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# A SHIFT IN GENDER REPRESENTATIONS AND NARRATIVES IN SUPER BOWL COMMERCIALS

by

ASHLEY ROCKWELL

Under the Direction of Daniel L. Carlson, PhD

## ABSTRACT

Despite the wide, diverse, and captive Super Bowl television audience, there are only a few studies—none longitudinal—that have examined gender representations in Super Bowl commercials. Scholars have demonstrated that advertisements influence our behaviors and attitudes and can reinforce and reflect dominant ideologies (Garst and Bodenhausen 1997; Kilbourne 1999; Smeesters and Mandel 2006). This study examines how the gender narratives and representations in 665 Super Bowl advertisements that aired between 2005 and 2016 changed over time. Based on this content analysis, gender representations and narratives of Super Bowl commercials shifted to become more egalitarian. While there was a general trajectory toward more gender-egalitarian messaging, there were periods of more gender-traditional messaging along the way that followed shifts in the United States economy, with masculinity crisis and correction themes prevalent in the advertisements that aired during the economic downturn. As the economy recovered, advertisers emphasized fatherhood, caring men, and tough women.

INDEX WORDS: Gender, Television advertising, Hegemonic masculinity, Economic downturn, Masculinity crisis, Content analysis

A SHIFT IN GENDER REPRESENTATIONS AND NARRATIVES IN SUPER BOWL COMMERCIALS

by

ASHLEY ROCKWELL

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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2016

A SHIFT IN GENDER REPRESENTATIONS AND NARRATIVES IN SUPER BOWL COMMERCIALS

by

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December 2016

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my best friend of 19 years, Baby. It was wonderful to know that she would love me even if I never finished this thesis. She also kept me company during the many hours spent locating Super Bowl commercials online. If I could, I would make this entire page a big picture of my sweet old lady puppy dog. To answer the age old question “who is a good dog?” – Baby of course. Baby was the best dog.

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The Super Bowl is an unofficial holiday in the United States (Cooper and Tang 2013; Pappas 2014; Wenner 2008, 2015) that frequently sets the highest viewership record for televised programs, often breaking its own record, year after year (Cooper and Tang 2013; Nielsen 2013, 2014; Pallotta 2015; Pappas 2014; Taibi 2015). While the viewers of the Super Bowl are diverse by race, gender, region, and age (Nielsen 2010), “television brings virtually everyone into a shared national culture” (Gerbner et al. 2002:44) and the Super Bowl exemplifies this. In addition to the size and diversity of its audience, another unique quality of the Super Bowl is its ability to bring together people who are actually excited to watch commercials (Kim, Cheong, and Kim 2012; McAllister 1999). The football game itself makes up only one quarter of the televised Super Bowl program; the rest is commercial programming. It is common for people to claim that they tune in just for the commercials (Pappas 2014). There is hype and anticipation for Super Bowl advertisements even before they air (Martin and Reeves 2001; Pappas 2014). After the commercials are broadcast, we see discussions of the advertisements both in the news (McAllister 1999; Messner and Montez de Oca 2005) and on social media (Brand 2015; Byun et al. 2012; Cooper and Tang 2013; Griner 2015). The conversations continue between people at home and in the workplace in the days after the game (Kanner 2004; Kelley and Turley 2004).

We know that television commercials influence our learning, memory, mood, body image satisfaction, and self-esteem (Hargreaves and Tiggemann 2002; Janiszewski et al. 2003; Smeesters and Mandel 2006). Advertisements can also influence our attitudes toward sexual aggression (MacKay and Covell 1997) and desensitize us to violent acts (Blackford et al. 2011; Gunter 2008). Advertisements, like other media, are also a major source of images of ideal gender roles (Garst and Bodenhausen 1997; Green and Van Oort 2013; Kilbourne 1999). The types of roles that are shown in advertisements are important because our “sense of self-worth or personal significance” is dependent upon “the roles available to us” (Becker 1962; Snow and Anderson 1987:1339). Mass media is a key source for educating people on the expectations of different roles (Thornton and Nardi 1975). Understanding the

expectations of a particular role is the first step in the process of role acquisition (Thornton and Nardi 1975; Turner 1962)

Not only are advertisements reflections of what people in our society idealize, but the more people view the messages, the more they reproduce those messages in their own lives (Gerbner et al. 2002; Signorielli 2012). Despite Super Bowl advertisements reflecting our society's ideals and having a potentially large impact on the individuals in our society, there have only been a handful of studies on Super Bowl advertisements and even fewer that focus on the representations of gender in the advertisements (Green and Van Oort 2013; King 2005; Messner and Montez de Oca 2005).

It is important to understand if and how the narratives and messages about gender in Super Bowl commercials have changed throughout the years since advertisements can mirror and reinforce dominant ideologies, which can then reinforce gender inequality (Bandura 2001; Kilbourne 1999; McIntosh and Cuklanz 2014). Changes in the content of advertisements can indicate “important shifts in dominant ideas” (Frost and Elichoff 2014:267). Depending upon the content, advertisements can promote social change, represent a shift in attitudes regarding social issues, and reinforce problematic ideals related to inequality (McQuail 2010). Therefore, advertisements that have more egalitarian messages can aid in shifting viewer’s perceptions of gender equality. Knowing that advertisements play a key role in gender socialization and that Super Bowl advertisements have large, diverse, and captive audiences, it is important to understand the gender messages sent through Super Bowl Commercials. To date, there is a dearth of longitudinal and gender-focused research on Super Bowl commercials (King 2005).

This study is a content analysis of Super Bowl commercials that aired between 2005 and 2016. The study focuses on the presence of men and women as central characters; portrayals of men and women; the gender of the narrators; and the overall gender narrative of the advertisements. Counting the presence of men and women along with the situations in which they are shown allows for the

“discovery of patterns that are too subtle to be visible on casual inspection” (Lutz and Collins 1993:89; Rose 2012). While documenting the presence of women and men is important, I also analyzed gender narratives in this research because the numerical presence of men and women in Super Bowl advertisements may remain the same over time though their representations may change (McCullagh 2002). Identifying and recording the representations of gender in Super Bowl commercials helps determine if these commercials portray and promote hegemonic ideals of masculinity and types of femininity known to reinforce gender inequality.

## **1 BACKGROUND**

### **1.1 Gender Identity**

Our gender identities are central to our sense of self; our gender “is part of the way we grow up, the way we conduct family life and sexual relationships, the way we present ourselves in everyday situations, and the way we see ourselves” (Connell and Pearse 2015:93). Our gender identity can be thought of as the way we incorporate our gender as part of our self through our perceptions of what it means to be a man or a woman and the way we adopt certain gender roles or the characteristics and behaviors that our culture deems suitable for our gender (Adler, Kless, and Adler 1992; Connell 1987; Howard 2000; Stets and Burke 2014). “[R]oles require specific performances to meet the expectations associated with the position” while those expectations are both projected from and evaluated by others in that situation (Stets and Burke 2014:414). The ideals related to gendered characteristics and behaviors (what is considered masculine or feminine) are flexible because they are determined across time and place (Schippers 2007), with “local”, “regional” and “global influences” (Charlebois 2011).

A key source for ideal images of roles, and gender roles specifically, is the media, which includes advertisements (Green and Van Oort 2013; Kilbourne 1999). When a person views a commercial, they can put themselves in the role of its characters and “test” their different possible selves (Markus and Nurius 1986; Scott 1994; Zayer and Otnes 2012). When they do this, they are comparing key aspects of

their gender identity (such as masculinity and femininity) with the idealized images in the advertisement (Milkie 1999; Zayer and Otnes 2012). This suggests that advertisements allow people to determine expectations of specific roles and evaluate how well they meet those expectations in comparison to what they see in the advertisements. This means that advertisements can affect the performance and behaviors of the people watching them. Some in the advertising field even acknowledge that their work plays a key part in the reinforcing the acceptance of gender roles, yet they admit that they do not take that into account when they create their advertisements (Zayer and Coleman 2014).

### **1.2 *Hegemonic Masculinity and Emphasized Femininity***

Idealized gender roles can be better understood when viewed alongside hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. Gramsci used the concept of hegemony to explain a means by which the ruling class reinforces their power through shaping what is “common sense,” or the accepted worldview of most people (Gramsci 1971:626). Going beyond “just a set of role expectations or [gender] identity,” hegemonic masculinity consists of everyday practices “that allow[s] men’s dominance over women to continue” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:832). Modern scholars have applied Antonio Gramsci’s idea of hegemony to understanding gender inequality and men’s domination over women (Beasley 2008; Charlebois 2011; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Demetriou 2001; Donaldson 1993; Messerschmidt 2012; Schippers 2007). For example, not only are men expected to take on leadership roles, but hiring practices that favor placing men in leadership positions allow men to continue to maintain their roles as leaders in our society. Emphasized femininity exists in conjunction with hegemonic masculinity as the idealized traits of femininity that reinforce gender inequality (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). For instance, women who act or feel subservient to men reinforce the idea that men should be the ones in power. Social institutions, such as the media, can promote hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Green and Van Oort 2013), using ideology to maintain the gendered distribution of power.

Many of the stereotypical characteristics of men also represent and reinforce hegemonic ideals such as the stereotype of men as leaders and aggressors (Bem 1974; Evans 2002; Kimmel, Hearn, and Connell 2005). Other hegemonic characteristics of men that also make up gendered stereotypes include men as risk takers, breadwinners, athletes, and tough guys (Kimmel et al. 2005). Two other hegemonic and stereotypical characteristics of men are obsession with sex with women and disgust by sex with—or even the implied intimacy between—two men (Messerschmidt 2005; Plummer 2005). In the same vein, many stereotypes of women also reinforce emphasized femininity. For example, women are stereotyped as caring, sensitive, and timid (Bem 1974; Charlebois 2011; Evans 2002; Schippers 2007) which are characteristics that combined with the leadership, toughness, and aggression of men, thereby help men maintain their dominance in our society.

