

2014-05-17

# The Cost of Commercials: An Analysis of Electronic Media and the Reinforcement of Gender Roles

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**THE COST OF COMMERCIALS:  
AN ANALYSIS OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA AND THE  
REINFORCEMENT OF GENDER ROLES**

**Honors Thesis**

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Bachelor of Science in Sociology  
In the College of Arts & Sciences  
At Salem State University**

By

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Faculty Advisor  
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The Honors Program  
Salem State University  
2014

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### **Acknowledgements**

From the bottom of my heart I would like to thank my thesis advisor Dr. Pamela Leong. I want to thank her for the patience and understanding that she showed me through this whole process. Without her as my thesis advisor, this process would have been a lot more stressful and difficult. I also want to thank Pamela for the education she has given me during my time in the Sociology department at Salem State University. She has taught me so many amazing things that I will keep with me for the rest of my life and without those teachings; I would not have been able to complete this very thesis. I urge anyone and everyone to take a class with Pamela because while she may be tough, she will push you to heights you did not think you could ever achieve.

### **Research Question:**

“Do television commercials play a role in reinforcing and socializing gender roles in our society?”

### **Abstract:**

The one social problem that has always captivated my attention as a student of Sociology is the problem of gender inequality. Now if you were to speak to most people, they may tell you that gender inequality is a mute point because our society has advanced and women have many of the same opportunities as men do. While this may be true, the idea that gender inequality is nonexistent in this day and age is a laughable idea. I chose to research this topic to show the general public that gender inequality still exists in many forms and we still have a long way to go in order to reach true equality of gender. It is my hypothesis that television commercials reinforce gender roles and socialize our society to accept and believe that men and women must perform and live in different and separate roles.

My methodology in undertaking this research project was a content analysis approach. First, I wanted to find one male centric channel and one female centric channel in order to see the difference in commercials between the two. I chose two cable television networks that had the highest viewership demographics for both men and women respectively. After researching, I discovered that Lifetime had on average a 75% female viewership overall (highest of all cable channels) and Spike TV had on average a 70% male viewership overall (highest outside of sports specific channels). After finding these two channels, I watched 3 hours of prime time

programming for each channel and recorded and analyzed every commercial that I saw. My findings allow me to conclude that there is a correlation between television commercials and the reinforcement of gender roles.

### **Introduction:**

As a student of Sociology, my undergraduate career has been filled with some remarkable discussions, debates, and concepts. All of these different facets of my Sociology education have shown me one major thing and that is that Sociology, at its core, is a study of social problems. Social problems plague our world and they endure the passage of time. What I mean by that is many of the social problems that exist in this world, have existed for hundreds of years and will continue to exist unless actions are taken. When I talk about social problems, there are almost too many to list. However, some of the major problems that Sociology strives to address are issues such as race equality, gender equality, poverty, homelessness, education, crime, and many more. The social problems that have always captivated my attention have been gender equality and gender roles.

Gender equality is the ideal that all men and women in any given society are treated equally and not treated differently based on their gender. Along the same lines of gender equality is the concept of gender roles. Gender roles are the roles that men and women are expected to play in a society. For hundreds of years here in America, men have been expected to play into the role of a provider. Along with being a provider, the ideal role a man, according to past perception, is someone who can do physical labor, fix things that are broken, work in high level positions, think critically, run businesses, and protect women and children. In that same respect, the role of women in the past has been perceived as someone who watches the children, cleans the house, does the gardening, and cooks dinner for their husband.

Gender roles have been a hot topic issue in America and have been for a very long time. It would seem that in today's society, women and men appear to be on equal ground and that past gender roles no longer exist. Women are working as CEOs, college professors, medical doctors, and engineers. These are all professions that women would not have been highly considered for even 50 years ago. Men in the same respect are permeating into careers like elementary school education, nursing, and even staying home with their children. This information would lead many to believe that gender roles in our society no longer exist. The common perception is since men now work in "feminine" careers and women work in "manly" careers, there is no longer any gender inequality. I could not disagree with this statement more and its ignorance is the purpose behind this research project.

Those who believe gender roles no longer exist in our society truly need to open their eyes and simply look around them. Gender inequality still exists and gender roles are still confining men and women. We as a society may think that we are passed this way of thinking, but it is my belief that we are still stuck in those dark ages. I think it is an amazing thing to see women working as CEOs and men staying home with their children. This clearly is a step in the right direction and shows that our society is willing to change and is on the precipice of change. However, we are not there yet and it is painful to think that some people believe we are. If our society as a whole believes we have achieved equality then that becomes frightening for many reasons. The main reason is because if our society believes we are truly equal, then they will become complacent and stop striving for true equality amongst genders. This cannot happen because then America will become stuck and will be unable to achieve true gender equality. Our society needs people to realize that women are still expected to fit specific roles, as are men, and even if women break through those roles and barriers, they are still not equal. It is common

knowledge that women are still paid less than men who are doing the same job. That is not equality, that is inequality.

