019; Rodríguez Pérez & Gutiérrez, 2017). It can be concluded that women react positively to the questioning of traditional stereotypical portrayals of femininity and applaud diversity and intersectionality in audiovisual advertising, whereas they reject commercials that disguise a conservative and even unequal approach under a false feminist stance.

Menvertising

Masculinities and the Media

As Green and Van Oort (2013) state, advertising has served as "a key site for the dissemination of dominant discourses on masculinity" (p. 697). Academic efforts to trace the changing nature of advertising directed at men with the intention to change traditional stereotypes and move toward equality are scarce, and they have appeared mostly in the past five years. It is true that efforts can be found on the study of the male body image in advertising (Harrison, 2008; Patterson & Elliott, 2002; Schroeder & Zwick, 2004), but the first article to explore male portrayals on the basis of a theoretical discussion of masculinity in terms of gender roles is the one by Gentry and Harrison (2010). Under the title "Is Advertising a Barrier to Male

Movement Toward Gender Change?," it offers an exploration of male and father role portrayals (see the section on "dadvertising," below) in advertising, to conclude that

the portrayal of gender in commercials in 2007 and 2008 does not appear to have improved greatly, despite a couple of decades of political correctness. Women are being shown in less stereotypically traditional roles, but male portrayals still reflect a very traditional masculine perspective, including the portrayals shown to boys. (Gentry & Harrison, 2010, p. 90)

Two important works need to be added to the academic development of the concept of menvertising: *Reshaping the Man in the Mirror: The Effects of Challenging Stereotypical Male Portrayals in Advertising* (Knutson & Waldner, 2017) and "Dadvertising: Representations of Fatherhood in Procter & Gamble's Tide Commercials" (Leader, 2019). Knutson and Waldner (2017) conclude from their case study that menvertising ads have positive effects on the brands behind them and, in general, that ads that challenge cultural and ethnical stereotypes have similar positive effects. However, they also note that "the female respondents were affected by the norm-breaking ads to a larger extent than the male respondents" (p. 41). Leader (2019) explores representations of several Tide's dads as "dadvertising", or advertising that uses fathers to represent a new vision of ideal masculinity centered on involved parenting and emotional vulnerability. The advertisements in her case study show different levels of practice and commitment to gender equality. Leader concludes that most examples reveal dadvertising's root in "neoliberal gender politics and commodity activism, wherein evolving masculinities are personalized and commoditized into consumerist actions" (p. 72). Both the higher implication of female users and the notion of dadvertising will be important for our case study.

Hegemonic Masculinity

To better understand the methodological proposal elaborated in this article, it is fundamental to briefly introduce the notion of hegemonic masculinity, because it is the basis of these and many other publications on the study of menvertising. Knutson and Waldner (2017) have attempted to define this concept as "advertising that challenge male body ideals and masculine gender role stereotypes" (p. 5). To understand the challenge to masculine gender role stereotypes, it is essential to understand the normative and stereotypical portrayal of masculinity.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity was coined by Connell (1995), inspired by Gramsci's concept of hegemony, which describes the ability of the dominant social group to obtain consent from those being subjugated. In terms of relations of power, production, and emotional attachment, hegemonic masculinity is defined as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (Connell, 1995, p. 77). Hegemonic masculinity therefore legitimizes men's dominant position in society and justifies the subordination of the common male population and women, and other marginalized ways of being a man. The stereotypical representation of hegemonic masculinity includes "a high degree of ruthless competition, an inability to express emotions other than

anger, an unwillingness to admit weakness or dependency, devaluation of women and all feminine attributes in men and homophobia" (Kupers, 2005, p. 716).

Gentry and Harrison provide an adequate revision of the conceptualizations of masculinity in academic literature in the different decades. Thus, they include David and Brannon (1976), who identified four main components of masculine expectations: the big wheel (a preoccupation with competition, achievement, and success); the sturdy oak (an emphasis on physical toughness and emotional stoicism); no sissy stuff (homophobia and an avoidance of all things feminine); and give 'em hell (an emphasis on being aggressive and forceful; Gentry & Harrison, 2010, p. 77). Similarly, they refer to Deaux and Major (1987), who noted that any behavior that can be perceived as feminine in a given context constitutes a role violation for heterosexual men. Thompson (1996) suggested that male identities are structured by themes of separation, and autonomy, whereas female identities are structured by themes of identification, connectedness, and forming relationships. Males are predisposed toward a self-focused and autonomy-driven orientation (Gentry & Harrison, 2010, p. 79). This description is relevant to understand traditional and stereotypical portrayals of men in advertising and to analyze to what extent and in which themes change has been achieved or attempted. Masculinities, however, are historically bound, and thus "older forms of masculinity might be displaced by new ones" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 833). This means that hegemonic masculinity should also be acknowledged as fluid and transhistorical, as gender relations and gender hierarchies are also subject to change.