### **1.3 Representation**

Advertisers tend to choose images that represent these hegemonic ideal images of gender (Hall 1997). For example, in an advertisement for laundry detergent, a mother might work to remove a stain from her child's favorite shirt. The mother represents an ideal mom and woman who is helpful and caring to her children; the detergent helped her reach that ideal. An advertisement for a pick-up truck might show a truck towing and hauling large and heavy objects, and this image can give meaning to the man driving the truck; it says that the man is tough and can perform difficult tasks. Representations of gender in advertisements are influential because advertisers have the power to circulate meaning, and although individuals can circulate meaning, the media can reach more people at once and therefore have more power (Hall 1997). According to Stuart Hall, advertising tries to get the viewer to identify with what is being portrayed in the image (1997). In his talk on *Representation and the Media*, Hall says, "No advertising image could work without being associated with it a kind of claim on identity" (1997). Hall also says that images of gender stereotypes in the media do not just produce identification but also meanings about gender (1997). This suggests that because of the relationship the



viewer has with the image, the meaning of different roles and identities represented in advertising will influence how the viewer thinks about those meanings (Hall 1997).

#### **1.4 *Albert Bandura's Four Subfunctions***

The concept of social learning can help illuminate the influence of gender representations in advertising as discussed by Hall. Social learning occurs when a person obtains knowledge from observing others (Signorielli 2012); Super Bowl commercials can be seen as agents in social learning by considering Albert Bandura's four subfunctions of observational learning. First, the viewers need to pay at least some attention to the model (Bandura 2001), in this case a commercial. As mentioned previously, the Super Bowl and its advertisements captivate viewers (Lab42 2013; Martin and Reeves 2001; McAllister 1999; Pappas 2014). Second, viewers must retain information from the model and this retention can be aided by increasing the exposure to the model (Bandura 2001; Signorielli 2012). Super Bowl commercials offer both repetition and opportunities to retain information from the model because the advertisements are played multiple times during the game, online, and for the rest of the year (Blackford et al. 2011). Third, the model must emphasize that the viewer should produce the same behaviors in their lives (Bandura 2001). The main goal of advertisements is to convince the viewers they should be engaging in a certain behavior, such as purchasing or using certain products (Petty, Briñol, and Priester 2009). Lastly, the viewers must be motivated to perform the behaviors (Bandura 2001). In commercials, people are often rewarded or punished for their gendered behaviors (Signorielli 2012), especially when it relates to expressions of masculinity (Green and Van Oort 2013; Messner and Montez de Oca 2005). For example, when men act brave and tough, they are often rewarded with praise or a kiss from an attractive woman. But if a man does something considered feminine, such as cry while watching movies, he is likely to be ridiculed by his friends.

### **1.5 Structuration**

Through its representations and function as a tool of social learning, media is a social structure that disseminates information about gender. A social structure is a social organization with “recurring patterns of social interaction”(Martin 2009:9). Barbara Risman, using Anthony Giddens’s theory of structuration as a framework, explains that gender can be a social structure in and of itself (Risman 1998, 2009). “Structuration refers to the notion that social structure both constrains behavior and is created by it” (Risman 2009:83). In the field of communications, the media is often thought of as a “mirror” of society, although many conclude that it is not always a perfect reflection (Bowman and Eden 2013; Holbrook 1987; McQuail 2010; Shoemaker and Reese 1996). If the media mirrors society, then society has a role in creating media. Exposure to different types of media, including advertisements, can influence the behaviors and attitudes of individuals (see Hargreaves and Tiggemann 2002; Lavine, Sweeney, and Wagner 1999; MacKay and Covell 1997; Pike and Jennings 2005; Smeesters and Mandel 2006). In other words, the gender portrayals we see in advertisements can constrain our behavior and ideas regarding gender but our ideas about gender also help create the gender depictions in advertisements. Understanding the messages about gender in Super Bowl commercials is important because advertisements can be both a reflection of our society’s common views about gender and act as an agent of socialization.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Gender and Advertisements**

Throughout the years, studies that have examined representations of gender in television commercials have overwhelmingly concluded that gender representations are unequal; men are not only disproportionately featured in advertisements they are also more likely to take on roles of authority and leadership when compared to women, who are often only featured in advertisements for domestic items (Allan and Coltrane 1996; Bartsch et al. 2000; Bretl and Cantor 1988; Davis 2003; Eisend

2010; Eisend, Plagemann, and Sollwedel 2014; Ganahl, Prinsen, and Netzley 2003; Gunter 1995; McArthur and Resko 1975; O'Donnell and O'Donnell 1978; Paek, Nelson, and Vilela 2010; Signorielli, McLeod, and Healy 1994). While there has been some expansion of roles and representations (especially for women) since the early 1950s, equal gender representation still lags (Allan and Coltrane 1996; Bretl and Cantor 1988; Eisend et al. 2014; Ferrante, Haynes, and Kingsley 1988; Ganahl et al. 2003). Women outnumber men as central characters for commercials selling domestic/household products while men tend to outnumber women in commercials selling all other types of products (Bartsch et al. 2000; Ganahl et al. 2003; Gunter 1995; O'Donnell and O'Donnell 1978; Paek et al. 2010; Whipple and Courtney 1980). Men dominate narration and voiceovers for advertisements (Allan and Coltrane 1996; Bartsch et al. 2000; Bretl and Cantor 1988; Gunter 1995; Paek et al. 2010; Whipple and Courtney 1980) and men are also more often shown in positions of authority compared to women (Eisend et al. 2014; Gunter 1995; McArthur and Resko 1975; O'Donnell and O'Donnell 1978). Even when it comes to age of characters in television advertisements, representations are unequal by gender; women who are depicted in commercials are more likely to be young, while men are depicted across more diverse age categories (Eisend et al. 2014; Ganahl et al. 2003; Stern and Mastro 2004), emphasizing that youth is an important characteristic for women while men are important at any age (Kilbourne 1999).

## **2.2 Super Bowl Commercials and Gender**

Beyond some marketing research, there have been very few studies with a specific focus on Super Bowl advertisements. Barbara King is one of only a handful of researchers who have conducted in-depth analyses on Super Bowl commercials. King conducted a content analysis of the 65 Super Bowl commercials that aired during the 2000 Super Bowl (2005). She found that for commercials with narrators, only 11 percent of the narrators were women (King 2005). Conversely, when the commercials were broken down by product type, she found that commercials for websites had more than double the percentage of narrators that are woman while beer commercials did not feature any narrators that were

women (King 2005). King also noted a general absence of women, with most advertisements featuring men as the central characters (2005). In addition, King coded for the allure of characters and was surprised to find that only one percent of the characters were shown in an alluring way (2005). Despite expecting to see women represented sexually in beer commercials, which had been shown extensively in other research on alcohol advertisements (see Chambers 2012; Hall and Crum 1994; Woodruff 1996), King noted that beer advertisements in the 2005 Super Bowl relied on “furry animals” instead (2005).

Focusing on advertisements targeting men, Michael A. Messner and Jeffrey Montez de Oca analyzed liquor and beer advertisements that aired during the 2002 and 2003 Super Bowl and the advertisements in the 2002 and 2003 swimsuit editions of *Sports Illustrated* (2005). Messner and Montez de Oca note that the men in the advertisements were not shown working, but rather participating in recreational activities (2005). Men tended to be shown in the role of “losers” and/or “buddies” while women are shown as “hotties” or “bitches” (Messner and Montez de Oca 2005:1887). The authors note that they characterized men in the commercials as “losers” or “dopey” when the status of their masculinity was vulnerable (Messner and Montez de Oca 2005). If they were with a group of other men, their vulnerability could be masked and the commercial instead emphasized “male friendship” or buddies (Messner and Montez de Oca 2005:1887). Women were either shown as “highly sexualized fantasy objects” (hotties), or women who prevented men from being able to enjoy “erotic pleasure” (bitches) (Messner and Montez de Oca 2005:1887). They also noted that women with the roles of girlfriend or wife were absent from the advertisements and the idea of relationship commitment was also avoided (Messner and Montez de Oca 2005).

Messner and Montez de Oca stressed that the portrayal of men as “dopey” in the alcohol advertisements was done in jest and for comedic effect (2005), but in Kyle Green and Madison Van Oort’s analysis of Super Bowl commercials from 2010, the authors found that “the male loser becomes ... a frighteningly pathetic victim of collective delusions” (2013). Green and Van Oort’s (2013) research

identified a “crisis of masculinity” narrative (2013) through semiotic analysis of select commercials from the 2009 and 2010 Super Bowls. Citing two Super Bowl commercials from 2009, the authors say the narrative about masculinity that year was “don’t worry, the men are fine” (Green and Van Oort 2013:701). They discuss a Pepsi Max advertisement that shows men being injured but still responding with “I’m Good” and a Universal Studios advertisement that shows a man can still be a superhero when he escapes to the theme park (Green and Van Oort 2013). The authors explain that in 2010, men are taking back power, with advertisements stressing man’s power has been lost at some point in our recent history (Green and Van Oort 2013). The authors noted that phrases like “wear the pants” and “man’s last stand” were used to encourage men to take back their power (Green and Van Oort 2013). Also, men who violate hegemonic masculine ideals, such as dressing sloppily or not taking charge, are ridiculed and looked down upon (Green and Van Oort 2013). Green and Van Oort go on to theorize that advertisers may have invoked the crisis of masculinity narrative in order to pander to men who were disproportionately affected by job loss during the economic downturn that began in previous years (2013).

