**Communality sells: The impact of perceivers’ sexism on the evaluation of women’s portrayals in advertisements**

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**Abstract**

Portrayals of women in advertisements have a significant impact on the maintenance of gender stereotypes in society. Therefore, the present research investigates the effectiveness of communal and agentic female characters in advertisements as well as the question how evaluations of such characters are influenced by perceivers’ sexist attitudes toward women. Results show that communal female advertising characters are evaluated more favorably than agentic ones and that these evaluations predict advertising effectiveness. Benevolent sexism predicts more positive evaluations of communal female advertising characters (studies 1 and 2). Moreover, hostile sexism predicts less positive evaluations of agentic female advertising characters when it is assessed under time pressure (Study 2). Implications of these findings for the perpetuation of gender stereotypes in advertisements and in society are discussed. Copyright © 2011 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

In Western societies, the social roles inhabited by men and women have undergone noticeable changes over the past decades (e.g., Diekman & Goodfriend, 2006). However, portrayals of women in advertisements have not kept pace with these changes, and as powerful communicators of values and beliefs, they continue to reinforce gender stereotypes in society (Davies, Spencer, & Steele, 2005; Hurtz & Durkin, 2004; Lindner, 2004). Women in advertising are still portrayed predominantly in communal roles, that is, as housewives or as caring mothers in domestic settings. These communal portrayals depict women as possessing stereotypically feminine traits, such as being gentle, shy, helpless, dreamy, submissive, dependent, and subservient to men (Harker, Harker, & Svensen, 2005; Kang, 1997; Lindner, 2004; Royo-Vela, Aldas-Manzano, Kuster-Boluda, & Vila-Lopez, 2007). In contrast, women are underrepresented in agentic role portrayals, for example, as competent, dynamic, and effective career women.

Although considerable research has investigated how women are portrayed in advertisements (e.g., Harker et al., 2005; Royo-Vela et al., 2007), few studies to date have compared evaluations of communal and agentic female advertising characters. Researchers have usually found more positive reactions to stereotypical portrayals of women, such as housewives, compared with counterstereotypical portrayals, such as business women (even when products were gender-neutral, such as cell phones; Orth & Holancova, 2004; Vantomme, Geuens, & Dewitte, 2005). However, there is also evidence of positive reactions toward counterstereotypical female portrayals, at least among some women (even when the advertised product was rather feminine, such as a food product; Jaffe & Berger, 1994; for an overview, see Whipple & Courtney, 1985). This raises the question whether perceivers’ attitudes toward women, that is, their sexism, might constitute an important predictor of the evaluation of female advertising characters.

Ambivalent sexism theory (Glick & Fiske, 1996) posits a distinction between sexist beliefs about women that are negative (hostile) or subjectively positive (benevolent) in tone. Ambivalent sexism results from men’s structural power (control over important social, political, and economic institutions) and the simultaneous interdependence between the sexes, which lends women dyadic power (because of men’s dependence on them as wives, mothers, and romantic partners).

Hostile sexism (HS) toward women is based on a clear antipathy toward and derogation of women and serves to justify the power of men. Generally, HS is directed toward women who challenge gendered role expectations and traditional power relations, such as career women (Glick, Diebold, Bailey-Werner, & Zhu, 1997). Thus, HS is associated with negative attitudes toward women in counterstereotypical, agentic roles (e.g., Glick et al., 1997). Benevolent sexism (BS), on the contrary, consists of subjectively positive attitudes that describe women not only as wonderful (e.g., as purer than men) but also as weak (i.e., in need of protection and financial provision from men). Therefore, benevolent sexism view women as best suited for low status roles (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Lee, Fiske, & Glick, 2010). Indeed, benevolent sexism attitudes are reserved for gender-stereotypical women, rewarding them for conforming to low status, traditional roles (e.g., as housewives; Glick et al., 1997). However, the existing literature has not yet addressed the question of whether HS and BS are associated with attitudes toward agentic and communal women in the context of advertising.
Both HS and BS serve to justify and maintain traditional gender roles, hence inequality, and are positively correlated (for a cross-cultural analysis, see Glick et al., 2000). However, people are usually not aware of this correlation (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Kilianski & Rudman, 1998). Persons holding benevolent sexist attitudes are less likely to be perceived as sexist and are also rated as more likeable than hostile sexists (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005; Bohner, Ahlborn, & Steinier, 2010). Furthermore, BS has a subtle influence on the maintenance of gender inequalities, as it is associated with opposition against equality-promoting policies (i.e., wage equity and progressive employment policies; Sibley & Perry, 2010; see also Jost & Kay, 2005). Moreover, being exposed to BS undermines women’s own self-constitutions of competence (Dardenne, Dumont, & Bollier, 2007; Dumont, Sarlet, & Dardenne, 2010), as well as perceivers’ ratings of a woman’s competence (when she is interviewed by a man who has BS; Good & Rudman, 2010).