The purpose of my research is to show the citizens of this society that they need to be aware of how gender roles still influence them and how they prevent true gender equality. I want people to walk away from this paper understanding that work still needs to be done and it is our duty to break down these gender roles and the disparities that they create. To show people how gender roles still exist, I want to direct them to an aspect of their lives that many people love, but also underestimate its influence and power. That aspect is television. Almost everyone loves television and has a favorite show or shows that they tune into every single week. Whether it is a sports game, a comedy, a drama, or a television movie, television gets millions of viewers for every program that airs and these programs spur conversation, thoughts, and fandom. People often disagree on what is the best show on television, but there is one thing that all television viewers agree on and that is that television commercials are extremely inconvenient.

Television commercials are the bane of many television viewers existence. They interrupt their favorite shows, they last for what seems like an eternity, and they never go away. Due to the public's perception of commercials, many people don't realize the true power that commercials possess. Many believe that commercials only exist to help sell a product, a company, a service, or promote a new show or movie. While all of that is accurate, in my opinion commercials do so much more. It is my hypothesis that commercials contain a subtext that promotes and reinforces gender roles in our society. I believe if one truly analyzes a commercial they will see that commercials are essentially still showing men and women playing specific roles in our society. If my hypothesis is true and television commercials do in fact reinforce gender roles, then we are dealing with a very powerful and scary force. Millions of



people consume television on a daily basis here in America. Children and adults alike have their favorite shows and tune in and if they are watching a show, then they are clearly watching commercials. If these commercials reinforce gender roles then they are in turn instilling these gender roles in the minds of our adults and children. This could lead to the socialization of our children to fit into these gender roles and could also lead to our adults reinforcing these gender roles in their children.

It is not only my hypothesis that commercials and electronic media reinforce gender roles in our society. It is also my hypothesis that the gender roles that these commercials are reinforcing are the archaic ideals that our society has been trying to overcome such as women being homemakers and men being providers. What I mean by this is that these commercials will still see women as homemakers and men as providers. I believe my hypotheses will be proven true by my research and if so, our society will have a lot of work to do if we ever want to truly achieve gender equality.

### **Literature Review:**

Before starting my own research, I first want to begin by looking back and reflecting on similar projects. By doing this, I want to learn from these past research studies in hopes of improving my own study. The first study I chose to examine was entitled “From Ally Mcbeal to Sábado Gigante: Contributions of Television Viewing to the Gender Role Attitudes of Latino Adolescents” by Rocio Rivadeneyra and L. Monique Ward. This study takes an in-depth look at the relationship between Latino teenagers and their attitudes towards gender roles based on their television viewing habits (Rivadeneyra & Ward, 2005). This study is strikingly similar to my own as it looks to investigate the correlation between gender roles and television viewing. In this

study, Rivadeneyra and Ward chose to survey 186 Latino or Latina students in an urban area in Los Angeles County (Rivadeneyra & Ward, 2005). The population of the high school in which the surveys were distributed was 80% Latino, of which the majority were Mexican (Rivadeneyra & Ward, 2005). Another interesting number regarding their study is that 56% of the students surveyed were female (Rivadeneyra & Ward, 2005).

The results of their survey were very interesting as they found that on average these teenagers were viewing around 3.75 hours per day (Rivadeneyra & Ward, 2005). This is mostly attributed to these teens watching primetime programming which typically lasts for 3 hours plus. I was happy to see that these teenagers averaged 3 plus hours of television viewing because in my study I will be watching around 3 hours of television per channel in the primetime hours. I chose to do this because primetime gets the most viewership and that is an assertion backed up the results of this study. Moving on with this study, Rivadeneyra and Ward found that the female teenagers who watched more television and perceived those television programs as realistic had a very high correlation towards accepting traditional female gender roles (Rivadeneyra & Ward, 2005).

These findings are extremely significant as it shows that gender roles portrayed on television can affect the viewer's perception of gender roles and can reinforce them, which is what my study is mostly trying to prove. However, my study is different in that I will not be using survey research and I will not be focusing on a particular race or ethnicity. I only want to look at gender roles and I don't want to also bring race or ethnicity into the equation. Instead of survey research, I will be doing content analysis of commercials because I simply want to look at what these commercials are saying. However, my study does have future implications for further research by creating a survey and doing something similar to this study. Of course the major

difference between my study and this one is that I will be examining television commercials, while this study by Rivadeneyra and Ward is focused on the actual television program.

A second study I reviewed was “Gender Role Portrayal Analysis of Children's Television Programming in Japan” by David R. Rolandelli. Just as in the study by Rivadeneyra and Ward, Rolandelli’s study focuses on analyzing actual television programs rather than the commercials. Rolandelli, in his study, states that television viewing is very popular in Japan among children and he wants to know what effect this television viewing has on these children’s perception and values pertaining to gender roles (Rolandelli, 1991). To answer this question, Rolandelli analyzed 279 characters from a select sample of Japanese children shows (Rolandelli, 1991). The results of this character analysis by Rolandelli resulted in some extremely fascinating findings. Rolandelli found that there was a big difference between the portrayal of male and female characters on these television shows (Rolandelli, 1991). Males were portrayed more often than females in professional occupations (Rolandelli, 1991). The attributes of men and women on these shows is described by Rolandelli as “Attributes descriptive of females were characteristic of relatively weak, younger, less mature individuals, while attributes descriptive of males were associated with powerful, older, likeable, mature persons”.