These studies lay the groundwork for understanding gender representations and narratives in Super Bowl commercials, but are not comprehensive. Messner and Montez de Oca’s research, while illuminating, is limited because it only focused on alcohol advertisements during 2002 and 2003. Green and Van Oort were able to compare the commercials from 2009 and 2010, but focused mainly on the advertisements from 2010 and limited their analysis to masculine gender portrayals. While King’s research was more in depth and covered all of the commercials from the 2000 Super Bowl, the results of her study only show a snapshot in time and do not allow us to determine if there has been change in gender portrayals in Super Bowl commercials across time. King, herself, called for a longitudinal study of Super Bowl commercials in order to understand how and if gender narratives have changed. The goal of this current study is to do just that through the analysis of the past 12 years of Super Bowl commercials.

At least some changes in gender representations and narratives in Super Bowl commercials in the past decade are expected due to changes within the NFL and broader attention to social issues. For example, two aspects of the NFL have changed recently which could influence a shift in gender narratives in Super Bowl commercials. First, women now make up 45 percent of the NFL fan base (Broughton 2013; Harrison 2013; Harwell 2014) with female viewership increasing by 26 percent between 2009 and 2013 (Chemi 2014). The NFL has started to target this new fan base with NFL branded clothing for women, including maternity wear, jewelry, and women's shoes in their fan shops (Ahmed 2012; NFL 2015). In 2010 the NFL even partnered with Victoria's Secret to create co-branded apparel for Victoria's Secret's PINK collection, which targets young women (Duff 2010). It is expected that sponsors of the Super Bowl will also shift their advertisements to appeal to this growing and changing fan base. Second, in 2014 there were two high profile cases of family violence: a domestic violence incident with Baltimore Raven Ray Rice, and a child abuse case with Minnesota Viking Adrian Peterson. Following the family violence incidents, commentators insisted that the 2015 Super Bowl was the "most feminist" Super Bowl due to the messages of gender equality in some of the Super Bowl commercials (McDonald 2015; Williams 2015). The NFL's increased attention to female fans and the media coverage of family violence in the NFL could lead to different gender narratives in Super Bowl commercials as advertisers try to appear considerate of those issues. Considering these factors, a progressively more egalitarian message in the Super Bowl commercials is expected over time.

### **3 METHODS**

#### **3.1 Design**

Multiple questions guided this study: What are the gender narratives of Super Bowl commercials? Have those narratives change over time? Were women and men featured equally as central characters and narrators? Did representations of men and women predominately fit hegemonic ideals and stereotypes of masculinity and femininity? To answer these questions, I conducted a content

analysis of Super Bowl commercials that aired between 2005 and 2016. Because Super Bowl commercials are a “large and complex dataset,” content analysis is ideal for understanding the messages in the advertisements (Krippendorff 2012; Rose 2012:85). An in-depth content analysis of gender representations and gender narratives in Super Bowl commercials also allows a researcher to find patterns and themes that would be missed with just a “casual inspection” (Lutz and Collins 1993:89). A systematic look at commercials is essential because of the ubiquitous role of advertisements in our social world.

### ***3.2 Data and Sampling***

I gathered a pool of Super Bowl commercials using the archival advertising websites [adland.tv](#) and [superbowlcommercials.tv](#), as well as [YouTube.com](#). I also cross-referenced the commercials with the USA TODAY AdMeter Super Bowl commercial list to ensure that the correct commercials were downloaded and assigned to the year the advertisement aired. I was unable to locate every single commercial that aired each year due to advertisers actively removing the illegal uploads of their commercials, but through the use of multiple video upload sites I was able locate all but three ads listed on the USA Today AdMeter for Super Bowl commercials that aired between 2005 and 2016. The year range begins at 2005 because of the limited online availability of commercials that aired before 2005, likely due to the advent of sites that allow video uploading, including [YouTube.com](#), which went online that year. The relative newness of video uploading could also be why the three commercials I could not locate were from 2005 (two) and from 2006 (one). I eliminated commercials for network specific television programs (the network that aired the Super Bowl for that given year) from the pool for two reasons: because these types of commercials were only available online for two Super Bowl years and because they are not considered Super Bowl commercials in the USA TODAY AdMeter Super Bowl commercial rankings. Similarly, I removed commercials that focus on the Super Bowl program itself, such as advertisements for the half-time show, from the pool. To keep the dataset consistent from year

to year, I also eliminated commercials that aired during halftime (totaling 14 commercials) because the USA TODAY AdMeter did not begin including commercials that aired during halftime until 2013. Since there is no other complete list of Super Bowl commercials, I could not confirm which commercials aired during the 2005-2012 halftimes. I cannot attest to the possible impact of halftime commercials, but they may be less influential than first and last quarter advertising. Advertisers pay a premium for first and fourth quarter advertisements versus other time slots because more people tune into the first and last quarter of the Super Bowl (Brady 2015). I included the remaining 665 commercials in the analysis. The number of commercials I analyzed for each year is listed in Table 3.1.

*Table 3.1 Number of Super Bowl Commercials Analyzed Per Year*

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
<b>Number of Commercials</b>	53	57	55	55	51	64	59	54	51	52	54	60	665

In the initial stages of the study, I focused on tallying the gendered features of the commercials. The units of analysis were the actual characters or narrators and voiceovers in the commercials. I only coded human or human-like characters. I coded fantasy characters or animals if and when these characters appear to be gendered. For example, I coded a commercial featuring a talking parrot since the parrot used a male voice. For the latter stages of the study, which focused on the overall gender narrative of a commercial, the unit of analysis was each individual commercial and individual year of each commercial.

### **3.3 Measurement and Analysis**

In numerous analyses of advertisements that focus on whether advertisements portray gender stereotypes and perpetuate hegemonic ideals of masculinity and femininity, gender representation variables included gender, location, social roles, credibility, and product type featured in the advertisement (Eisend 2010; Furnham and Paltzer 2010; McArthur and Resko 1975; Prieler 2015). This



study measured the variable “gender” dichotomously as man or woman. The variable “location/situation” refers to the main location in which the action of the commercial takes place. I broke this variable down into five main categories: Home (kitchen, living room, bedroom, etc.), Work (business office, construction site, factory, etc.), Outdoors (park, bike path, river, etc.), Store/Retail Facility (grocery store, shopping mall, hardware store, etc.), and Entertainment (movie theater, sporting event, restaurant, etc.) and noted the specific location. I noted whether the location offered stereotypical messages. For example, women in a commercial shown in a kitchen or laundry room would represent the portrayal of a gender stereotype, while a man doing laundry in a commercial would represent an image that goes against a gender stereotype.

I also noted the categorization of whether a commercial reinforced or challenged a gender stereotype based on previous gender and advertising research as well as the characteristics included in the Bem Sex Roles Inventory (BSRI) and examinations of gender hegemony (see Charlebois 2011; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Demetriou 2001; Kimmel et al. 2005; Schippers 2007) . For example, I considered men as athletic, forceful, risk taking, and taking charge (Bem 1974; Kimmel et al. 2005; Prentice and Carranza 2002), and men as stupid (Green and Van Oort 2013) as reinforcements of stereotypes for men. When women acted childlike, nurturing, and sensitive (Bem 1974; Prentice and Carranza 2002) or when their main role was that of a sex object (Kilbourne 1999; King 2005; Lavine et al. 1999) I noted that those commercials reinforced stereotypes of women. When characters in a commercial challenged gender stereotypes or hegemonic gender ideals (e.g. men as nurturing or women as tough), I coded them as such.

Following Leslie Z. McArthur and Beth G. Resko’s example, I based the “social role” of a character on how the characters are cast in the commercials, such as homemaker, spouse (wife/husband), parent (mother/father), child, celebrity, athlete, etc. (1975). In addition, I noted when a character occupied a stereotypical gendered role. The “credibility/authority of the character” variable

had two main sub-categories: product user and authority. In some commercials, a character uses the product (product user), whereas in others a character acting as a professional recommends or endorses the product (authority) (Eisend 2010; McArthur and Resko 1975). The “credibility/authority of the character” can also represent stereotypical gender representations because gender stereotypes assume that men have more authority than women and are likely to be shown as the person endorsing the product instead of just using the product (Eisend 2010; McArthur and Resko 1975). The “product type” variable was categorized based on the type of product being advertised in the commercial and consisted of these categories: apparel, automotive, technology, banking/investment, food, beverage, alcohol, entertainment, insurance, etcetera. I included product type categorization in my analysis since past research on advertisements found gender differences in commercials based on product type (Bartsch et al. 2000; Ganahl et al. 2003; Gunter 1995; O’Donnell and O’Donnell 1978; Paek et al. 2010; Whipple and Courtney 1980).

I used the numerical gender representation (the number of women and men represented as central characters or narrators) and the coding based on location, product type of the commercial, social roles, and credibility/authority of the central characters to help determine the overall gender narrative of a commercial.

#### **4 RESULTS**

Numerous patterns emerged regarding the gendered representations of men and women in the Super Bowl advertisements examined. I address those themes first, notably a general trajectory toward more gender-egalitarian presentations. In addition, over the 12 years of commercials, I identified three time periods with gender themes that were distinctive from one another. These distinctive themes correlated with major economic changes in the United States. I found the first distinctive theme during the period prior to the Great Recession (2005-2007), the second during the economic downturn (2008-2012), and the third during the post-recession recovery (2013-2016).