Connell herself, as well as other authors (e.g., Bridges & Pascoe, 2014; Moller, 2007; Whitehead, 1999), have developed and amplified the notion of hegemonic masculinity, questioning the rigidity of the model, adding new ways of implementation of such a concept to different areas of study and suggesting transformations according to different social changes. However, the one relevant idea for the present article is the emphasis on interaction and agency by the audiences to accept, negotiate, question, and even reject portrayals of hegemonic masculinities, therefore rejecting the idea of an inevitable social reproduction of such a model and recognizing the significance of social struggles (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Several authors have examined the presence of symbols of hegemonic masculinity in advertising as well as the changing manner in which the threats to it are expressed in visual and narrative strategies used in recent commercials. Messner and Montez de Oca (2005) connect beer, liquor, and sports as typical symbols of masculinity, but add the role of the "happy loser" as a new trope and include the "revenge-against-women themes" (p. 1906) in recent commercials, which may be linked to allowing men to feel as victims and experience resentment against women. Following on sports commercials and developing the notion of the crisis of masculinity, Green and Van Oort (2013) find that, five years later, commercials do not portray the acceptance of the "happy loser" that Messner and Montez de Oca report, but rather express a "profound aggression in reaction to the supposed failure of attempts to properly perform masculinity" (p. 696). The commercials they explore tell men to retake their lost masculinity, and partly blame women and changing gender roles for the crisis they are experiencing. The resistance to the attempts to change stereotypical gender roles has been present in different manners, and this article clarifies the reactions by viewers and users in such terms through the analysis in the case study.

In such a context, literature shows that although women applaud progressive efforts in advertising to advance gender equality, there is a big segment of the male population that does not reject stereotypical portrayals of masculinity, and an indeterminate number of men that show a strong resistance to efforts to modify hegemonic masculinity (Gentry & Harrison, 2010; Knutson & Waldner, 2017; Leader, 2019). García (2008) thus illustrates males' complacency with such portrayals:

In an age where sex, power, and materialism rule, it's not just men but masculinity itself that has become commoditized, packaged, and predigested for the masses. Lulled into complacency by Budweiser ads—and Budweiser itself—most men are all too happy to gorge on reassuring platitudes and pretend that the mindless violence and materialism engulfing their gender has nothing to do with them. (p. 114)

The following section briefly focus on the notion of resistance and on the three principal reasons to explain men's lower identification with commercials that promote new portrayals of masculinities that deviate from or subvert hegemonic masculinity.

Resistance, Reactance, and Masculine Gender Role Stress

This section aspires only to provide a simple definition of the concepts that are relevant to understand the reactions to the commercials analyzed in the next section; to do so, a working definition will be included without any attempt at exploring or theoretically explaining such concepts. Resistance generally means the refusal to accept or comply with something. In the context of gender studies, it specifically means opposition to the change that gender mainstreaming promotes. Resistance is thus meant as a phenomenon aiming to preserve the status quo rather than to question a particular dominant social order. The concept of "gender resistance" encompasses multiple and contradictory meanings. It alludes to conventional binary constructions of gender and power asymmetries that are frequently resistant to change (Sifaki & Spiropoulou, 2012, p. 187). In times in which feminist advances and changes to traditional gender roles are socially promoted, an adverse resistant reaction is to be expected.

In the field of advertising, Dhanya and Jaidev (2018) carry out a meta-analysis of the theoretical studies around the concept of reactance and define it as "an unpleasant motivational state that arises when an individual experiences a threat her or his freedoms" (p. 4449). The authors summarize most of the findings on reactance and provide the following insights: Reactance is considered as reactive and not proactive, because it depends on how individuals look for ways to restore their autonomy or to confront what they perceive as a threat to their freedoms. Consumers confront unwanted obtrusive marketing communications through various digital and social media channels and have knowledge about the persuasive tactics and their attempt to push to purchase a specific product as well as the intentions of a marketer (p. 4450). In other cases, consumers perceive a threat to their freedom in a process in which cognitive and affective components interact with individual self-image and perception (p. 4459). In all cases, consumers may react in the manner that the company anticipates, ignore the promotional efforts, respond contrarily, or spread negative messages against the company, something which the current social media platforms conveniently facilitate.

The last concept to be briefly mentioned here is the masculine gender role stress. Mussap (2008) explains that through the combination of attitudes, rewards, and punishments, women and men are socialized to conform to gender-stereotyped roles (p. 72). Such perception affects the manner in which women and men respond to cognitive and emotional appraisal of situations and events as potentially stressful: "For men, appearing physically inadequate, expressing emotions, being subordinate to women, being intellectually inferior, and failing to perform in their work and sex life, are interpreted as particularly stressful (these five factors comprise the Masculine Gender Role Stress Scale" (Mussap, 2008, pp. 72-73). The concept of gender role stress suggests, in the present context, that men will react in specific ways when they experience this particular form of stress associated to the traditional masculine gender role.

Definition, Method, and Sample

This article offers an innovative methodological approach to the analysis of audiovisual commercials in this new area. Although the method of research is content analysis, the proposal is based on the principles adapted from femvertising due to the fruitful development of that field of study and the opportunities such a model provides for an exploration of the portrayal of men in advertising. According to Becker-Herby (2016, pp. 18-19), there are five aspects that femvertising campaigns embrace in their commercials:

1. Use of a female target.
2. Messaging that is inherently profemale.
3. Pushing gender-norm boundaries/stereotypes.
4. Downplaying of sexuality.
5. Portraying women in an authentic manner.