These results show that gender roles are being portrayed on television and television is one of the most consumed forms of media, especially by children. If television does in fact portray gender roles such as these than that can be extremely detrimental towards gender equality. This is because these children are essentially being socialized by television to abide and accept these gender roles that they see on television and that can really prevent them from thinking in a way that would promote gender equality. Despite this study taking place in Japan, I believe shows in America would show extremely similar results. Also, even though Rolandelli

was observing television shows, I expect to find similar attributes and gender role support in my study when I observe commercials.

The next study found is in direct line with my study and it is “Is advertising a barrier to male movement toward gender change?” by James Gentry and Robert Harrison. This study is strikingly similar to mine in that Gentry and Harrison analyzed commercials specifically to look at how they promote gender roles in viewers (Gentry & Harrison, 2010). That is exactly what I want to do with my study as I want to see what impact television commercials have in reinforcing gender roles. Gentry and Harrison also used content analysis for their data retrieval by analyzing commercials directly, which is exactly the strategy that I will be taking in my study (Gentry & Harrison, 2010). A big difference between this study and mine however, is that Gentry and Harrison focused on the male side of this issue, while I want to focus on both genders equally.

The results found by Gentry and Harrison were astounding and were right in line with what I would have expected in my study. Gentry and Harrison found that commercials have not become more gender neutral (Gentry & Harrison, 2010). They found that men were also still being portrayed in the typical masculine perspective and nothing has truly changed (Gentry & Harrison, 2010). I find these results to be exactly what I expected and what I expect to see in my study. Basically what this study is saying is that the gender roles of our past are still not gone and they still permeate the television world, especially the commercials. However, when I perform my study, I will focus on both genders rather than on one particular side so that I can get a fuller picture.

The fourth study I chose to read in preparation for my research was entitled “Are Television Commercials Still Achievement Scripts for Women?” and it was written by Janice D.

Yoder, Jessica Christopher, and Jeffrey D. Holmes. This study was different from my study in that they chose to analyze the impact of sexist advertising on television rather than simply analyze the commercials themselves (Yoder, Christopher & Holmes, 2008). I find this to be extremely fascinating research and in my opinion it is the next logical step to take my research. I think my research is important because it sets out to prove that commercials do in fact reinforce gender roles. However, if my research produces positive results, it would be interesting to take it further and see what impact that has on viewers, much like this study did. This study by Yoder et al. set out to find if women and men's aspirations were diminished if they viewed commercials that were either sexist or clearly portrayed specific gender roles. However, they were unable to find a major correlation, but they still believe that women and men are affected by the media and its images (Yoder, Christopher & Holmes, 2008). I agree with that final statement and although their results weren't completely conclusive, I believe Yoder et al. were on the right track and I would love to look more into research focusing on the impact of television commercials.

The final study I chose to review was entitled "Consuming Images: How Television Commercials that Elicit Stereotype Threat Can Restrain Women Academically and Professionally" and it was written by Paul G. Davies, Steven J. Spencer, Diane M. Quinn, and Rebecca Gerhardstein. In this study, Davies et al. set out to see what effect stereotypical commercials could have on the aspirations and abilities of women. Of all the studies I reviewed before starting my own research, this one by Davies et al. was the most astounding. This study focuses on the impact that commercials can have on women. While it is different than my study, I believe it is very telling and proves the point that I am trying to prove in my study which is that commercials reinforce gender roles. The hypothesis is that women working in a quantitative field

(math) risk being personally reduced if subjected to negative stereotypes that portray women as unable to do math as well as men (Davies, Spencer, Quinn & Gerhardstein, 2002).

To test their hypothesis, Davies et al. showed the sexist commercials to women and then gave them a subsequent math test (Davies, Spencer, Quinn & Gerhardstein, 2002). According to the study, women who believed the commercials were self-relevant underperformed on the math test (Davies, Spencer, Quinn & Gerhardstein, 2002). The researchers also gave a different set of women an aptitude test after they viewed these sexist commercials and these commercials caused many of these women to lose confidence in their abilities and even skip the math portion of the test (Davies, Spencer, Quinn & Gerhardstein, 2002). The fact that these commercials had such a profound impact on these women shows the power that television commercials possess and how they can truly reinforce gender roles.

### **Methodology:**

To show that television commercials reinforce gender roles, I had to structure my research in a way that allowed me to analyze as many commercials as possible. To do this I took a content analysis approach to my research. Through content analysis, I will analyze different television commercials to understand what exactly the commercial is attempting to promote and to whom that commercial is aimed towards. By doing this I will be able to see what products and services are being advertised towards women and what is being advertised towards men. However, analyzing these commercials is not just about looking at what is being advertised to the different genders. It is also about seeing how men and women are being portrayed in the commercials. With this information I can then see how men and women are perceived in our society. If men are being advertised with things like cars and tools, then clearly their role is still

perceived as a fixer and problem solver. In the same respect, if women are being portrayed in commercials as cleaning or taking care of children, then clearly their role is still seen as a homemaker.