#### **4.1 Overall Results**

There was a dearth of women characters and voiceovers in the 665 commercials I analyzed. Women made up only 30.23 percent of total characters (i.e. main characters plus other characters). Moreover, women were less likely to be main characters (23.28 percent) compared to other characters (33.79 percent). Women were most underrepresented in voiceovers, with women performing only 4.55 percent of all voiceovers (see Table 4.1). Indeed, four of the 12 Super Bowl years I analyzed had no commercials that featured women voiceovers. Men dominated the commercials that featured gendered characters with 75.24 percent of the commercials featuring more men than women, only 10.77 percent of the commercials featured more women than men, and 13.99 percent of the commercials featuring equal gender representation.

Table 4.1 Character and Voiceover Totals for Each Super Bowl Year

Year	Men as Main Characters	Women as Main Characters	Men as Other Characters	Women as Other Characters	Total Men Characters (main + other)	Total Men Characters (main + other)	Men as Voiceover	Woman as Voiceover
2005	77.33%	22.67%	66.43%	33.57%	70.18%	29.82%	94.74%	5.26%
2006	80.88%	19.12%	66.97%	33.03%	72.32%	27.68%	89.74%	10.26%
2007	90.14%	9.86%	69.57%	30.43%	75.29%	24.71%	97.37%	2.63%
2008	84.52%	15.48%	72.90%	27.10%	78.01%	21.99%	100.00%	0.00%
2009	80.00%	20.00%	75.18%	24.82%	76.78%	23.22%	100.00%	0.00%
2010	77.55%	22.45%	68.89%	31.11%	71.94%	28.06%	94.59%	5.41%
2011	74.70%	25.30%	65.45%	34.55%	68.55%	31.45%	100.00%	0.00%
2012	70.27%	29.73%	75.59%	24.41%	73.63%	26.37%	90.63%	9.38%
2013	69.32%	30.68%	62.96%	37.04%	64.98%	35.02%	96.67%	3.33%
2014	71.08%	28.92%	63.83%	36.17%	66.52%	33.48%	92.31%	7.69%
2015	65.52%	34.48%	56.69%	43.31%	59.84%	40.16%	87.50%	12.50%
2016	78.82%	21.18%	63.93%	36.07%	68.09%	31.91%	93.55%	6.45%
All Years	76.72%	23.28%	66.21%	33.79%	69.77%	30.23%	95.45%	4.55%

The results regarding product type and location of characters in the commercials showed little differences based on the gender of the characters. There was not a striking difference in product type based on gender beyond men being more likely to be featured in alcohol commercials than women. Commercials for household products also tended to feature more women compared to other product types. The proportion of men and women featured in automotive commercials was almost equal when the total proportion of men and women in all the commercials was considered. Men were also more often shown outdoors while women tended to mainly be featured in the home or at bar/party.

The most common social roles for men were that of leaders, risk takers, and saviors (usually coming to the aid of a woman in need). Men were also more likely than women to be shown as athletes, cowboys/farmers, criminals, doctors, scientists, and military/police. As for gender themes, men were most often shown as brave, taking charge, tough, violent, and as having ingenuity or intelligence to problem solve. Men were also often shown as dopey or stupid for comedic value while women were instead shown to be sources of antagonism. For example, in a 2006 Outback Steakhouse commercial,

actor Jermaine Clement from the Flight of the Concorde explains how his relationship with Outback Steakhouse is like a boomerang as he accidentally breaks a boomerang while trying to pull it off the restaurant wall and says “both times I was thrown out of Outback, I came back,” implying that he has made numerous stupid mistakes while at the restaurant (Outback 2006). In a 2005 Budweiser commercial, Cedric the Entertainer describes the three things he would want with him if he was stranded on an island: “a beautiful woman, and endless supply of Bud Light, and oh yeah another beautiful woman” (Budweiser 2005a). The viewer is then transported to Cedric’s fantasy island where he is shown lounging on the beach drinking his Bud Light (Budweiser 2005a). His enjoyment of this fantasy is quickly ruined when the two beautiful women start nagging him to do chores around the island (Budweiser 2005a). Already tired of their antagonism, Cedric changes his three island items to a dog, barbecue, and Bud Light (Budweiser 2005a). The women in this commercial added comedic value, but did so through acting as antagonists. This theme of women as antagonists is similar to but broader than what Messner and Montez de Oca termed women as “bitches” (2005:1887). Messner and Montez de Oca used that term to describe how women were often shown as the ones who prevented the sexual pleasure of men (2005). In the commercials I analyzed I noticed that this concept was not only used in regards to the prevention of sexual pleasure but also the prevention other forms of enjoyment for men.

Throughout the Super Bowl years analyzed, advertisers predominantly showed women in two social roles: that of the sex object (where the sexual appeal of the character was of key importance to the narrative of the advertisements and the role of the character) and the victim (where the character experiences some type of threat or needs to be saved). Other common roles for women included that of the love interest and partner of a man (i.e. wife or girlfriend). All three of these roles tend to focus on women solely through the eyes of men and reinforce hegemonic ideals for men. For example, women as sex objects emphasizes the importance of sexual conquests for men (Charlebois 2011; Plummer 2005). In addition, advertisers often paired women with men as the savior, reinforcing the idea of men as

dominant and women as helpless. Considering the small proportion of woman characters featured in the Super Bowl advertisements, there was a disproportionate number of girls represented as children compared to boys. By limiting the roles of worth for women to just those that reinforce the men's dominance, the social roles for women in Super Bowl commercials exemplify emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity.

When commercials included authority figures (e.g. expert, scientist, celebrity), 78.87 percent were men. Both men and women were more likely to be product users than authority figures, but the gap between product user and authority figure was smaller for men compared to women. Men were 1.43 times more likely to be a product user versus an authority figure, while women were 1.84 times more likely to be shown as product user versus an authority figure. This reflects past research indicating that men are more often presented as authority figures in advertising (Eisend 2010; McArthur and Resko 1975) since hegemonic masculinity associates authority with men (Collinson and Hearn 2005) .

For each Super Bowl year analyzed, more commercials reinforced gender stereotypes than challenged them, for example, showing men more often as tough, violent, and saviors compared to women (see Table 4.2). For instance, in the commercial for the film *Hannibal Rising*, numerous men are shown in positions of authority such as police, doctors, and the main villain, while the only woman character featured in the trailer takes the role of the victim (Weinstein Co. 2007). A total of 459 (69.02 percent) commercials reinforced gender stereotypes, 160 (24.06 percent) commercials combated gender stereotypes, and 137 (20.60 percent) commercials did not feature any obvious gender stereotypes. In 13.53 percent of cases, an advertisement would both reinforce and combat gender stereotypes such as when a man would be shown as violent but a woman in the same advertisement would be shown as tough and powerful. Overall, when commercials challenged gender stereotypes they were 2.61 times more likely to challenge stereotypes for women than for men (of commercials that

featured men, 13.99 percent challenged stereotypes for men, but in commercials that featured women, 36.50 percent challenged stereotypes for women).

#### **4.2 Results for 2005 through 2007**

During the years leading up to the Great Recession, there is an increase each year in the proportion of characters that are women. Despite the increase in female representation, stereotypical gender roles still dominate. Men were primarily shown as workers and saviors. Women on the other hand were missing in the workplace and mainly seen as sex objects and victims for men to save.

From 2005 through 2007, the gender narrative for men consisted mostly of men as workers, performing both blue- and white-collar jobs. In office situations, where one would expect to see a more equal representation of women and men, ads tended to feature only male employees. For example, in the eight CareerBuilder commercials that aired from 2005 through 2007, all of the office scenes were dominated by men; even the ones that featured chimpanzees had the chimps dressed up in men's suits (Career Builder 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2006a, 2006b, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c). During this period, all of the main characters in the commercials were men. Of the three commercials that had a woman character, two were secretaries. This absence of women as workers was even more striking because the office settings in the commercials did not appear to be in traditionally male-dominated fields.

Table 4.2 Percentage of Commercials that Reinforced or Challenged Gender Stereotypes

Year	Reinforced Stereotypes for Men	Reinforced Stereotypes for Women	Challenged Stereotypes for Men	Challenged Stereotype for Woman	No Obvious Gender Stereotypes	Reinforces Gender Stereotypes	Challenging Gender Stereotypes	Challenges per Reinforces
2005	75.47%	39.62%	7.55%	11.32%	13.21%	88.68%	18.87%	21.28%
2006	70.18%	29.82%	10.53%	15.79%	10.53%	84.21%	26.32%	31.25%
2007	76.36%	30.91%	10.91%	16.36%	7.27%	85.45%	27.27%	31.91%
2008	69.09%	27.27%	5.45%	5.45%	12.73%	83.64%	12.73%	15.22%
2009	68.63%	21.57%	1.96%	13.73%	15.69%	76.47%	15.69%	20.51%
2010	75.00%	26.56%	4.69%	10.94%	14.06%	79.69%	14.06%	17.65%
2011	74.58%	38.98%	8.47%	6.78%	15.25%	81.36%	16.95%	20.83%
2012	50.00%	11.11%	7.41%	12.96%	33.33%	55.56%	16.67%	30.00%
2013	56.86%	27.45%	21.57%	19.61%	23.53%	56.86%	37.25%	65.52%
2014	51.92%	19.23%	23.08%	15.38%	21.15%	53.85%	38.46%	71.43%
2015	35.19%	20.37%	11.11%	22.22%	38.89%	42.59%	33.33%	78.26%
2016	38.33%	8.33%	10.00%	23.33%	38.33%	37.70%	32.79%	86.96%
All Years	61.19%	25.11%	10.08%	14.43%	20.30%	69.02%	24.06%	34.86%

Note: These percentages do not total 100 percent because in some incidents, stereotypes were reinforced and combated within the same commercial.