Men and women tend to actively endorse ambivalent sexism toward women to a similar degree (see Glick et al., 2000), even though men’s and women’s sexist attitudes toward women may have different origins (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Sibley, Overall, & Duckitt, 2007). For men, both HS and BS reinforce the gender hierarchy and therefore their cultural advantages. The subjectively appealing aspects of chivalry and protection are assumed to disarm women’s resistance against men’s higher status and power (Sibley et al., 2007). In addition, women’s belief that they should be protected, cherished, and provided for by men can exert a strong pressure toward cognitive consistency among them, which may lead to overtly hostile and subjectively negative evaluations of other women who refuse to conform to conventional gender roles (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

The main purpose of advertising is to make a specific product or brand more attractive for potential consumers, so as to increase sales (Blüher & Pahl, 2007). Purchase intention and product evaluation depend on how perceivers evaluate the character advertising a product (e.g., Goldsmith, Lafferty, & Newell, 2000; Lynch & Schuler, 1994). In the present research, we focus on whether purchase intent of a product is influenced by evaluations of communal or agentic portrayals of women in advertisements. In addition, we examine the impact of perceivers’ HS and BS on these evaluations in two studies.

Our hypotheses were as follows:

**Hypothesis 1**: Communal female advertising characters should be preferred over agentic ones because perceivers tend to devalue those who deviate from gender stereotypes (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004; Rudman & Glick, 2001).

**Hypothesis 2**: More positive evaluations of (agentic and communal) female advertising characters should predict effectiveness of the respective advertisement because evaluations of characters are decisive for advertising effectiveness (Goldsmith et al., 2000; Lynch & Schuler, 1994).

**Hypothesis 3**: Perceivers’ BS should predict a more positive evaluation of communal female advertising characters, whereas perceivers’ HS should predict a less positive evaluation of agentic ones. This hypothesis is based on previous research, which found that HS is associated with negative attitudes and BS is associated with positive attitudes toward women in agentic and communal roles, respectively (e.g., Glick et al., 1997).

**Overview of This Research**

In both studies, we used gender-neutral products selected on the basis of pilot testing. In Study 1, we examined the impact of perceivers’ hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes on evaluations of agentic and communal female advertising characters, respectively. In addition, we examined how such evaluations predict advertising effectiveness in terms of purchase intent. Before Study 2, a post-test was carried out that investigated several aspects of the advertising female characters in detail. Specifically, we analyzed the ascribed agency and communality, attractiveness, and credibility of these characters to rule out concerns about the pictures used in Study 1 and to select additional portrayals of female characters for Study 2. In Study 2, we again investigated the impact of sexist attitudes on evaluations of female advertising characters. However, to reduce social desirability effects, we limited the capacity to control responses regarding sexist attitudes among half of the participants. Because HS is perceived as more sexist than BS, we expected limited control to only influence the relationship between HS scores and ratings of agentic female characters (and not the relationship between BS and ratings of communal or agentic female characters of either type).

**Pilot Study: Gender-Neutrality of Products**

Past research found a preference for advertisements in which the gender of the character and product gender were congruent (Lynch & Schuler, 1994). To avoid this confound, we conducted a pilot test to select gender-neutral products.