Rodríguez and Gutiérrez (2017) adapted these principles in their analysis of several commercials to identify the real femvertising and distinguish it from other ads that, while emphasizing the centrality of an empowered female figure, resulted in the commodification and stereotyping of feminine gender roles. Becker-Herby's approach might be useful insofar as it provides the basis for a close analysis of gender-role stereotyping, although some aspects need to be reformulated, especially those addressing the empowerment, self-confidence, determination and motivation underlying profemale messages (see Principle 2, above) and the downplaying of sexuality and the centrality of the male gaze (Principle 4, above).

Likewise, Leader (2019) identifies some common features that work when producing dadvertising commercials and have to do with how gender identities are negotiated by "adopting domestic roles while retaining hegemonic traits" (p. 81). These ads are aimed at both masculine and feminine target audiences, and although they reaffirm to women that men are changing, they also "provide consolation" to those men who feel threatened by women who aspire to dethrone them from their hegemonic positions. Furthermore, these commercials also encompass new forms of manhood that pivot more on nurturance than heterosexuality and thus are inclusive for the queer community (Leader 2019, pp. 79-80). The potential threats posed by Leader (2019) in her analysis of dadvertising match precisely all those aspects that Mussap (2008) defines in the Masculine Gender Role Stress Scale, and which concentrate on the anxiety to look inadequate and feel challenged by women's superiority in intellectual, professional, and sexual realms (Mussap 2008, pp. 72-73).

Therefore, femvertising and menvertising by no means work in symmetrical terms. They stem from dramatically different positions. In very simplistic terms, whereas femvertising works as an empowering, inspirational force for women to overcome the subordinate gender roles and stereotypes in which they have been historically confined, menvertising works precisely in the opposite direction. Their starting point is that of privilege, of a hegemonic position that is now being seriously questioned and challenged by women's empowerment and nonheterosexual forms of masculinities. In other words, it is easy for the audience to identify positively with the messages of equality articulated by femvertising spots, but it is not that easy for men to embrace messages that interrogate normative forms of masculinity and render them inadequate and unfavorable. This provokes resistances and calls for a more insightful exploration of how menvertising can become an effective tool to advance gender equality.

As a necessary first step to introduce the methodology developed, we provide a definition: Menvertising is advertising that questions hegemonic masculinity and provides visual and narrative portrayals of men that promote diversity and advance equality. This definition is based on the one provided by Knutson and Waldner (2017) as previously mentioned. "Advertising that challenge male body ideals and masculine gender role stereotypes" (p. 5). The term menvertising can also be found in social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter; to mention just two examples, there is an Instagram account called Menvertising (@menvertising), and it is also a hashtag on Twitter (#menvertising) used by LRWTonic (@LRWTonic). This set of principles is proposed for the analysis of menvertising that, inspired in Becker-Herby's five components above, may provide a useful methodological tool to further identify how menvertising works:

1. Use of diverse male talent. Masculinity is no longer represented by young, middle-class, White heterosexual males. On the contrary, a more intersectional and diverse approach to representation is observed. Questions of race, age, class, or gender identity are taken into consideration.
2. Pushing gender norms'/stereotypes' boundaries. Perceptions of what a man/boy "should" be are challenged, as well as the diverse nonnormative environments that question hegemonic masculinity. Domestic scenarios, gender-neutral spaces and those that are not traditionally associated to masculine realms are portrayed.
3. Real men, authentic manner. Men of all kinds are portrayed as ordinary citizens and not as idealized bodies that are unattainable for average men. Likewise, the product promoted in the ad also responds to this authenticity, being transparent and genuine in what they sell.
4. Promale message. This component is the most problematic when confronted with femvertising actions. Although femvertising encourages women to gain affirmation, self-confidence, motivation, and feel empowered, pushing them beyond traditional subordinate roles, menvertising ads precisely refrain from reinforcing men's hegemony and call for a negotiation of these gender-bound identities. Far from that, they launch a positive message by vindicating the privilege of participating in realms from which they have culturally been excluded, like caregiving, or by acknowledging the right to feel vulnerable and emotional. Although femvertising empowers women, menvertising conspicuously deprives men of the privileges

associated to hegemonic masculinities and asks them to negotiate new subject positions by embracing feminine traits in a celebratory way.

5. Downplay sexuality. The male gaze that dominates traditional representations of masculinity is here neutralized and desexualized, in not only how it reifies women but also how it objectifies male bodies inverting this male gaze (Patterson & Elliott, 2002).

A series of questions can help identify how menvertising works. This method of analysis allows an insight into the strategies used and the elements that provoke resistance. Table 1 shows these features to which some questions are associated.

Table 1. Menvertising: Key Features (Own Elaboration).