Women's reoccurring role as the damsel in distress and as sex objects was standard for many of the commercials that aired during 2005 through 2007. One such victim who needs rescuing is the main character of a 2005 Budweiser commercial. In the ad, an attractive woman sits by herself at a bar, while one creepy man after another takes the seat next to her and hits on her (Budweiser 2005b). Each of the men spouts cheesy pick-up lines as they paw at her hand, arms, and shoulders (Budweiser 2005b). She tries to turn them down with polite headshakes and "no-thank you's", but they do not listen (Budweiser 2005b). Finally, her savior – a male-voiced parrot -- swoops in to her rescue and squawks at the men to go away (Budweiser 2005b).

The GoDaddy commercials of 2005, 2006, and 2007 exemplify the role of women as sex objects. Their 2005 commercial featured a woman whose small, thin-strapped tank top starts to come undone while she is speaking at a committee meeting; the breaking of the shirt's strap is too exciting for the men in the room causing one older man to lose his breath, requiring use of his oxygen tank (GoDaddy 2005). In 2006, a similar tank top scene occurs, but this time it is a more private scene between the



GoDaddy model and an older man in an office (GoDaddy 2006). In 2007, GoDaddy references their use of women as sex objects by showing a man walking through the GoDaddy offices and opening the door to the marketing department. In the room there are lots of women dressed in what is now GoDaddy's signature, tight, white, thin strapped tank top dancing with other GoDaddy employees (all men) (GoDaddy 2007). As the GoDaddy models dance and jump around, the movement of their breasts are emphasized while they are sprayed with champagne in the style of a wet t-shirt contest (GoDaddy 2007). The man then ends the commercial by saying, "everybody wants to work in marketing" (GoDaddy 2007). The main purpose for including each of the women featured in these commercials is for their sex appeal, since none are shown doing any actual office work.

#### **4.3 Results for 2008 through 2012**

The Great Recession began in late-2007 and technically ended in mid-2009 (Sommer 2016; Wingfield 2010), but the housing market crisis and high unemployment continued in the years after, not markedly improving until late 2012 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016; Cornish and Davidson 2013; S&P Dow Jones Indices 2016). The gender narratives for the commercials that aired during the Super Bowls of these years were unique compared to the commercials that aired in the pre-recession and recovery years, as they were characterized by a specific emphasis on masculine risk taking and the need to correct the emasculated gender displays of men.

One of the first features that distinguished this period of commercials was the uptick in ads featuring men-as-risk-takers, especially in the 2010 and 2011 years. For example, the 2011 Kia commercial demonstrates how men are shown as powerful risk takers. It begins with a man stealing a car from two police officers and then another man swoops in while flying a helicopter and steals the already stolen car, which is then taken out of the sky by the Greek god Zeus (Kia 2011). After being stolen by aliens, the car is summoned through a portal by a leader of an ancient civilization (Kia 2011).

Each time the car is stolen, the men perform risky stunts just to possess it. All the main characters who take drastic measures to steal the Kia are men demonstrating their great power.

In addition to risk-taking, a new narrative of masculinity correction emerged during the years of the economic downturn. In the commercials, men were encouraged to change their “unmanly” behavior. While women were still shown as victims and sex objects, they also took on a new role as the emasculators of men in these masculinity correction commercials. A 2010 Flo TV commercial depicts sports announcer Jim Nantz giving an “injury report” on a man named Jason who is accompanying his girlfriend on a Sunday shopping trip to the department store. Nantz says, “As you can see, his girlfriend has removed his spine, rendering him incapable of watching the game.... Boy that’s hard to watch” (Flo TV 2010). Jason is then shown with a red bra flung across one of his shoulders, smelling candles with his girlfriend in a different part of the store. Nantz tells Jason to get a Flo TV, a handheld live mobile television device, and to “change out of that skirt” (Flo TV 2010). This commercial implies that Jason’s girlfriend has emasculated him to the point where he is now a woman, as evidenced by Nantz’s reference to his metaphorical skirt. The advertisement also implies that the Flo TV can be a tool to correct his gender deviance and return his masculinity.

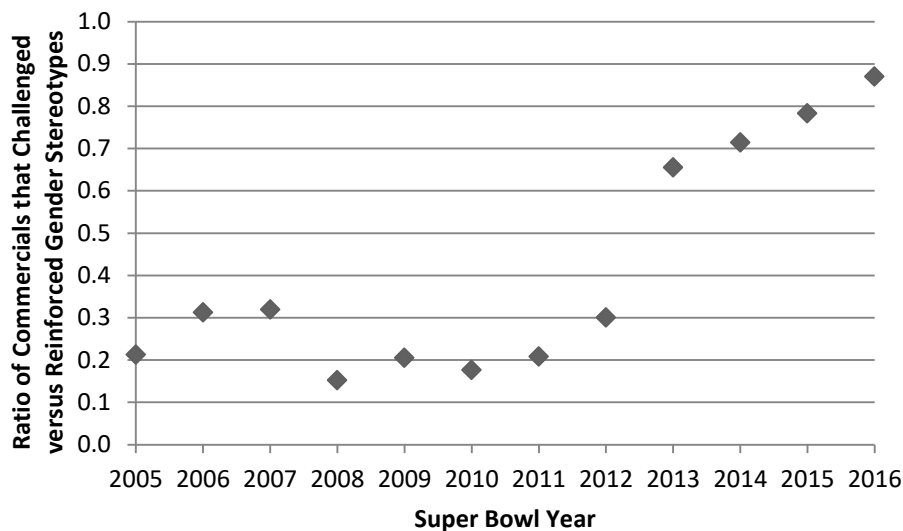
Another example of the emphasis on masculinity correction and women as emasculators occurs in a 2010 commercial for the Dodge Charger. The commercial starts out with an image of a man and a voiceover speaking in first person, listing all of the tasks he will do (presumably directed towards his female significant other), “I will say ‘yes’ when you want me to say ‘yes’. I will be quiet when you do not want to hear me say ‘no’. I will take your call. I will listen to your opinions of my friends... I will put the seat down. I will carry your lip balm” (Dodge 2010). As the list continues, we see images of other men who are also assumed to identify with the voiceover (Dodge 2010). The voiceover then says that because he does all of those tasks he will drive the car he wants to drive (Dodge 2010). Another voiceover comes in and says “Charger. Man’s. Last. Stand.” (Dodge 2010). The advertisement portrays

men who have already given up so much power to their girlfriends or wives that they need to take a “stand” and show their masculinity by driving a powerful and fast Dodge Charger.

During the years of the economic downturn, men who were engaging in activities that were not stereotypically masculine were portrayed as stupid. One example is a Doritos commercial from 2011 where a man’s obsession leads to awkward intimacy with other men in his office. In the first scene a man finishes a bag of Doritos, then the main character turns to the man and informs that he “left the best part,” right before sucking the Dorito cheese-dust off the man’s finger with his mouth (Doritos 2011). In another scene, a different man wipes his Dorito cheese dust covered hands on his pants and the main character swoops in and rips off the man’s pants so he can lick off the cheese dust (Doritos 2011). The commercial is exemplifying inappropriate behavior for men; he acted stupid and it resulted in intimate moments between men. These types of moments go against hegemonic ideals of masculinity where same-sex touching is considered weak (Evans 2002). The commercial leaves the viewer feeling that the character is stupid because he could have avoided all of the awkwardness if he would have just purchased his own bag of Doritos.

#### ***4.4 Results for 2013 through 2016***

Starting in 2013, there is another gendered shift in the Super Bowl commercials as the start to become more egalitarian and appear to pick up where the trend of the pre-recession left off. In fact, Figure 4.1 demonstrates that if it were not for the economic downturn years, the ratio of commercials that challenge stereotypes versus those that reinforce gender stereotypes would have increased steadily over time. Instead, there is precipitous drop in the ratio of commercials that challenged versus reinforced gender stereotypes between 2008 and 2012.



*Figure 4.1 The Ratio of Commercials that Challenged/Reinforced Gender Stereotypes*

During the recovery years, the gender roles of men and women start to broaden. Women are no longer only sex objects and victims, but are also shown as powerful and tough. This is especially apparent in the sudden increase in commercials for films that feature women as super heroes and villains. In the 2016 trailer for X-Men that aired during the Super Bowl, the gender of the characters shown fighting nearly reaches parity, with five characters that are men and four characters that are women (20th Century Fox 2016). Also, while men are still more likely to be shown as athletes than women are, during the recovery years more women are shown as athletic. In the commercial for the wearable activity tracker -- FitBit -- the advertisers show an equal number of men and women working out and using the wearable device (FitBit 2016). The commercial also features women performing in tough sports like martial arts (FitBit 2016).

The men in Super Bowl commercials during the recovery years also gain a new social role as caring fathers. In Nissan's commercial titled "With Dad," scenes cut between a father and his son spending time together and the father at work as a racecar driver (Nissan 2015). The viewer gets the sense of the dangers inherent in driving a racecar when the father crashes his car but survives (Nissan

2015). The commercial also implies that racing keeps the father away from home. Harry Chapin's "Cats in the Cradle" plays throughout the commercial, an emotional song about an absent father (Nissan 2015). This represents the hegemonic ideal that men are the breadwinner and not the one who nurtures (Marsiglio and Pleck 2005). Despite the commercial beginning with an absent father narrative, it shows that the father and son have made many memories together and that the father has had a good relationship with the son's mother. As the commercial ends, we see the father put his racing helmet away, appearing to have retired from racing (Nissan 2015). In the last scene the father goes to pick up his son from school and they both embrace (Nissan 2015). The father in this commercial may still be a risk taker, but he is also shown as sensitive and loving.