Twenty participants (10 women, 10 men) rated 27 products (e.g., mineral water, toothpaste, vitamin pills, soap, jeans, or shampoo) regarding their gender neutrality on a seven-point semantic differential (1 = masculine, 4 = gender-neutral, 7 = feminine). One-sample t-tests, comparing ratings against the neutral point, resulted in six gender-neutral products, all $t$s(19) < 1.45, $p$s > .16. The products were deodorant ($M = 3.70, SD = 0.98$), shower gel ($M = 4.20, SD = 0.62$), contact lenses ($M = 3.75, SD = 0.91$), cell phones ($M = 3.95, SD = 1.10$), health insurance ($M = 4.20, SD = 0.77$), and coffee ($M = 4.05, SD = 0.94$). These findings were in line with results of previous studies assessing the gender-neutrality of products (e.g., Grohmann, 2009; Martin & Gnoth, 2009).

**STUDY 1**

Study 1 investigated how female advertising characters are evaluated when they are presented as either communal (i.e., stereotypically) or agentic (i.e., counterstereotypically). In addition, we assessed whether HS and BS would influence
these evaluations and the extent to which these evaluations impact advertising effectiveness (i.e., intent to purchase the advertised products).

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants from Switzerland were invited via email by student research assistants to participate in an Internet-based survey (in the German language) in exchange for a chance to win one of three movie vouchers. The participants (N = 107; 64 women and 43 men) ranged in age between 21 and 70 years (M = 33.52, SD = 11.23).

**Materials and Procedure**

Participants were told that the purpose of the online study was to investigate the relationship between their personality traits and their impressions of advertisements. Upon clicking a link in the recruitment email, participants were directed to a website, where they could complete the questionnaire. The study consisted of three main parts:

The first part contained demographics questions (e.g., gender and age) and filler items to bolster the cover story (e.g., questions about participants’ life-style, general interests, life goals). A German version (Ambivalent Sexism Scale, ASS Eckes & Six-Materna, 1999) of the 22-item Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (Glick & Fiske, 1996) was used to assess HS and BS. Sample items for HS are as follows: “Women seek to gain power by getting control over men” or “Women are too easily offended,” and sample items for BS are as follows: “Women should be cherished and protected by men” or “Many women have a quality and purity that few men possess” (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Participants evaluated the items on a six-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree, 6 = completely agree). Internal reliabilities were acceptable for the ASS (z = .88), BS (z = .84), and HS (z = .86). In the second part, participants were asked to “evaluate the character shown in the picture” (for the post-test of pictures, refer to the next paragraphs). Participants evaluated portrayals of two communal and two agentic female characters that were presented in randomized order with a semantic differential measure of attitudes (see Eagly, Mladinic, & Otto, 1991; Skowronski & Lawrence, 2001) on four six-point semantic differential scales: bad-good, negative-positive, useless-valuable, unpleasant-pleasant (z = .90). Two portrayals of communal female characters (woman with baby and woman with cat) and two of agentic female characters (businesswoman and athletic woman) were presented. These two agentic female subtypes were chosen because both could be considered counterstereotypical (Glick et al., 1997). To disguise the purpose of the study, participants also evaluated other advertising characters, such as a baby, an old woman, or man, as well as men in different roles.

In the third part, the same pictures of the female advertising characters reappeared. To control for order effects, items and images were always presented in randomized order. For each of the four pictures, participants had to choose one of the six gender-neutral products that they would advertise with the respective picture. Finally, purchase intent was assessed by asking participants for every picture whether they would buy the products they associated with the respective picture, provided that they had a need for it. Participants indicated their purchase intent on a six-point Likert scale (1 = definitely not buy, 6 = definitely buy).

**Results and Discussion**

**Evaluations of Female Advertising Characters**

To investigate evaluations of female advertising characters portrayed as either communal or agentic, a dependent sample t-test was computed. The results showed that communal female advertising characters (M = 4.37, SD = 0.91) were evaluated more positively than agentic ones (M = 3.68, SD = 1.11), t(106) = 6.68, p < .001, which is consistent with Hypothesis 1.

**Advertising Effectiveness of Female Advertising Characters**

In addition, we analyzed how the evaluations of communal and agentic female advertising characters affected the intent to purchase the advertised products by conducting simple regression analyses. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, more positive evaluations of communal and agentic female advertising characters predicted higher purchase intent for the respective products (communal female advertising characters: $\beta = .48, t(105) = 5.55, p < .001$; agentic female advertising characters: $\beta = .44, t(105) = 4.98, p < .001$).