Now that I know exactly what I want to do in my research, which is analyzing television commercials, I now have to go about structuring that research and bringing it to fruition. To do this, I know I want to have a big enough sample size of commercials to draw conclusions from. I want around 200 commercials because I believe it is a manageable number to obtain and also a decent sample size to draw conclusions from. To obtain this number of commercials, I would need to watch a good amount of hours of television. I have decided to analyze 6-7 hours of television in order to collect the large sample of commercials I need. I have settled on the number of 6-7 hours of programming because I want to watch primetime television for these commercials. Typically prime time programming on the east coast is 8 pm to 11 pm. So if I were to watch two nights of primetime programming that would give me the 6-7 hours of commercials that I want for my sample data. The reason for wanting primetime television for this project is because primetime television is where the newest and best shows air on each television network. Because of that, primetime television gets the most viewers and I want to see what these networks are advertising when they have the most viewership, since advertising companies covet high viewers.

After determining that I will be watching primetime programming for two nights, I also want to watch a different network on each night. I want one network to be a male-oriented network and the second network to be a female-oriented network. I am organizing my research like this because it would give me two different perspectives on what exactly is being advertised on two different networks. By observing a female-oriented network, it gives me a direct look into

what commercials are intended to be seen by females. The same goes for the male-oriented network because I would be able to see exactly what commercials are directed towards men. This is a perfect way to see if gender roles are truly being reinforced by commercials because if the female-oriented network has commercials portraying women as homemakers, then clearly the advertisers still have gender roles in mind. Knowing that I need to observe a male and female channel, the next question became which ones?

To determine which networks I wanted to observe, I decided to look up demographic information on each major cable network. The network demographic information was broken down into many categories including gender based on male and female viewership percentages. With this information I decided to choose the highest viewed channel by men and the highest viewed channel by women as my two subjects. However, I decided to exclude sports channels from my research because even though they have a high male viewership, their commercials mostly comprise of sports products and previews of future sports games. With that in mind, I chose Spike TV as my male-oriented channel to observe. Spike TV has a 70% base of male viewership, which is the highest among cable networks ("Network demographics," 2014). For the female-oriented network, I chose Lifetime as my subject. Lifetime has an astonishing 75% female base audience, which is the highest among all cable networks ("Network demographics," 2014).

With all of this in mind, the structure and methods of my research are completely structured. I will be watching primetime television from 8-11pm on both Lifetime and Spike TV. I will record every commercial I see (included at the end as Appendix A) on each channel during that primetime period. I will do Lifetime on the first night and a separate night I will follow with watching Spike TV. After recording every single commercial over the 6-7 hour period, I will

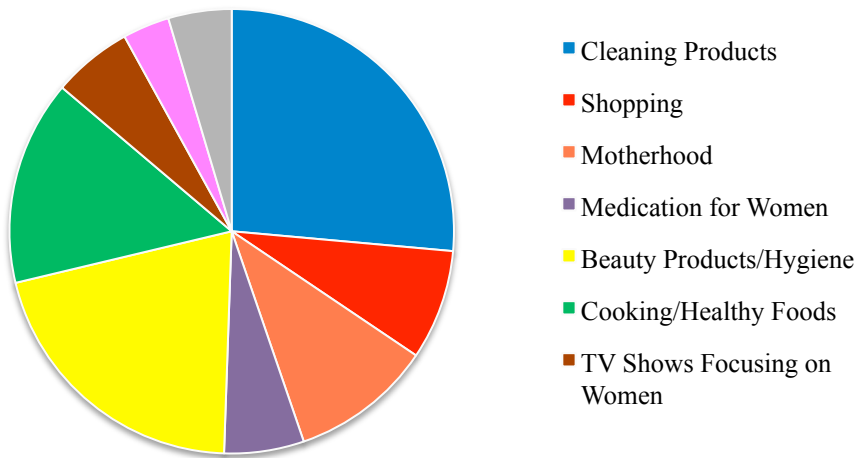


then analyze what products and services were advertised on the male-oriented channel versus the female-oriented channel. It is my belief that this methodology will provide me with the best sample of data to show the disparities between and men and women and how gender roles are being reinforced by television commercials.

### **Results and Findings;**

To show the research results from my content analysis, I will first begin with Lifetime and the commercials I observed during the primetime hours I watched the network. From 8pm to 10 pm I viewed a Lifetime movie entitled “Death Clique”. This movie centered around two teenage best friends who then become friends with a new girl in town. This new girl becomes obsessed with one of the friends and murders the other friend in order to have the aforementioned friend all to herself. After “Death Clique”, to round out the primetime hours I viewed “Hoarders” from 10pm to 11 pm. Hoarders of course being the documentary show focusing on hoarders cleaning up their homes and getting psychological help with their mental illness. I watched a total of 87 commercials during my viewing of Lifetime and the following charts and graphs show the breakdown of all the commercials organized into categories.