Features	Questions
Use of diverse male talent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are ads presenting diverse male models in terms of race, class, age, bodily features, disabilities, and nonbinary gender identity?
Pushing gender norms'/ stereotypes' boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are men presented in neutral scenarios or in those that are not associated with hegemonic masculinity traits? • Are they in professional or domestic environments that challenge traditional roles?
Real men, authentic manner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are men portrayed as average, ordinary citizens, moving away from normative ideas on bodies and physical appearance? • Are they and the situations depicted portrayed in an authentic manner, transparent concerning the product they advertise?
Promale message	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the ad privileging inclusiveness and motivation of men with regard to those aspects that are often neglected in traditional masculinities, such as caregiving, vulnerability, tenderness, and open expressions of emotion? • Is it celebrating more gender neutral, affirmative, and celebratory ways of living a new masculinity?
Downplay sexuality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the ad deliberately challenging the sexualized male gaze? • Is heteronormative sexuality challenged?

These questions will be applied to three commercials that work as a case analysis. Choosing a case analysis as a methodological tool serves the purpose of testing the premises formulated in the questions. Further discussion on the findings will critically address the resistances these commercials found in the consumers as well as the significance/relevance of menvertising as a tool to fight gender stereotypes and roles and embrace gender equality. Commercials were selected on the basis of different levels of belonging to the paradigm and the definition of menvertising offered in this article. The three represent successful companies with a long tradition in advertising and provide a representative example of the implementation of this methodological model, which is susceptible of application to other commercials.

Analysis

Gillette. "The Best a Man Can Be."



Figure 1. "The best a man can be." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koPmuEyP3a0>

Launched during the Super Bowl in 2019, this ad provoked much reaction and opened up one of the most heated controversies on masculinities in recent times (Ganev, 2019). The commercial begins with the brand's slogan since 1989, "The Best a Man Can Get," to immediately ask the audience: "Is this the best a man can get?" (2019, 0:08). This is followed by scenes demonstrating negative behavior among males, including bullying, sexism, sexual misconduct, and toxic masculinity, and acknowledgement of social movements such as #MeToo. The ad continues to explain that "we believe in the best in men: To say the right thing, to act the right way," since "the boys watching today will be the men of tomorrow" (2019, 0:53). As a result, the original 1989 slogan is reworked to reinforce this message, becoming "The Best Men Can Be" (2019, 1:43).

Diverse Male Talent

In a study of masculinity and race in advertising, Russel Luyt (2012) reminds us that in the conception of hegemonic masculinity, relations are not only characterized by men's dominance over women, but also hierarchy among men, which are often determined along axes of social difference such as race, sexuality, and social class (p. 36). In his study carried out in South Africa, Luyt concludes that in general, "white men are represented as exemplars of hegemonic masculinity whilst black men are marginalised" (p. 35). The Gillette commercial is innovative in terms of diversity in two different manners. First, it includes males from different generations: older men, adults, young men, adolescents, and children. The implicit message is that gender equality and the rejection of sexual abuse concerns men from all generations, and every man should feel accountable for his behavior. Second, and more interestingly, most African American men included in the commercial exhibit a respectful attitude toward

women or reinforce the empowerment of women. They even reproach the inappropriate behavior of some of their White friends. This opposes the traditional hegemonic representation in advertising and in media portrayals in which African American males are frequently linked to both delinquency and absenteeism in their role as fathers. It may be added that such innovative and progressive portrayal that confronts hegemonic masculinity in racial terms is not extended to the representation of female figures in the commercial, who remain mostly passive and powerless.

Pushing Gender Norms'/Stereotypes' Boundaries

This commercial deliberately shows stereotyped situations in which children behave according to traditional masculine impulses: aggressive, competitive, and bullying, whereas men display abusive conducts toward women. These boundaries are pushed in the second half of the ad where all these traits are denounced and signaled as highly inadequate. The same guys prove to be able to show an attitude dramatically different, thus overcoming prejudices and embracing more loving and friendly forms of masculinity.

Real Men, Authentic Manner

There is a diversity that shows real men and boys in real situations, often mixing people of different origins and in different environments. Whereas men's portrayals are authentic, the narrative shows no connection with the product that is being promoted. The brand has a tradition in producing short narratives emphasizing the best values of masculinity. "The best a man can be" is a tag that marks the commercials in past years. Unlike other promotional campaigns that show normative heterosexual men in perfectly shaped bodies, this ad highlights ordinary people with ordinary lives.

Promale Message

This ad has been exemplary in the way it explicitly fights against violence and abusive conducts. Yet it received ferocious attacks and was ill received for its overt denounce of sexually aggressive conducts. The intentional message of calling men on their responsibility to stop abuse and sexual oppression and search for a positive, friendly, and celebratory masculinity turns against itself by displaying a much evident shameful and chauvinistic behavior that the audience interpreted as a direct attack to all men. The aspirational message of the second part was overshadowed by the punitive reproval of the opening scenes in a clear illustration of reactance: The male audience felt threatened by a narrative that not only denounces the excesses of a toxic masculinity but also makes them look in a mirror that returns a dreadful image.

Downplay Sexuality

The commercial explicitly denounces sexual abuses and violent conducts and, consequently, implicitly censures the sexualized male gaze. Produced in the aftermath of the #MeToo movement, its goal was that of reinforcing the collective engagement of men in this fight. No attention to other gender identities is given as the focus of the action is the violence against women perpetrated by heterosexual men.

TIDE. "Tide Boost Is My Tide. What's Yours?"