**Sexism as a Predictor of Evaluations of Female Advertising Characters**

A hierarchical regression analysis was computed to analyze the impact of BS on the evaluation of communal female advertising characters. In this analysis, we controlled for HS scores, as recommended by Glick and Fiske (1996), because there was a significant correlation between BS and HS, r = .44, p < .001. In general, participants scored higher on BS (M = 3.12, SD = 0.94) than on HS (M = 2.94, SD = 0.86). Consistent with Hypothesis 3, BS reliably predicted evaluations of communal female advertising characters, $\beta = .30, t(104) = 2.85, p < .005$. By contrast, HS had no impact on evaluations of communal female advertising characters, $\beta = -.00, t(104) = -.02, p = .985$.

We then analyzed the impact of perceivers’ HS on the evaluations of agentic female advertising characters while controlling for BS. Inconsistent with Hypothesis 3, HS did not predict evaluations of agentic female advertising characters, $\beta = .01, t(104) = 0.12, p = .908$.3 Neither did BS

3Further analyses showed that HS had a nonsignificant impact on both agentic female subtypes (businesswoman: $\beta = .01, t(104) = 0.12, p = .908$; athletic woman: $\beta = .02, t(104) = 0.22, p = .826$). As expected, the impact of BS on agentic female characters was not significant for both subtypes (businesswoman: $\beta = -.02, t(104) = -0.21, p = .834$; athletic woman: $\beta = .04, t(104) = 0.38, p = .704$).
predict the evaluations of agentic female characters, $\beta = -0.02$, $t(104) = -0.21$, $p = .834$.

In summary, Study 1 showed that communal female advertising characters were evaluated more positively than agentic ones (Hypothesis 1), and evaluations were highly predictive of the intent to purchase the advertised products (Hypothesis 2). Perceivers’ BS proved to be an important predictor for the evaluation of communal female advertising characters (Hypothesis 3), whereas there was no effect of HS on evaluating agentic female advertising characters. This null finding may have been influenced by social desirability because hostile, but not benevolent, sexism toward women is easily recognized as sexist (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005). Thus, considering the current cultural climate, it is unlikely that respondents will communicate their prejudicial attitudes especially prejudices against women, openly (Campbell, Schellenberg, & Senn, 1997; Eyssel & Bohné, 2007). In an attempt to overcome this problem, we limited participants’ cognitive capacity in Study 2, to minimize the possibility that responses were controlled with regard to sexist attitudes. By doing so, we intended to receive more sincere ratings on those items measuring HS.

One limitation of the present study concerns the measurement of advertising effectiveness. In this study, advertising effectiveness was measured by presenting a list of the six gender-neutral products for each picture and asking participants to select one product they would advertise with the respective picture. Next, we asked for their purchase intent of the selected product. Because participants had the possibility to choose different products, this self-selection may have affected purchase intent ratings. This limitation was overcome in Study 2 because we framed the pictures as advertisements for one product only (i.e., health insurance) to have more control over ratings of purchase intent.

Regarding the portrayals of communal and agentic female advertising characters, our study was limited because we did not empirically test whether communal female advertising characters were perceived as more communal than agentic (and vice versa for agentic female characters). In addition, we did not account for the potential impact of advertising characters’ credibility and attractiveness on advertising effectiveness. The credibility of an advertising character is defined as the degree to which the advertising character is perceived to have expertise on a subject and is trusted to provide an impartial opinion about the subject (Jung & Kellaris, 2006). Previous research has consistently shown that credibility of an advertising character influences advertising effectiveness (e.g., Bower & Landreth, 2001; Goldsmith et al., 2000; Jung & Kellaris, 2006). In addition, some studies have found evidence for the impact of attractiveness on credibility of advertising characters and on advertising effectiveness (Bower & Landreth, 2001; Goldsmith et al., 2000). Thus, to address these limitations, that is, to ensure that female communal and agentic advertising characters of Study 1 were perceived as significantly more communal and agentic respectively but as similarly attractive and credible, we carried out a post-test on the portrayals used in Study 1. In addition, we wanted to replicate the findings of Study 1 with different materials, so we performed pilot test on additional pictures for Study 2.