## Lifetime Commercial Breakdown



### Lifetime Commercial Breakdown

Cleaning Products	26%
Shopping	8%
Motherhood	10%
Medication for Women	6%
Beauty Products/Hygiene	21%
Cooking/Healthy Products	15%
TV Shows Focusing on Women	6%
Dating Websites	3%
Other	5%

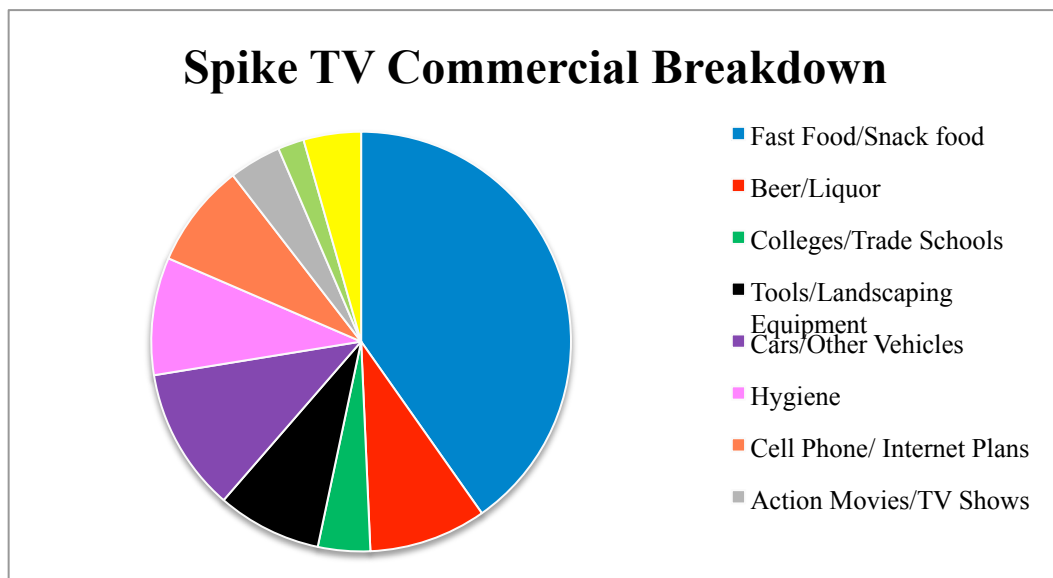
As the charts and graphs above show, there were a good amount of categories of commercials that I observed while watching Lifetime. I would like to go through the categories one by one and give a breakdown of exactly what I observed. The first category is cleaning products which were 26% of all the commercials shown on Lifetime. Included in this category were products such as Hoover vacuums, Shark mops, Gain laundry detergent, Tide laundry detergent, Mr. Clean magic erasers, garbage bags, and Cascade dish washer detergent. This was the largest category of commercials on Lifetime and all of the commercials featured women doing the cleaning around the house using these products.

Beauty products and hygiene products were the next largest category composing 21% of the total commercials on Lifetime. These commercials were mostly focused on items like acne cream, hair coloring, skin lotion, and make-up. All of these commercials featured women needing to look more beautiful and these products helping them with their “flaws”. The next highest category was cooking and healthy food products which equaled 15% of the total commercials seen on Lifetime. These commercials included two separate commercials for Maytag products. One being a dish washing ad and the other being an oven ad, both featuring a woman cleaning and cooking before and after a meal. All the food ads on this network were focused on women needing to be healthy and eating things like low-fat Yoplait yogurt and granola. The next highest number for commercials on Lifetime was the category of motherhood which had 10%. These commercials featured products like diapers, Gerber’s food products for infants, and commercials featuring a mother doing things with or for her children.

Following these categories were shopping commercials which composed 8% of all the commercials. These commercials were mostly from department stores such as JC Penny and Macy’s. They were focused on moms running around and shopping because there was a big sale event. Tying for the next spot is medication for women and TV shows featuring women, which were both at 6%. These were simply just medications needed for women who have medical issues pertaining to most women and the shows were all Lifetime original series featuring a strong female cast, with little to no men. Finally, the last category to address is dating websites which represented 3% of all commercials viewed. These commercials focused on women wanting a man and being really desperate. This then led to a friend recommending online dating and how if they want to get married and find a guy then online was the best way. The “other”

category was at 5% and was mostly comprised of commercials that did not really fit into a category such as pet products and even a commercial for a pen.

After watching Lifetime for those 3 hours and observing those commercials, I then moved on to Spike TV. I chose to watch Spike TV on a another night for the same hours of primetime television which were from 8-11pm. On the night that I viewed Spike TV, they were showing two movies back to back one being “Get him to the Greek” and the other being “X-men”. “Get him to the Greek” being a comedy featuring two male leads about a drug addicted and drunken rock star and his manager. The second movie, “X-men”, is a superhero film featuring a team of mutants with superpowers fighting evil. In order to make my viewing of Spike TV equal to my viewing hours of Lifetime, I watched the full 2.5 hours of “Get him to the Greek” from 8pm- 10:30pm. Then I only watched 30 minutes of “X-men” in order to keep it at an even number of 3 hours of primetime viewing. On Spike TV I observed a total of 90 television commercials in the three hours of television watching. The following charts and graphs show all of the different categories that each commercial fit in to and the percentage breakdown of each category.