Figure 2. Dad mom. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDZ0SdlKPXU>

This brand has a series of dad-mom commercials that depict men in charge of domestic chores, especially the laundry. In this commercial, launched in 2014, the man monologues on his duties as a dad mom while he skillfully folds children's clothes from the laundry basket. His message to the audience is that he can be a dad mom and yet remain fully masculine.

Diverse Male Talent

The ad presents an average White, middle-class young adult in his late 30s or early 40s, a heterosexual family man, probably the same type as the target men and women at whom this ad aimed.

Pushing Gender Norms/Stereotypes' Boundaries

Gender stereotypes are challenged in a number of ways. First of all, the audience is introduced to a dad-mom figure, a character that has received much attention in late studies on advertising. Coined as dadvertising (Leader, 2019), this strategy presents a family man that changes the breadwinner status of a successful professional for that of nurturer and caregiver within the household, without renouncing to his masculinity. In the second place, his environment is not the stereotyped masculine setting of a multinational headquarter office, a sports club, or a trendy bar, but the domestic environment of a middle-class living room, which works as the operation center with a vacuum cleaner and an ironing board in the background. Moreover, he is proud in showing abilities that are not commonly attributed to men, such as skillfully folding girlish clothes.

Real Men, Authentic Manner

This is an ordinary man, presented as a father who cares for his family's well-being, in an ordinary setting, and undertaking an ordinary domestic chore. Far from the idealized version of fatherhood in some other dadvertising examples, where a happy and playful father enjoys his children outdoors, this father accepts the prosaic burden of domestic chores associated to his real dad-mom role.

Promale Message

This ad provides a good example of how dadvertising can challenge traditional traits of masculinity, but does not entirely challenge hegemonic masculinity. Whereas the Gillette commercial shown in Figure 1 is a good example of "reactance" and may provoke masculine gender role stress, this detergent commercial succeeds in "adopting domestic roles while retaining hegemonic traits" (Leader, 2019, p. 81). In his didactic speech to the camera, the character reinforces the fact that he is not in the least renouncing his masculinity, but he is adding in his "unique mixture of masculinity and nurturing," which women find "alluring" (2014, 0:15). Father and product (detergent) concur in a perfect tandem where "the brute strength of dad" (2014, 0:33) mixes with the nurturing of the detergent. The words "dad mom," "boost," and "smart" pop up on the screen as the devoted father gives up the chore to go to the gym next door, thus neutralizing the potential "reactance" that his attitude could provoke both in the male and female audience.

Downplay Sexuality

This last turn to pull ups and crunches reinforces even more an affirmative masculinity that remains intact in its heteronormative performance. Far from challenging the male gaze, the ad invites the audience to experience a new form of masculinity. As Patterson and Elliott (2002) note, "the growing feminization of hegemonic masculinity enlarges male participation in consumption but also protects patriarchy" (p. 236). In that manner, hegemonic masculinity is not threatened, and identification with a soft approach to gender equality is perceived as positive by the audience.

DODGE. "Man's Last Stand."

Figure 3. "Man's last stand." <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CTCudnnZ8sw>

This commercial from 2011 promotes one of the symbols of hegemonic masculinity par excellence: the muscle car. Starting with a narratorial voice showing the images of four smart guys, the voice goes monotonously over all the duties and burdens a complaisant man has to go through every day to please his partner. This monotonous checklist is made apparent in their boring and serious faces when, suddenly, the shrilling noise of a high-speed car engine and the image of a sports car hitting the road appears, as the tag "Man's Last Stand" fills the screen.

Diverse Male Talent

The ad portrays four attractive young heterosexual males in their 30s. All but one, in a slight disheveled appearance, conform to the normative standards of an impeccable masculine physical appearance. Ethnic diversity is limited to one handsome African American man. Both contribute to create a superficial impression of diversity, as age, heteronormativity, and social status define their profile as ideal.

Pushing Gender Norms/Stereotypes' Boundaries

Boundaries are not challenged in this commercial. The narratorial voice lists all the tasks these good heterosexual men undertake to please their partners: They appear as obedient, docile, and complacent partners, able to cope with all the new domestic demands they find bothersome, as well as with professional pressures. Their deferential complacency contrasts with a stereotyped representation of femininity: whimsical, demanding wives who enjoy stupid TV shows and impose insufferable mothers in law. This polarization works well in creating an oppressive atmosphere, unnatural for real men who need a relief valve and seek reward in genuine, manly activities.

Real Men, Authentic Manner

These men conform to the normative idea of masculinity: young, good-looking, and well off. The highly stereotyped situation stresses sexual dualism and polarizes men's and women's roles and desires. The car constitutes an object of desire that counteracts the oppressive environment of everyday routine and projects authentic masculinity beyond the inadequate realms of domesticity.

Promale Message

The ad celebrates traditional, hegemonic masculinity. The condescending attitude of the obedient husband is interpreted as unnatural and conceals the real nature of man: powerful, aggressive, and intrepid—fond of risky adventures and in need of a safety valve that works as the last redoubt of masculinity. Unlike the other commercials analyzed above, this narrative seeks the complicity of the male audience by stressing the most stereotyped traits of a static masculinity incapable of negotiating different subject positions and skeptical to new forms of masculinity.