The differences between the advertisements from the economic downturn and more recent years are striking when one compares commercials for the same product from each of the time periods. In 2010, a Dove for Men spot told the story that once a man is born he is told to "be good at sports, run hard, run fast, ... lift weights, be strong, know how to fight ... be tough, be cool, be full of pride, don't show your sensitive side ... go check out a noise and never be scared ... change a flat tire while they wait in the car" (Dove 2010). The commercial says that over time the man will feel comfortable with doing all those tasks and then "you can take on anything, of course you can, because you are a man" (Dove 2010). The advertisement then implies that if you are comfortable with being a man, your skin should also be comfortable, so you should use Dove for Men products (Dove 2010). The 2010 Dove advertisement, while pointing out the absurd amount of pressure on men to be tough and in control, still puts value on those characteristics and states that it is those actions and traits that make a person a man. In 2015, Dove for Men portrays different types of behaviors and qualities that make a man strong. The 2015 commercial shows a series of moments featuring dads interacting with their children (Dove 2015). Then the advertisement has text that asks "What makes a man stronger?" followed by more dads interacting with their children and text that reads "Showing that he cares" (Dove 2015). Dove even

ends the spot with a call to action campaign called “Care Makes a Man Stronger” and encourages viewers to share their stories about how caring makes them stronger by using the hashtag “#RealStrength” (Dove 2015). The 2015 advertisement is not just showing men in nurturing roles but is advocating for the redefinition of what makes a man a strong, a direct contrast to how Dove previously put value on toughness and being in charge in their 2010 Super Bowl advertisement.

#### 4.5 General Change Over Time

Beyond the unique differences between the pre-recession, economic downturn, and recovery years, there were also fairly consistent changes related to gender throughout the Super Bowl years analyzed in the study. To examine patterns of change over time, I correlated advertisement year with the proportion of commercials depicting the following characteristics: men as main characters, men as other characters, men as total characters, women as main characters, women as other characters, and women as total characters. There was a significant positive correlation between time and the proportion of main and total characters that were women. The relationship between time and women as other characters was not significant (see Table 4.3). There was also no significant relationship between time and women voiceovers, however, the p-value approached statistical significance ( $p = .057$ ) even with a sample size of 12.

*Table 4.3 Correlation of Super Bowl Year and Characters and Voiceovers*

Variables	Women as Main Characters	Women as Other Characters	Total Women	
			Characters (main + other)	Woman as Voiceover
Year	.659*	.489	.659*	.323†

Note: †  $p \leq .10$ , \* $p \leq .05$

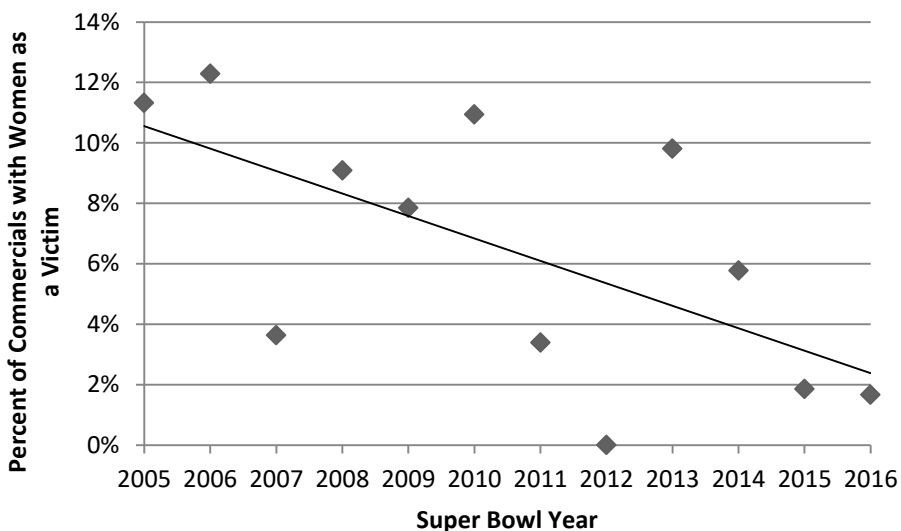
The roles of women in the commercials also changed throughout the years, with significant negative relationships between time and women as victims, and time and emphasis on beauty (see Table 4.4, Figure 4.2 and 4.3). The results also indicate a positive correlation between time and depictions of powerful women (see Table 4.4 and Figure 4.4). Across all of the years, women are

routinely and repeatedly depicted as sex objects. Indeed, this remains the predominant role for women in Super Bowl commercials, but the p-value did approach statistical significance ( $p = .073$ ) despite the small sample size (see Table 4.4). This indicates that there has been a substantive decrease in the use of women as sex objects in Super Bowl Commercials.

*Table 4.4 Correlation of Super Bowl Year and Gendered Roles*

Variables	Men as Workers	Men As Risk Takers	Men as Savior	Men as Father	Women as Victim	Women as Beauty	Women As Sex Object	Women as Powerful
Year	-.498†	.198	-.061	.604*	-.626*	-.611*	-.536†	.631*

Note: †  $p \leq .10$ , \* $p \leq .05$



*Figure 4.4.2 Percentage of Commercials that Show Women as a Victim Each Year*

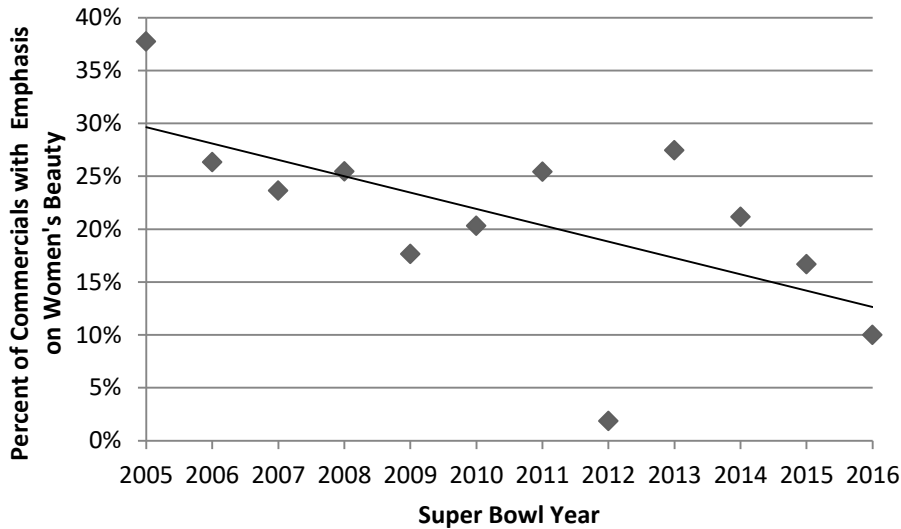


Figure 4.3 Percentage of Commercials that Emphasize the Importance of Women's Beauty Each Year

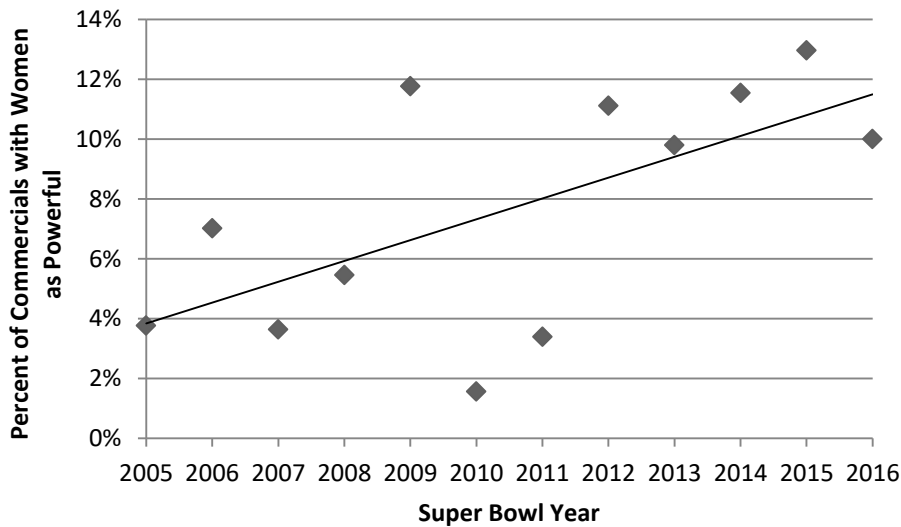
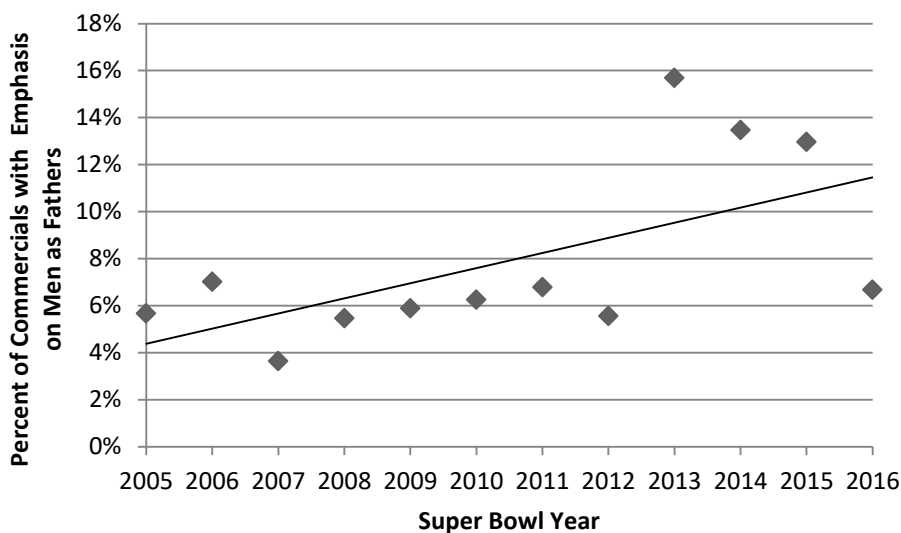


Figure 4.4 Percentage of Commercials that Show Women as Powerful Each Year

Over the years, the gender representations of men remained mostly static, with the exception of the recent increase of men being shown as fathers. There is a significant positive correlation between time and men represented as caring fathers (see Table 4.4 and Figure 4.5). There are no significant correlations between time and men as workers, risk takers, and saviors (see Table 4.4).