### Spike TV Commercial Breakdown

Fast Food/Snack Food	40%
Beer/Liquor	9%
Colleges/Trade Schools	4%
Tools/Landscaping Equipment	8%
Cars/Other Vehicles	11%
Hygiene	9%
Cell Phone/Internet Plans	8%
Action Movies/TV Shows	4%
Male Enhancement Pills	2%
Other	4%

There were many different categories of commercials that I observed in the 3 hours I watched Spike TV programming and, right in line with my hypotheses, the commercials were completely different from those seen on Lifetime. The main category of commercials seen on Spike TV was fast food and snack food, which totaled 40% of all commercials seen. These commercials included restaurants like Arby's, Wendy's, Burger King, Sonic, Dominoes, and Pizza Hut. The snack food commercials seen were for products like Reese's, Kit-Kats, Jolly Ranchers, and Doritos. Following fast food and snack food, the next highest category was commercials for cars and other vehicles at 11%. These commercials included products like Kia cars, State Farm car insurance, websites for finding cars, motorcycles, and even Firestone tires.

The next category with the highest percentage of commercials was tied between beer/liquor and hygiene at 9%. The beer/liquor commercials were for products like Bud Light, Bacardi, and Smirnoff vodka. The hygiene commercials were all mostly for shaving and one add for a "manly" soap that was not meant for women because it was for rugged and smelly men. Following those set of categories was another tie between tools/landscaping equipment and cell phone/internet plans which both totaled 8%. The cell phone/internet plan commercials all featured a dad of a family trying to provide his family with the best deal on a plan from

companies like Verizon and Metro PCS. The tools /landscaping equipment category included commercials for products like Craftsman tools and also Craftsman lawn mowers and tractors.

Following those categories, there was a three way tie at 4% between colleges/trade schools, action movies/TV shows, and other. The colleges and trade school commercials were for schools like ITT tech, car mechanic schools, and maritime mechanic schools. The action movie and TV show commercials all featured actions stars and crazy stunts and explosions, which may appeal to a young male demographic. The “other” category was comprised of commercials that really did not fit into any of the categories. One main commercial in the “other” category that intrigued me was an ad for InventHelp. This commercial urged inventors to call in with their inventions and possibly make millions off of their idea. The commercials then reviewed a bunch of male inventors that have called them in the past who are now successful. The last category of commercials I observed was a set of commercials for male enhancement pills which totaled 2% of the total commercials.

### **Discussion:**

I will begin the discussion of my research findings by first discussing what I observed on the Spike TV network. The top three categories of commercials seen on this network were fast food/snack food, cars/vehicles, and beer/liquor. These top three categories are very telling in that men are expected to want to eat, drive awesome cars, and drink as much alcohol as possible. These are things that, in our society, are often seen as “manly”. If you are a true man in this society, it is expected that you know a lot about cars, you like drinking a lot of beer, and you love to eat. These are all things in our society that are expected out of men and these

commercials reinforce that perception. These commercials are reassuring men who watch Spike TV that they should be interested in cars and alcohol to be a real man.

One interesting observation I would like to explore was something I saw in a car insurance commercial. In this commercial, a man is shown shopping for the “bare essentials” in a grocery store. This is clearly playing into the gender role of a man needing to be “manly” and this commercial suggest that being manly is being able to survive on the bare minimum. While that in and of itself is an interesting commentary on the role of men, I was more interested in what was happening in the background of the commercial. In the background a white mother was shown shopping with her kids and she was buying diapers in bulk. So while the man is buying the bare essentials, a woman in the background is shown shopping with kids for a bunch of diapers. To me this is a commercial that perfectly represents the terrible gender roles that still exist in our society that need to be overcome. A woman is expected to shop for her children and worry about them, while the man must worry about himself and his status as a “manly” man.

Two categories I would like to talk more in depth about are tools/landscaping equipment and colleges/trade schools. The fact that 8% of the commercials seen on Spike TV were for Craftsman tools and Craftsman lawn mowers was compelling. This completely reinforces the gender role that men are supposed to be these “handymen” who can fix all of the problems around the house. Every man in our society should be able to use a hammer and that has long been a gender role that men have been expected to fit in to. With all of these commercials featuring white men using the tools, it shows that this gender role is still active in our society.

While I find the tool commercials to be fascinating, I am even more intrigued by the college commercials seen on Spike TV. Why is it that there were a bunch of commercials focused on getting a college level education or trade education shown on Spike TV but none on

Lifetime? I think this is a really important issue to address because it is very telling on the current state of gender roles in our society. Men are expected to get an education and get high paying jobs in order to provide for their families. That has always been a gender role of men that has never truly been applied to women and that is exemplified here. The fact that Spike TV has a 70% male audience shows that these colleges are trying to reach out to men. ITT Technical Institute and Universal Technical Institute are both schools that offer a great technical education including computer work and even car mechanical repair. None of these commercials aired on Lifetime and it shows that clearly our society still doesn't place an emphasis on women getting an education. This suggests that a woman is still expected to fulfill the role of being a wife and homemaker, while the man still is expected to get an education and a job.