Table 1. Post-test: means (and standard deviations) of agency and communality ratings of female advertising characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Set</th>
<th>Advertising character</th>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Communality</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Businesswoman*a,b</td>
<td>6.08 (0.54)</td>
<td>4.58 (1.18)</td>
<td>5.13***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Athletic woman*</td>
<td>5.01 (0.95)</td>
<td>3.86 (1.09)</td>
<td>7.49***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Businesswoman in front of group*b</td>
<td>6.19 (0.60)</td>
<td>4.67 (1.25)</td>
<td>4.92***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Woman in self-confident pose*b</td>
<td>4.92 (1.07)</td>
<td>4.51 (1.47)</td>
<td>2.71*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Portrait of businesswoman*c</td>
<td>5.73 (0.97)</td>
<td>4.30 (1.03)</td>
<td>4.55***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Woman with baby*a,b</td>
<td>4.44 (0.97)</td>
<td>5.22 (1.34)</td>
<td>-2.36*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Woman with cat*c</td>
<td>4.21 (0.98)</td>
<td>4.94 (0.66)</td>
<td>-2.32*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Woman with teddy bear*b</td>
<td>4.25 (1.02)</td>
<td>4.97 (1.17)</td>
<td>-3.00***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Woman with appealing smile*b</td>
<td>4.11 (1.21)</td>
<td>4.83 (1.02)</td>
<td>-3.90***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Woman feeding baby*b</td>
<td>4.85 (0.99)</td>
<td>5.53 (1.09)</td>
<td>-3.54**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = 34.
*aPicture was used in Study 1.
*bPicture was used in Study 2.
*c$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

In this post-test, a pool of pictures (some of them were used in Study 1) was tested regarding ascribed agency, communality, attractiveness, and credibility of female advertising characters.

Thirty-two participants (8 men, 24 women) took part. From the pool of 30 pictures, participants were asked to rate one of two sets of pictures on agency, communality, attractiveness, and credibility (each containing 15 pictures). The participants rated only one of the two sets, to reduce the amount of pictures each participant had to rate.

Participants used a seven-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much) to indicate the extent to which they perceived the female advertising characters as communal, namely sincere, warm, selfless, loyal, and fair-minded, and as agentic, that is, competent, efficient, intelligent, dynamic, and organized (1 = not at all, 7 = very much) (see, e.g., Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2004; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). In addition, participants rated the attractiveness of the female advertising characters on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). To assess the credibility of advertisements, participants were asked how credible each character appeared as an advertiser for a deodorant, a shower gel, contact lenses, a cell phone, a health insurance, and for coffee (1 = not at all, 7 = very much).
To ensure that agentic female advertising characters were perceived significantly more agentic than communal, whereas communal female advertising characters were perceived as more communal than agentic, we computed dependent sample $t$-tests comparing the mean communality and agency ratings of each picture (Table 1). In addition, to ensure that agentic female advertising characters were perceived as more agentic than communal advertising characters and vice versa, independent (when comparing ratings of Set 1 versus Set 2) and dependent sample $t$-tests (when comparing ratings of either Set 1 or Set 2) were computed. Similarly, we computed independent and dependent sample $t$-tests to ensure that attractiveness and credibility did not differ significantly.

Results showed that pictures of agentic female advertising characters selected for Study 1 (businesswoman, athletic woman) were rated as more agentic than communal characters, and communal characters selected for Study 1 (woman with baby, woman with cat) were rated as more communal than agentic characters (all $t_s > 1.85$, $p < .05$, one tailed). Moreover, these advertising characters did not differ in attractiveness (all $t_s < 1.03$, $p > .05$, two tailed). To test whether advertising characters were perceived as credible sources to advertise for the gender-neutral products, we computed a mean score for the credibility ratings of all six gender-neutral products. Results showed that advertising characters selected for Study 1 did not differ in mean credibility ratings (all $t_s > 2.05$, $p > .05$, two tailed). Taken together, the female characters used in Study 1 were reliably representing communal and agentic advertising characters and were perceived as similarly attractive and credible (Table 2). Thus, advertising effectiveness ratings were not confounded by attractiveness and credibility of advertising characters.