*Figure 4.5 Percentage of Commercials that Show Men as Fathers Each Year*

Overall, there is also a strong, significant, and negative relationship between time and percentage of commercials that reinforce gender stereotypes (see Table 4.5 and Figure 4.6). This applies to both men and women (see Figures 4.6 and 4.7). Following this trend, there was also a positive correlation between time and the percentage of commercials that did not use any obvious stereotypes (Table 4.5 and Figure 4.8). No significant relationship exists between time and percentage of commercials that challenge gender stereotypes and the ratio of challenging versus reinforcing gender stereotypes is also not significant at conventional levels, but both have a p-value of .057 and sample size of 12; these results can be interpreted as demonstrating a substantive increase over time in the number of commercials challenging stereotypes relative to reinforcing them. Specifically, commercials that challenge stereotypes of woman have substantively increased but are not significant at conventional levels ( $p = .056$ ).

Table 4.5 Correlation of Super Bowl Year and Gender Stereotypes

Variables	Reinforces Gender Stereotypes	Challenging Gender Stereotypes	Ratio of Challenging versus Reinforces	Stereotypes of Men	Stereotypes of Woman	Challenges Stereotypes of Men	Challenges Stereotypes of Woman	No Obvious Gender Stereotypes
Year	-.934***	.562†	.562†	-.859***	-.693***	.437	.564†	.851***

Note: † p ≤ .10 , \*\*\*p ≤ .001

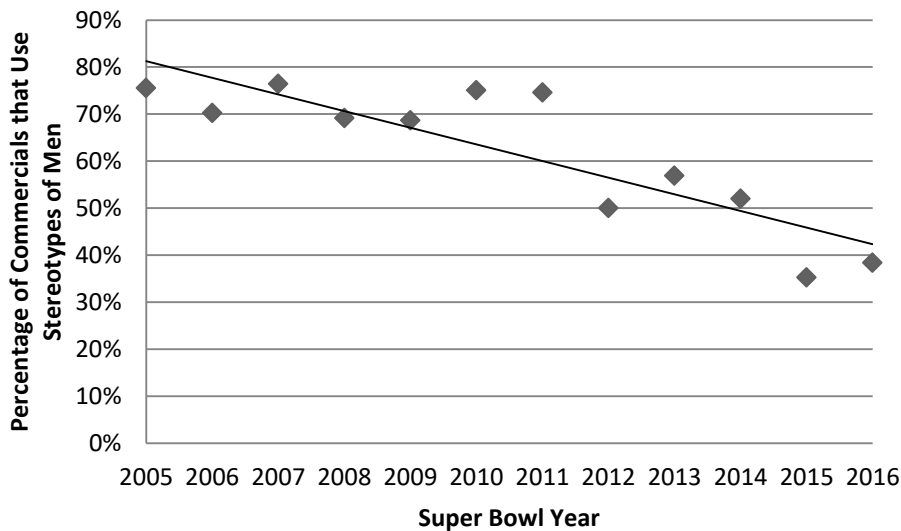


Figure 4.6 Percentage of Commercials that Use Stereotypes of Men Each Year

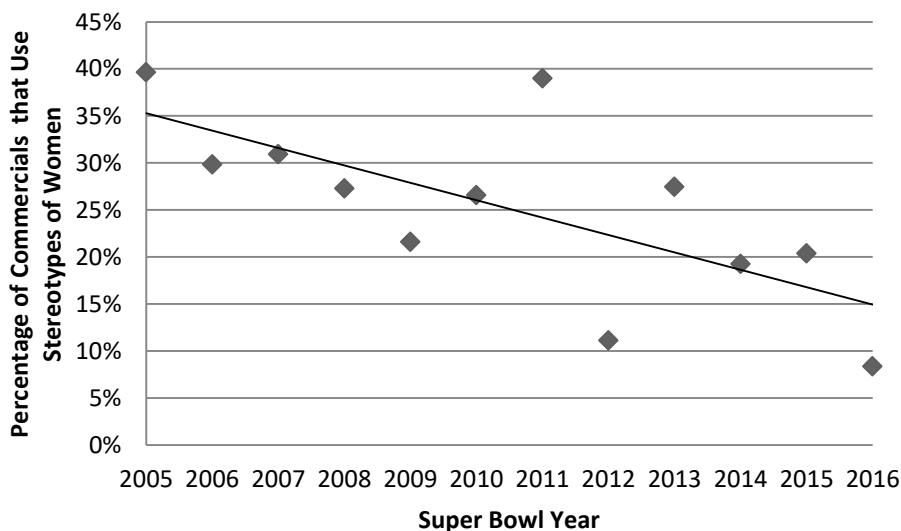


Figure 4.7 Percentage of Commercials that Use Stereotypes of Women Each Year

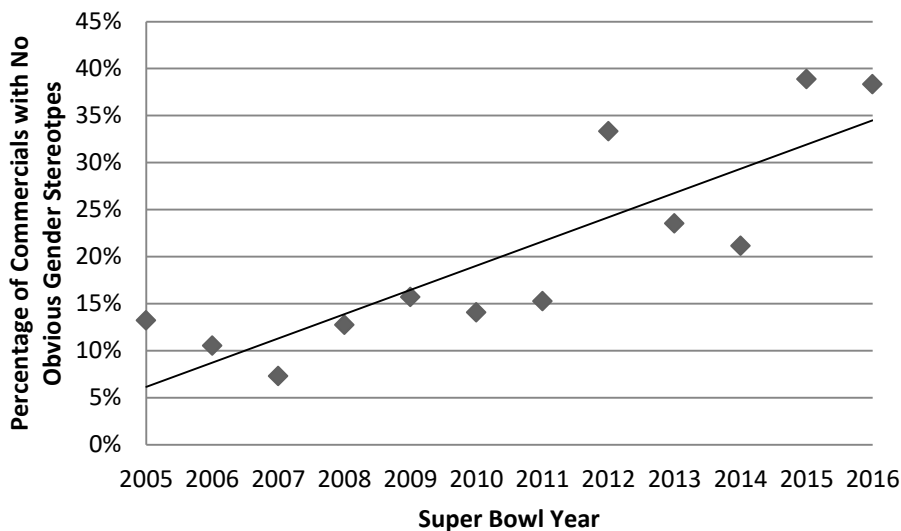


Figure 4.8 Percentage of Commercials that Use No Obvious Gender Stereotypes Each Year

## 5 DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to determine if gender narratives and representations in Super Bowl commercials have changed over the past 12 years. This study has found a considerable shift in gender narratives, which is good news when it comes to representations promoting visions of gender equality. The Super Bowl's large audience is now watching advertisements that feature more diverse gender roles and fewer gender stereotypes.

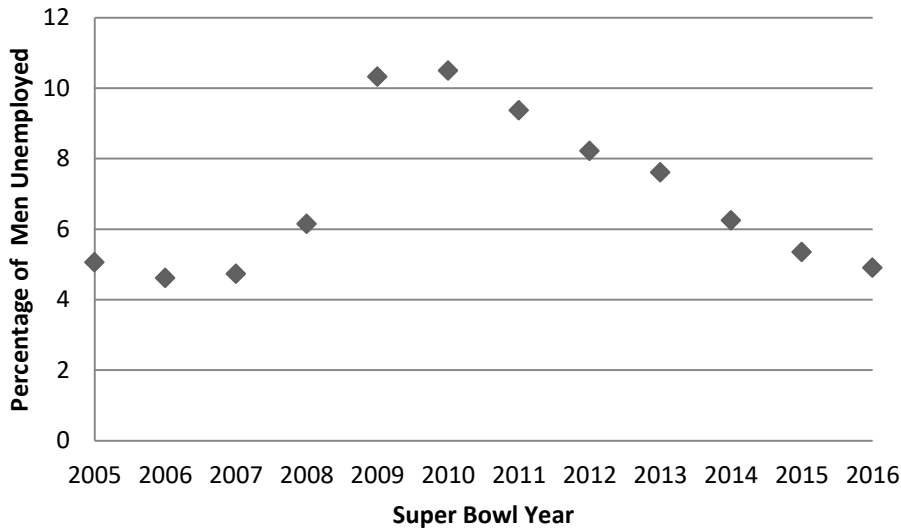
Through this analysis, three distinct time periods associated with the United States' Great Recession emerged. The commercials from the pre-recession years emphasize the importance of men as workers and women as sex objects and damsels in distress. Despite advertisers' reliance on gender stereotypes, over these three years there was a gradual decrease in the number of gender stereotypes used and an increase in challenges of those stereotypes. What appears to be a trend toward more equal gender representations suddenly disappears during the economic downturn years with a strong emphasis on the importance of hegemonic masculinity characteristics for men. During the heart of the

economic downturn in 2010 and 2011, this narrative was most evident with Super Bowl advertisers encouraging men to take charge and take a stand against those who emasculated them. Green and Van Oort noted the trend as a “masculinity crisis” in their study of 2010 Super Bowl Commercials (2013). This study presents evidence that Super Bowl advertisers adopted narratives associated with correcting masculinity throughout the years of the economic downturn and not just in 2010, the year Green and Von Oort studied. As the country shifted into the recovery years, the gender narratives of the Super Bowl commercials moved away from crises of masculinity and masculinity correction and began to emphasize the importance of fatherhood and caring. “When men conceptualize fatherhood, become fathers, and act as fathers, they do so within larger social and cultural contexts, many of which intersect with systems of gender relations” (Marsiglio and Pleck 2005:259). This emphasis on a more nurturing form of fatherhood could represent a cultural shift regarding fatherhood. All the while, women were depicted in more diverse roles demonstrating their strength and ability to save others as well as themselves. Beyond the economic recovery there is also a recovery in the trend towards equality, with the ratio of challenges to gender stereotypes increasing over reinforcements of gender stereotypes.