Downplay Sexuality

The male gaze is reinforced by all the clichés about men's desires and aspirations. The tag "Man's Last Stand" illustrates the failure of a hegemonic masculinity at risk, unable to adapt to new more gender-neutral scenarios.

Discussion

The reaction to the Gillette commercial is a clear indicator of both the real commitment to advancing toward equality that it promotes and of the forceful resistance experienced by segments of the population when a threat to hegemonic masculinity is perceived and contested by the users. Sentiment analyses (such as NetBase) have reported an initial negative reaction; several television news programs devoted time to discussing the commercial (Fox, CBS, and BBC, among others), and celebrities manifested their disgust and rejection of the message. As a representative example, Piers Morgan (2019) wrote an article—which, under the title "I'm so Sick of This War on Masculinity and I'm not Alone—With Their Pathetic Man-Hating Ad, Gillette Have Just Cut Their Own Throat"—included all the main arguments that can be found as reactance instances by many other users. The commercial is accused of claiming that all men are bad; a reaffirmation of "let boys be boys" is emphasized, and a rejection of a moralizing tone that invades individual freedom is perceived. Morgan's article reflects in its sentences some feelings that were common to many of the male viewers: "It's basically saying that it's wrong, and harmful, to be masculine, to be a man" (para. 5). The defense of traditional masculinity is stated with the help of the quote by David French, a writer for the *National Review*, whose words are included in the piece to reinforce Morgan's view:

As David French, a writer for the *National Review*, put it in his withering response to the report: "The assault on traditional masculinity—while liberating to men who don't fit traditional norms—is itself harmful to the millions of young men who seek to be physically and mentally tough, to rise to challenges, and demonstrate leadership under pressure. The assault on traditional masculinity is an assault on their very natures. Are boys disproportionately adventurous? Are they risk-takers? Do they feel a need to be strong? Do they often by default reject stereotypically 'feminine' characteristics? Yes, yes, yes and yes." (Morgan, 2019, para. 6)

The defense of hegemonic masculinity is evident in these words. Additionally, the moralizing tone is condemned as "a patronizing series of educational visual entreaties about what men should in various unpleasant situations" (Morgan, 2019, para. 34). Both reactance and the stress resulting from the threat to the traditional masculine role are apparent here, the article also includes statements that reveal the fear of losing privileges associated to hegemonic masculinity, and laments that the "celebration of men," patent in previous Gillette commercials, is no longer present and refers to the possibility of women making false accusations of rape. It is equally true that many celebrities showed support and approval. The tweet by journalist Keith Boykin is interesting because it refers precisely to the threat to masculinity: "If you're threatened by a razor commercial asking you to be a better man, you don't need a new shaver; you need new standards" ("20 Celebrity," 2019, para. 11). The analysis of different responses to the commercial reveals the tensions and negotiations underlying traditional and new conceptions of masculinity, and menvertising becomes a fruitful field for such exploration.

The Tide commercial did not provoke a negative response. The threat to hegemonic masculinity is not perceived precisely because the commercial does not attempt to persuade men to alter the traits associated with it. On the contrary, as Kristi Rowan Humphreys (2016) rightly notes, commercials such as this present caring, sensitive dads who have hypermasculinized qualities: "The active definition of masculinity requires the hypermasculinized imagery to balance the activity of cleaning, thus serving as reiterations of traditional hegemonic masculinity" (p. 216). Men viewers are assured that even if they perform domestic chores traditionally associated with feminine behavior, they are still "real men" and have no reason to feel threatened in their privileges. Interestingly, some of the comments rejected the dad-mom self-definition by the protagonist, rejecting the association with the female role: "Wow—pretty obnoxious. I'm a stay-at-home dad, not a dad-mom. Seriously, Tide? Who is this ad supposed to appeal to?" (Cochran, 2011, para. 10). The commercial shows potential for showing progress toward equality, but in the end, it reinforces existing stereotypes.

Finally, the Dodge commercial provides a relief valve for those men who feel trapped in their daily lives by a series of constraints and obligations that involve dealing with the annoyances that their girlfriends/wives impose. Stereotypical notions of women nagging and bothering men with petty requests ("I will carry your lip balm") and being emotional and demanding ("I will say yes when you want me to say yes") are then confronted with men's last stand (to drive the Dodge Charger). That may be interpreted as the last resort by men who feel obliged to "tame" their natural impatient, aggressive, and irresponsible behavior by women, and whose last resort is to find freedom by fleeing in a fast car. It reinforces traditional

notions of hegemonic masculinity, adding the need to escape the confinement that domestic and female obligations impose by driving fast and getting away from them.