For the selection of pictures for Study 2, as before, the selection criteria was the communality, agency, and attractiveness ratings of each advertising character. In addition, female advertising characters had to be perceived as credible to advertise health insurance. Based on these criteria, two pictures that were used in Study 1 were replaced because those advertising characters differed in terms of credibility for advertising health insurance. We selected four communal (woman with baby, woman with teddy bear, woman with appearing smile, woman feeding baby) and four agentic female advertising characters (businesswoman, businesswoman in front of group, woman in self-confident pose, portrait of businesswoman) for the second study.

Results indicated that each of the four agentic advertising characters was rated at least marginally more agentic than each of the communal advertising characters ($t_s > 1.68$, $p < .06$, one tailed), whereas each of the communal characters was rated at least marginally more communal than agentic characters ($t_s > 1.34$, $p < .10$, one tailed). Moreover, all eight selected female advertising characters were rated as similarly attractive (all $t_s < 1.81$, $p > .05$, two tailed) and equally credible (all $t_s < 1.35$, $p > .05$, two tailed) to advertise for health insurance.

### STUDY 2

Study 2 aimed at clarifying the unexpected absence of an effect of HS on evaluations of agentic female advertising characters. As outlined earlier, social desirability demands may have prevented effects of HS on the evaluation of agentic female advertising characters by restricting scores on the HS scale. To prevent participants from controlling their responses, previous research used time pressure to limit cognitive capacity (e.g., Eyssel & Bohner, 2007; Sczesny & Kühnen, 2004). In those studies, the cognitive capacity was limited when assessing the dependent or criterion variable. In this study, instead, we assessed hostile and benevolent sexist attitudes (i.e., the predictor variables) under time pressure. The reasoning behind this procedure was that previous research clearly showed that HS, but not BS, was recognized as being sexist (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005). Because people are motivated not to admit that they hold such hostile, prejudicial attitudes about women (Campbell et al., 1997), they are assumed to control their hostile sexist attitudes if capable of doing so. Thus, to prevent participants from controlling their expression of HS, we limited cognitive capacity by placing half of the participants under time pressure.

For the condition without time pressure, we expected results similar to those of Study 1: whereas BS should predict more positive evaluations of communal female advertising characters, HS should not predict less positive evaluations of the agentic characters. In the time pressure condition, perceivers' BS should predict more positive evaluations of communal female advertising characters and their HS should predict less positive evaluations of agentic characters (modified Hypothesis 3). Again, we expected that communal female advertising characters would be preferred over agentic ones (Hypothesis 1) and that evaluations of both communal and agentic advertising characters would predict advertising effectiveness, in terms of interest in and intent to purchase the advertised product (Hypothesis 2).

#### Table 2. Post-test: means (and standard deviations) of attractiveness and credibility ratings of female advertising characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Set</th>
<th>Advertising character</th>
<th>Attractiveness</th>
<th>Credibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Businesswoman&lt;sup&gt;a,b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5.00 (1.00)</td>
<td>4.93 (1.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Athletic woman&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4.65 (1.06)</td>
<td>4.21 (1.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Businesswoman in front of group&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5.65 (0.61)</td>
<td>5.29 (1.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Woman in self-confident pose&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5.41 (1.23)</td>
<td>4.43 (2.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Portrait of businesswoman&lt;sup&gt;ab&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5.73 (1.16)</td>
<td>5.09 (1.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Woman with baby&lt;sup&gt;ab&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5.06 (1.56)</td>
<td>5.22 (1.31)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Woman with cat&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5.00 (1.20)</td>
<td>3.82 (1.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Woman with teddy bear&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5.18 (1.13)</td>
<td>5.00 (1.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Woman with appearing smile&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5.82 (1.02)</td>
<td>4.71 (1.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Woman feeding baby&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5.20 (1.42)</td>
<td>5.73 (1.49)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $n = 34$.

<sup>a</sup>Picture was used in Study 1.

<sup>b</sup>Picture was used in Study 2.

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For communality ratings of woman with teddy bear versus businesswoman in front of group ($t(16)=0.88$, $p = .196$), woman with appearing smile versus businesswoman ($t(16)=0.94$, $p = .181$), and woman with appearing smile versus the business woman in front of group ($t(16)=0.57$, $p = .288$), we found nonsignificant differences in the predicted direction.
Method

Participants

Participants from Switzerland were invited via email by student research assistants to participate in an Internet-based survey in German (N = 108; 72 women and 36 men) ranged in age between 18 and 77 years (M = 30.31, SD = 16.48). Participation in this study was voluntary and was not compensated.