The sudden stall in the trend of more equal gender representation aligns with the economic downturn. During the great recession, the nation saw a spike in unemployment with 82 percent of job losses affecting men (Rampell 2009a). Commentators even referred to the time period as the “mancession” (Rampell 2009b; Thompson 2009). “Since the early nineteenth century, American manhood has revolved around the status of breadwinner: the independent, self-made man who supports his family by his own labor” (Kimmel and Ferber 2000:594). Jobs and work are tied to masculinity; a man’s economic situation may take a huge hit due to job loss, but a man’s masculinity and the power that comes with it also takes a beating (Michniewicz, Vandello, and Bosson 2014; Sherman 2013). To compensate for the emasculating effects of unemployment, unemployed men tend to display their masculinity in other ways (Brines 1994; Demantas and Myers 2015). For example, with the goal of

neutralizing their gender deviance as unemployed men, men will do even less housework compared to men who are currently employed despite having more time to help around the house (Brines 1994; Demantas and Myers 2015).

Many women were able to keep their jobs during the economic downturn, causing some women to take on the role of the family breadwinner when their partners lost their jobs. This can be seen as another hit to men's masculinity (beyond just their unemployment) since men report experiencing a threat to their masculinity when a woman out performs them or when women are in positions of power over them (Dahl, Vescio, and Weaver 2015; Netchaeva, Kouchaki, and Sheppard 2015). The negative correlation between the ratio of advertisements that challenged versus reinforced gender stereotypes and the unemployment rate for men (see Figure 5.1) even approached statistical significance at ( $p = .089$ ) despite the small sample size. Meaning that as the unemployment rate for men increased there were fewer advertisements that challenged gender stereotypes and more advertisements that reinforced gender stereotypes. Based on the close relationship between the economy and men's masculinity, it is reasonable that advertisers could capitalize on the sudden insecurity of men by emphasizing and reassuring them there was a way to take back their manhood. In addition, advertisers could appeal to the idea of masculinity threat by using representations of women that depict emphasized femininity and devalue the worth of women in comparison to men.



*Figure 5.1 Percentage of Unemployed Men Each Year (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016)*

As the economy improved and many men went back to work, restoring one of their key sources of masculinity, the crisis of masculinity narrative appeared to end. During the recovery, the trend toward more egalitarian messages in the Super Bowl commercials returned and continued to grow. The recent attention to domestic and family violence in the NFL could have also influenced the shift in gender narratives. The NFL even partnered with the organization NO MORE, which has a goal of raising awareness about domestic violence. Although the public services announcements from NO MORE were not included in this analysis because they aired during halftime in 2015 and 2016, it appears that Super Bowl advertisers are following the lead of the NFL and encouraging a kinder, gentler role for men. This emphasis on men as caring and women as tough could also be a reflection of our ever-changing society. Through the years, Americans' attitudes have shifted toward the support of gender equality and egalitarianism (Friedman 2015; Gerson 2011; Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001). Even the NFL's evolving response to domestic and family violence could reflect an overall shift in attitudes regarding gender.

Certainly, we are still nowhere near parity, with a disproportionate lack of women featured in Super Bowl commercials, but this study shows that there has been a fairly steady increase in the representation of women in Super Bowl commercials. Beyond an overall trend towards equality in our society, part of the motivation behind the increase of Super Bowl commercials that feature women could be due to advertisers recognizing the growing base of NFL fans that are women. Furthermore, in the more recent Super Bowl years, the gender themes for women have become more diverse, going beyond an emphasis on beauty and toward women being tough and powerful. Although at unconventional levels of significance, it appears that there has been a slight increase in women voiceovers in Super Bowl commercials: only 2015 had a higher percentage of women voiceovers (at 12.50 percent) compared to King's study of the 2000 Super Bowl commercials (at 11 percent). It is possible that patterns related to the economic downturn could also influence the underrepresentation of woman voiceovers, with three out of the five years during the economic downturn having none.

Unlike past research on gender and advertising (e.g. Eisend 2010; Furnham and Paltzer 2010; Prieler 2015), the gender of the main characters in the Super Bowl commercials I analyzed in this study tended not to align strictly with the type of product being sold or the setting of the advertisement. King predicted from her analysis of 2000 Super Bowl commercials that there was a trend in advertising featuring animals as opposed to sexualized women. However, my findings indicate that a woman's predominant role within Super Bowl commercials, despite a decline over time, remains that of the sex object.

Whether or not they were acting as a sex object, women also frequently played an antagonizing role in Super Bowl commercials. Messner and Montez de Oca (2005) used the term "bitches" to describe the trope of women as preventers of men's sexual pleasure. A similar theme emerged in this study, but I describe it as women as antagonists. The name of this theme is important because "bitches" is both a derogatory and analytically limited term. This concept of women disrupting men's pleasure goes beyond

just their sexual enjoyment. Commercials show women thwarting the general (not just erotic) happiness of men and therefore provide a key source of conflict through the obstacles they create.

This study is the first comprehensive and longitudinal analysis of Super Bowl commercials. While the results show a shift in the gender narratives and use of gender stereotypes within Super Bowl commercials, there are limitations to the study. Despite previous research indicating that advertisements do influence the thoughts and actions of their viewers, this current study cannot explain if and how people are affected by the gender narratives and representations in these Super Bowl commercials. An exposure experiment is needed to determine the actual effect of Super Bowl commercials on the public. This current study also does not allow us to predict if the gender trends and gender narratives will continue. Based on this study alone, we cannot say with certainty if the shifts in narratives are long-lasting or just related to current events; thus, it is important to continue analyzing future Super Bowl commercials. If a comprehensive list of Super Bowl commercials that aired during halftime could be constructed, then it would be important to include such advertisements in future studies to ensure narratives or themes were not overlooked.

Despite the clear limitations of this study, the results indicate a shift in the gender representations and narratives of Super Bowl commercials over the past 12 years. While 12 years is a relatively short amount of time, seeing so much change so quickly is surprising and encouraging. Since we know the effect of advertising and media as a structure can be compounding and cyclical through the concept of structuration (Risman 2009), this could mean that not only are the dominant ideologies about gender shifting (Bowman and Eden 2013; Holbrook 1987; McQuail 2010; Shoemaker and Reese 1996), but that the ideologies will continue to shift as more and more people are exposed to these new gender narratives and representations.



## 6 CONCLUSION

This study indicates that gender narratives and gender representation have changed over time. It is possible that these changes are a result of changes in the position of men in the economy, the increase coverage of domestic violence committed by NFL players, and the increase in NFL fans that are women. While it looks like there has been some progress and flexibility on what is expected of women – men are still shown in mostly rigid and limited roles in Super Bowl commercials. Despite this rigidity, men’s portrayals as nurturing and family-oriented are becoming more of an acceptable and respected role in Super Bowl advertisements and may be predictive of greater expansion. Super Bowl advertisers are relying less on gender stereotypes and including more women characters in their commercials, but there are still more advertisements that reinforce, rather than challenge, gender stereotypes. In a sense, the results of this study are both encouraging and discouraging. It is disheartening to see that unequal and problematic representations of men and women are still prominent in advertising, especially when those representations reinforce hegemonic ideals. However, it is promising to see what might be a trend towards more equal and diverse gender representation. The stereotypical gender characters and hegemonic ideals featured in Super Bowl commercials are evident within this study as with other studies of advertising, but it appears that more diverse representations of gender are emerging, at least within Super Bowl advertisements.

These changing representations of gender are important because the Super Bowl is the most watched television program in the United States (Cooper and Tang 2013; Nielsen 2013, 2014; Pallotta 2015; Pappas 2014; Taibi 2015) and its diverse viewership (Experian Marketing Services 2014; Nielsen 2010) tunes in giving special attention to the commercials (Kim et al. 2012; McAllister 1999). If Super Bowl commercials, like other forms of advertisements and media reinforce and represent dominant ideologies (Bandura 2001; Kilbourne 1999; McIntosh and Cuklanz 2014), then the shift seen in this study could represent a shift in “dominant ideas” relating to gender (Frost and Elichaooff 2014:267). In other

words, this shift in gender narratives and representations in Super Bowl commercials could represent a move away from roles that reinforce emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity to roles that emphasize ideas of gender equality.

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