The analyses show how the concept of hegemonic masculinity remains central to the concerns of advertisers and how this is only partially challenged. They also show how this concept is fluid and dynamic and adopts traits that allow a negotiation of subject positions without renouncing its privileged status. Although fatherhood and attitudes related to protection and breadwinning shape the traditional portrayal of men, these are refashioned in more caregiving and domestically engaged husbands and fathers whose masculinity does not feel threatened in the least, as their ostensible "feminization" is only an enlargement of their privileged position. In other cases, like Dodge, old and new representations collide, but the most traditional stereotyped confrontation of gender identities is used as a strategy of seeking the consumer's complicity and identification, reproducing old models and embracing static expressions of hegemonic masculinity. Resistance in the brand community was found only when some traits of masculinity were overtly identified as toxic and abusive, returning a disturbing image in the mirror that no man wants to acknowledge.

Conclusion

Gender remains central in a consumer society, and the portrayals of gender roles in advertising not only reflect brand-related attitudes and their influence on the behavior of consumers but also become powerful indicators of social transformations. Menvertising is defined in this article as the type of advertising that questions hegemonic masculinity and provides visual and narrative portrayals of men that promote diversity and advance equality. It is an emerging type of advertising that has received limited attention in the academic field. However, it provides an opportunity for fruitful analyses focused on the tensions, negotiations, and responses to both traditional and stereotypical portrayals of masculinity and to attempts at promoting new images of men that subvert hegemonic masculinity and its privileges. As the publications have shown in the realm of femvertising (Rodríguez Pérez & Gutiérrez, 2017), brand commercials sometimes choose a progressive position toward equality, creating campaigns that have a certain potential for social change, but end in a process of commodification that may result in reinforcing traditional gender roles, and in others, they align themselves with traditional values and reinstate stereotypes.

One of the most interesting effects of the responses by the audiences to both femvertising and menvertising is the abovementioned approval of campaigns that work toward elimination of stereotypes and advances toward equality by women consumers (and conversely, rejection of traditional portrayals of gender roles) as opposed to the lack of concern by male users to representations that maintain hegemonic masculinity characteristics and, in some cases, even negative responses to attempts to promote equality. Some of the explanations are provided in this article. It illustrates the anxieties that surface when gender identities of old and new masculinities collide in advertising representations, but also the difficult balance between the brand strategies and their reception by the brand communities (Schroeder & Zwick, 2004). By introducing an innovative method of enquiry inspired in prior femvertising campaigns and by analyzing three commercials as illustrative cases to test how menvertising works, results show that, in the end, none of the commercials seems to be fully successful from the point of view of a real menvertising practice, although Gillette's campaign seems to be as close as one can possibly be.

Whether this responds to a commodification of gender activism (Banet-Weiser, 2014) or to a genuine endeavor to contribute to social transformation, the truth is that menvertising can open new ways of constructing masculinity and democratizing gender relations.

References

- Abitbol, A., & Sternadori, M. (2019). Championing women's empowerment as a catalyst for purchase intentions: Testing the mediating roles of OPRs and brand loyalty in the context of femvertising. *International Journal of Strategic Communication, 13*(1), 22–41.
- Akestam, N. (2017). *Understanding advertising stereotypes: Social and brand-related effects of stereotyped versus non-stereotyped portrayals in advertising*. Gothenburg, Sweden: BrandFactory.
- Banet-Weiser, S. (2014). "Free self-esteem tools?" Brand culture, gender, and the Dove real beauty campaign. In R. Mukherjee & S. Banet-Weiser (Eds.), *Commodity activism: Cultural resistance in neoliberal times* (pp. 39–56). New York: New York University Press.
- Becker-Herby, E. (2016). *The rise of femvertising: Authentically reaching female consumers*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Belkaoui, A., & Belkaoui, J. M. (1976). A comparative analysis of the roles portrayed by women in print advertisements: 1958, 1970, 1972. *Journal of Marketing Research, 13*, 168–172.
- Bridges, T., & Pascoe, C. (2014). Hybrid masculinities: new directions in the sociology of men and masculinities. *Sociology Compass, 8*(3), 246–258.
- Cochran, A. (2011, November 17). Flap over Tide ads glorifying stay-at-home dad. *CBS News*. Retrieved from <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/flap-over-tide-ads-glorifying-stay-at-home-dad/>
- Connell, R. (1995). *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender & Society, 19*(6), 829–859.
- Courtney, A. E., & Whipple, T. W. (1983). *Sex stereotyping in advertising*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- David, S., & Brannon, R. (1976). *Forty-nine percent majority: The male sex role*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Deaux, K., & Major, B. (1987). Putting gender into context: An interactive model of gender-related behavior. *Psychological Review, 94*(3), 369–389.