Materials and Procedure

In the first part of Study 2, participants evaluated portrayals of four communal and four agentic female characters (selected on the basis of the presented post-test, refer to earlier discussion). Participants were asked to “evaluate the character in this advertisement.” Evaluations were assessed with a semantic differential measure of attitudes on five six-point semantic differential scales (α = .96).

In addition, advertising effectiveness was not only measured through purchase intent as in Study 1 but also through interest in the product because health insurances are expensive. Thus, consumers are required to consider such a product intensively (Spotts, Weinberger, & Parsons, 1997). Therefore, interest in the product could constitute a more sensitive measure for advertising effectiveness than purchase intent. To assess interest in the product, participants were asked “If you were to choose a new health insurance within the next 3 months, would this advertisement increase your interest in this?” Participants answered this question on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = very unlikely, 7 = very likely).

In the second part, we assessed demographic data as well as HS and BS toward women. Specifically, we assessed HS and BS after the evaluation of female advertising characters and advertising effectiveness. We chose this order to ensure that evaluation ratings would not be affected by reactance to the sexism measure. To decrease controlled responses when assessing HS and BS, half of the participants were instructed to respond to the ASS items as quickly as possible, which was emphasized by a visualized countdown presented above each item. Participants were asked to complete their ratings before the countdown of 8 s finished. Nevertheless, participants were allowed to take longer than 8 s to respond because the induction of subjective time pressure was more important than the reaction time per se. For all participants, every item of the ASS was presented on a single page of the online study. Response times (in seconds) for the editing of each page were assessed automatically. The response times were inspected and screened. Eight participants were eliminated from the sample because of extremely high response latencies. The ASS documented acceptable internal reliabilities when assessed without time pressure (ASS: α = .92; BS: α = .86; HS: α = .91), as well as with time pressure (ASS: α = .88; BS: α = .83; HS: α = .87).

Results and Discussion

Manipulation Check

To test whether participants indeed responded more quickly to the ASS items under time pressure compared with those without time pressure, we first calculated the total duration of the completion of the ASS for each participant. Next, we conducted an independent sample t-test to compare the time spent on completing the questionnaire in both conditions. As expected, participants in the time pressure condition on average responded significantly faster to the ASS questionnaire (M = 167.31 s, SD = 39.23 s) than participants without time pressure did (M = 222.86 s, SD = 84.63 s; t(98) = 4.18, p < .001).

Evaluations of Female Advertising Characters

As predicted in Hypothesis 1, communal female advertising characters were evaluated more positively (M = 3.80, SD = 0.06) compared with agentic ones (M = 3.45, SD = 0.54; t(48) = 3.58, p = .001). In terms of purchase intent (agentic female advertising characters: β = .36, t(106) = 3.93, p < .001) and in terms of higher purchase intent (agentic female advertising characters: β = .25, t(106) = 2.62, p = .010; communal female advertising characters: β = .32, t(106) = 3.46, p = .001).

Sexism as a Predictor of Evaluations of Female Advertising Characters

HS and BS showed a significant positive correlation when ASS was assessed without time pressure (r = .66, p < .001) and also with time pressure (r = .35, p < .014). In both conditions, participants scored higher on BS than on HS. There were no significant differences between the BS ratings under time pressure (M = 3.61, SD = 0.86) in comparison with those without time pressure (M = 3.43, SD = 0.99; t(98) = .96, p = .338). For HS, however, we found significantly higher HS scores in the time pressure condition (M = 3.39, SD = 0.95) compared with that in the no time pressure condition (M = 2.83, SD = 1.00; t(98) = −2.86, p = .005).

When sexism was assessed without limiting participants’ cognitive capacity, similar results as in Study 1 were obtained: whereas BS predicted evaluations of communal female advertising characters to a significant degree, β = .45, t (48) = 2.63, p = .011, HS had no impact on evaluations of communal female advertising characters, β = .03, t(48) = −0.16, p = .875. Again, HS did not predict less positive evaluations of agentic female advertising characters, β = −.11, t(48) = −0.68, p = .497. Unexpectedly, BS predicted positive evaluations of agentic female characters, β = .57, t(48) = 3.42, p = .001.