There are two more subjects I would like to discuss in terms of commercials I observed on Spike TV. The first is on Spike TV, there was one particular commercial focusing on selling an electronic razor. In this commercial, a man is depicted shaving after a shower and practicing his pick up lines on women in the mirror. After this practicing in the mirror, the commercial ends with the man saying that women will definitely have sex with him. This commercial aired 3 times over the three hours I was watching Spike TV. This commercial reinforces the idea that men should be sex driven womanizers. It socializes young males to think in this manner and believe that offensive pick up lines and looking good are the ways in which men will be able to have sex with women. It also expresses that being "manly" is all about focusing on vanity, having sex with women, and giving out really bad pick-up lines.

I also would like to discuss the Invent Help advertisement that aired on Spike TV. This ad, like I mentioned above, looks to entice inventors to send in their idea in hopes of making money off of them. Every inventor shown in the ad was a male. This ad did not air on Lifetime



and to me it shows that men are still perceived as the thinkers in our society. The fact that no women were shown in this commercial was truly concerning because to a viewer it shows that women aren't considered as inventors. If our society was truly equal then men and women would both be considered to have the ability to invent, but by the looks of this commercial, it would appear as if only men have that ability. This commercial single handedly reinforces the gender role that men are the workers and the thinkers and that women have no place in that world just like they had no place in that commercial.

Moving on from Spike TV, I would now like to discuss the many things that I observed while watching Lifetime. The top three categories of commercials shown on Lifetime were for cleaning products, beauty products, and cooking products/healthy foods. Just like with Spike TV, Lifetime's top three commercial categories are very telling and show just how accurate my hypotheses are. The gender roles of women, that need to be changed, have always been that they must clean the home, look after the kids, and cook for their husbands. These top three categories play completely into those gender roles and it's terrible.

All the cleaning products advertised were for laundry detergent, dish washing detergent, dishwashers, vacuums, and mops. Also, all of these commercials featured a woman performing these cleaning duties around the home, usually cleaning up after their messy children. What this show is that the gender role of women is to still be cleaners and take care of the home. Perhaps the most significant observation I made while watching Lifetime was within the first hour of watching Lifetime, the same Hoover vacuum commercial aired 3 times. Clearly advertising vacuums to women was a priority and it shows how women are perceived in our society.

The beauty product commercials all featured women who had physical flaws and how they needed to fix them and look more beautiful. This included acne problems, discolored and

nasty hair, and dry skin. All these commercials focused on fixing these problems and after using the products, the women were portrayed as being happy and often being caressed by a man. This reinforces the gender role of women not only needing to look beautiful, but needing to look beautiful in order to obtain a man. These beauty product commercials are basically saying that a woman cannot be happy until they look beautiful and get a relationship.

The third highest category was cooking/healthy food products and that led me to some very interesting observations. For one, the fact that ovens were being advertised to women shows that once again, our society sees women as the ones who need to cook for their families. However, the more important observation comes from how all of the food products seen on Lifetime were healthy. They showed women wanting to lose weight and how eating low-fat yogurt and granola would help that process and make them more beautiful. This is completely opposite from Spike TV where 40% of the commercials were for junk food and fast food. So according to these commercials, it is socially acceptable for men to eat whatever they want, but it is the role of the woman to be health conscious and watch their weight. That is a horrible ideal to spread, but it is something that these commercials are reinforcing and putting out into the general public who view these commercials.

Some other key observations I would like to discuss regarding Lifetime commercials include the motherhood commercials and the dating website commercials. The motherhood commercials all featured a mother feeding and changing the diapers of their children. The father was not shown and the products, like diapers and food, were all being advertised to a mother rather than a father. This exemplifies how it is still the gender role of the woman to look after the children and that still has clearly not changed. The dating website commercials showed women seeking a husband to complete their lives. This shows that the gender role of a woman is that

they must constantly be seeking a relationship in order to fulfill their life. There were no commercials seen on Lifetime depicting a strong, independent woman. Rather, these commercials depict women as men-dependent, mothers, and as women obsessed with their own vanity and weight.

### **Conclusion:**

The set of commercials that I observed and analyzed from both Lifetime and Spike TV were extremely intriguing and telling. With the information I have collected from these two networks, I believe I have a sufficient amount of evidence to show that my hypotheses are accurate. My hypotheses of course being that commercials and electronic media do in fact reinforce gender roles in our society and that these gender roles are in line with women being mothers and homemakers and men being providers and handymen. The commercials seen on both Lifetime and Spike TV truly have no common ties. Each channel has completely separate categories of commercials that aired on their channels on primetime. Not only are the commercials completely separate for these two channels, but Spike TV's commercials completely reinforce the typical male gender role in our society and Lifetime's commercials completely reinforce the typical, archaic gender roles of women in our society. The fact that I received these results spurred mixed feeling within me. For one, I was thrilled to see that my hypotheses were accurate. However, it pains me to see just how accurate my hypotheses were. This truly shows me that our society has a lot of growing left to do because gender roles clearly still exist and women and men are not equal in our society, despite what many may say.

How can anyone say that gender equality has been obtained in society after looking at this research? According to these commercials and this research, women are still expected to get

a husband, clean the house, watch the kids, look beautiful, and watch their weight. On the flipside, men are still expected to go to school, get a good job, provide for their families, be handy with tools, be knowledgeable of cars, and eat whatever they want. This is astonishing because many of these are the same gender roles our society has had since its inception. Nothing has truly changed, in yet there are people in our society who actually believe that men and women are equal. This is simply not true and now I have evidence to back my case up. Women and men are not equal in our society. While women may have permeated the working world and are making advancements, our society still clearly doesn't consider them equal to men and it's shameful.