- Dhanya, D., & Jaidev, U. (2018). Consumer reactance. A review of research methodologies. *International Journal of Pure and Applied Mathematics*, 118(18), 4449–4467.
- Drake, V. E. (2017). The impact of female empowerment in advertising (femvertising). *Journal of Research in Marketing*, 7(3), 593–599.
- Eisend, M. (2009). A meta-analysis of gender roles in advertising. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 38, 418–440.
- Furnham, A., Abramsky, S., & Gunter, B. (1997). A cross-cultural content analysis of children's television advertisements. *Sex Roles*, 37, 91–99.
- Ganev, D. (2019). Gillette ad controversy. *Social Media Insight*. Retrieved from <https://commetric.com/2019/02/07/gillette-ad-controversy-social-media-insights/>
- García, G. (2008). *The decline of men*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Gentry, J., & Harrison, R. (2010). Is advertising a barrier to male movement towards gender change? *Marketing Theory*, 10(1), 74–96.
- Goffman, E. (1979). *Gender advertisements*. London, UK: MacMillan.
- Goldman, R., Heath, D., & Smith, S. (1991). Commodity feminism. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 8(3), 333–351.
- Grau, S., & Zotos, Y. (2016). Gender stereotypes in advertising: A review of current research. *International Journal of Advertising*, 35(5), 761–770.
- Green, K., & Van Oort, M. (2013). "We wear no pants": Selling the crisis of masculinity in the 2010 Super Bowl commercials. *Signs*, 38(3), 695–719.
- Harrison, C. (2008). Real men do wear mascara: Advertising discourse and masculine identity. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 5(1), 55–74.
- Hawkins, D. I., & Coney, K. A. (1976). Advertising and differentiated sex roles in contemporary American society. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 4, 418–428.
- Humphreys, K. R. (2016). Ads and dads: TV commercials and contemporary attitudes. In E. Podnieks (Ed.), *Pops in pop culture: Fatherhood, masculinity, and the new man* (pp. 107–125). London, UK: Palgrave.

- Kapoor, D., & Munjal, A. (2019). Self-consciousness and emotions driving femvertising: A path analysis of women's attitude toward femvertising, forwarding intention and purchase intention. *Journal of Marketing Communications, 25*(2), 1–21.
- Knutson, M., & Waldner, M. (2017). *Reshaping the man in the mirror: The effects of challenging stereotypical male portrayals in advertising* (Bachelor of Science thesis, Stockholm School of Economics). Retrieved from <https://handelsradet.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/210-Reshaping-the-Man-in-the-Mirror-The-effects-of-challenging-stereotypical-male-portrayals-in-advertising.pdf>
- Kupers, T. A. (2005). Toxic masculinity as a barrier to mental health treatment in prison. *Journal of Clinical Psychology, 61*(6), 713–724.
- Leader, C. (2019). Dadvertising: Representations of fatherhood in Procter & Gamble's Tide commercials. *Communication, Culture & Critique, 12*, 72–89.
- Lundstrom, W. J., & Sciglimpaglia, D. (1977). Sex role portrayals in advertising. *Journal of Marketing, 41*, 72–29.
- Luyt, R. (2012). Representation of masculinities and race in South African television advertising: A content analysis. *Journal of Gender Studies, 21*(1), 35–60.
- McArthur, L. Z., & Resko, B. G. (1975). The portrayal of men and women in American television commercials. *Journal of Social Psychology, 97*, 209–220.
- Menéndez, I. (2019). ¿Puede la publicidad ser feminista? Ambivalencia e intereses de género en la femvertising a partir de un estudio de caso: Deliciosa Calma de Campofrío [Can advertising be feminist? Ambivalence and gender interests in femvertising through a case study: *Deliciosa calma*, by Campofrío] *Revista de Estudios Sociales, 68*, 88–100.
- Messner, M., & Montez de Oca, J. (2005). The male consumer as loser: Beer and liquor ads in mega sports media events. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 30*(3), 1879–1909.
- Moller, M. (2007). Exploiting patterns: A critique of hegemonic masculinity. *Journal of Gender Studies, 16*(3), 263–276.
- Morgan, P. (2019, January 15). *I'm so sick of this war on masculinity and I'm not alone—With their pathetic man-hating ad, Gillette have just cut their own throat*. Retrieved from <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6594295/PIERS-MORGAN-Im-sick-war-masculinity-Gillette-just-cut-throat.html>
- Mussap, A. (2008). Masculine gender role stress and the pursuit of muscularity. *International Journal of Men's Health, 7*(1), 72– 89.

Patterson, M., & Elliott, R. (2002). Negotiating masculinities: Advertising and the inversion of the male gaze. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 5(3), 231–246.

Rodríguez Pérez, M. P., & Gutiérrez, M. (2017). Femvertising: Female empowering strategies in recent Spanish commercials. *Revista de Investigaciones Feministas*, 8(2), 337–351.

Schroeder, J. E., & Zwick, D. (2004). Mirrors of masculinity: Representation and identity in advertising images. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 7(1), 21–52.

Sifaki, E., & Spiropoulou, A. (2012). Gender resistance: Contemporary practices and approaches. *European Journal of English Studies*, 16(3), 187–198.

Thompson, C. (1996). Caring consumers: Gendered consumption meanings and the juggling lifestyle. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22(4), 388–407.

20 celebrity reactions to Gillette's ad about toxic masculinity. (2019, January 18). Retrieved from <https://www.jetss.com/news/2019/01/20-celebrity-reactions-to-gillettes-ad-about-toxic-masculinity/>

Whitehead, S. (1999). Hegemonic masculinity revisited. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 6(1)5, 8–62.

Wolin, L. D. (2003). Gender issues in advertising—An oversight of research: 1970–2002. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 43, 111–129.

Zawisza, M., & Cinnirella, M. (2010). What matters more, breaking tradition or stereotype content? Envious and paternalistic gender stereotypes and advertising effectiveness. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 40(7), 1767–97.