In the time pressure condition, Hypothesis 3 was fully supported: BS predicted more positive evaluations of communal female advertising characters, β = .31, t(46) = 2.08, p = .043, whereas HS did not, β = −.27, t(46) = −1.82, p = .076. Moreover, HS predicted less positive evaluations of agentic female
advertising characters, $\beta = - .31$, $t(46) = -2.04$, $p = .047$, whereas BS did not show an effect, $\beta = .14$, $t(46) = .92$, $p = .361$.

In summary, Study 2 corroborated the results of Study 1 in that communal female advertising characters were evaluated more positively than agentic ones (Hypothesis 1). The evaluations of female advertising characters again had a significant impact on advertising effectiveness, namely on purchase intent as well as on interest in the product (Hypothesis 2). When participants’ sexism toward women was assessed without time pressure, participants’ BS again predicted significantly more positive evaluations of communal female advertising characters, whereas HS did not predict less positive evaluations of agentic characters (Hypothesis 3). Unexpectedly, BS also predicted more positive evaluations of agentic female advertising characters. Because this finding is unique to Study 2, we do not have confidence in it, pending replication.

Of more importance, when participants’ HS and BS scores were measured under time pressure (i.e., when their cognitive capacity to control responses for social desirability was limited), participants’ BS predicted more positive evaluations of communal female advertising characters and HS predicted less positive evaluations of agentic ones. Because participants in the time pressure condition scored significantly higher on HS than participants without time pressure, this instruction might be a promising means of obtaining more genuine ratings of sexist attitudes.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

In the present research, we examined whether communal female advertising characters were generally preferred to agentic ones and how this affected advertising effectiveness. This was considered important because the effectiveness of advertisements may determine how women will be portrayed in advertisements in the future. In this research, we found that despite the changing roles of women in Western societies, agentic women are not yet fully accepted in the context of advertising. Communal female advertising characters are still being evaluated more favorably than agentic ones. Because of the impact of advertisements on social values and beliefs, communal gender role portrayals can contribute to the maintenance of gender stereotyping in societies (Davies et al., 2005; Hurtz & Durkin, 2004; Lindner, 2004).

Furthermore, evaluations of advertising characters have a significant impact on advertising effectiveness, as found in the present research (see also Goldsmith et al., 2000; Lynch & Schuler, 1994). Therefore, the preferences outlined earlier may encourage advertisers to continue portraying women in traditional, communal roles instead of modern, agentic roles. In addition, we were able to show that HS and BS had a significant impact on reactions toward women portrayed in different gender roles also in the context of advertising. These results are congruent with findings in earlier research, which showed that BS is associated with more positive reactions toward women in gender-stereotypical communal roles, whereas HS is associated with more negative reactions toward women in counterstereotypical, agentic roles (e.g., Glick et al., 1997; Masser & Abrams, 2004; Sakalli-Ugurlu & Beydogan, 2002).

Addressing the more positive evaluations and higher advertising effectiveness of communal compared with agentic female advertising characters, it would be interesting to assess whether product type has an impact on those findings. In other words, future research should examine whether the match and mismatch between the communal and agentic advertising character and the products that are associated with communal-ity and agency, respectively, has an impact on advertising effectiveness.

In addition, because portrayals of gender stereotypical roles in advertisements affect the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and thus gender hierarchy in societies, it is necessary to investigate how agentic female advertising characters can be made more appealing to perceivers. In other fields of research (i.e., research on gender discrimination in the context of leadership), it has been shown that women receive more approval when their agentic qualities are tempered by highlighting aspects of their femininity, such as displaying communal warmth (Heilman & Okimoto, 2007; Rudman & Glick, 2001). In the context of advertising, similar effects might be expected when “feminine” features of female advertising characters are emphasized (e.g., long hair or big eyes). Thus, understanding the conditions under which agentic female characters are equally effective or even more effective in advertising than communal characters could promote the portrayal of women in greater diversity of roles, and thus, portrayals of women in advertisements would keep up with the changes in our society.

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