Television commercials seem like such an inconsequential form of media. They are a form of electronic media that everyone dislikes, but they are also a form of media that everyone consumes. That is where the inherent danger of electronic media and television commercials truly resides. Everyone sees these commercials and therefore, the messages they carry are seen by everyone in our society. Therefore, like my research shows, if these commercials are reinforcing these unequal gender roles amongst men and women, they are in fact reinforcing them to the whole television consuming society. This is very concerning because if these gender roles are still being reinforced and socialized to our society, then they are still being ingrained in the minds of our new generations. It will be harder to eliminate these thoughts from our society if they are still being advertised and spread through electronic media.

To truly achieve gender equality we need to eradicate these gender roles. We as a society should not confine our men and women into specific roles based on gender. We should be pushing for all members of our society to define their own roles and follow their own paths. If men want to care for a child then that's fine and if women want to be independent and work, then

that's fine too. While in America, we have the power to make these decisions; it is clearly not the norm as many still follow these old, unequal gender roles. Television commercials and other forms of media need to be aware of the impact they have on society. They need to advertise equally to all genders no matter the product. Tools and college education should be advertised towards women, just like vacuums and diapers should be advertised for men. Without this effort and change, gender equality will be hard, if not impossible to achieve.

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## **Appendix A: Commercial Analysis Data**

### **Lifetime Channel (75% female audience)**

#### **Program Watched: “Death Clique” (Movie), Running Time: 2 hours**

- Hoover floor mate deluxe vacuuming commercial featuring a blonde woman vacuuming her home (3)
- DSW shoe store commercial featuring young white girls kissing a young boy on the cheeks (teens) (2)
- Cheerios commercial aimed at buying healthy cereal for your children
- Palmers cocoa butter spray lotion featuring a black and white woman rubbing the lotion on themselves
- Older white woman suffering hot flashes: I-cool for menopause
- Macy’s commercial for a sale currently being advertised: commercial depicts a middle aged white woman running around shopping for a bunch of clothes and shoes due to the deal (female commercial voice)(2)
- Baileys chocolate coffee creamer featuring a beautiful white woman (4)
- Volkswagen featuring a white female salesperson and a white family of three with white daughter
- A lawsuit commercial on behalf of women injured from Yaz birth control pills
- Devious maids commercial about Hispanic woman maids who are dealing with persona issues (2)
- Middle aged white woman with acne who is a bridesmaid and insecure. Meets with white doctor and prescribed Aczone to make her look more beautiful. After Aczone, she is

depicted in a pink dress with hair done looking beautiful and confident (female narrated)(2)

- Alevé commercial featuring a man working in a car garage doing manual labor
- Panera bread commercial narrated by a woman about a woman named Katie who loves broccoli cheddar soup and says its healthy
- One a day vitamin commercial focused on a woman who needs to go to gym and get healthy and says the vitamins can help
- Rice Krispies commercial featuring a black mother and her two young sons making rice Krispy treats at home
- Shark steamer mop advertised. Narrated by woman. Shows white mother who has to clean up after her messy family including a husband who carelessly drops food on the floor
- Olay commercial featuring a white woman getting married to a white male, younger looking skin because your best is beautiful (narrated by female)
- Yoplait Greek yogurt featuring multicultural woman eating it and saying how yummy and healthy it is
- Eharmony.com commercials about a young blonde white girl talking about how you can find hot babes on the website because she heard her grandfather say that
- Nature valley breakfast biscuits commercials featuring a woman hiking
- Children's Allegra commercial featuring mothers playing with their kids
- Dance show about young girls in competitive dance competitions (bring it)
- Nature path granola about young women needing a healthy breakfast
- Paper mate Ink joy commercial narrated by female that focuses on beautiful and smooth writing (2)
- Applebee's commercial featuring young blonde white female chef
- Humira commercial featuring a middle aged white woman talking about her skin problems and how Humira clears them up
- Blue diamond almond milk commercial narrated by female talking about how healthy the milk is
- Penelope Cruz commercial about Nespresso
- Another shark product, this time a vacuum version showing women cleaning the house
- JC Penny sale commercial featuring women shopping (2)
- Drop dead diva commercial (TV show)
- Gain laundry detergent commercial featuring middle aged white woman doing laundry, while man lies in newly washed sheets in bed
- Match.com commercial focusing on white woman named Nikki looking for the right man
- Crest mouth wash featuring middle aged white woman using the product
- Black mother talking about her baby son eating Gerber Graduates food
- Kelloggs cereal commercial focusing on being healthy for kids
- Mr. Clean magic easer commercial
- Monistat pill commercial to cure yeast infection
- Yoplait yogurt commercials focusing on the fruit and healthiness (narrated by woman)
- Megared heart healthy medicine targeting woman, shows a woman running
- Gerber graduates puffs commercial

- Olay face moisturizer focusing on blonde woman using it to look more beautiful and have better skin
- Clarin's skin lotion commercial focusing on no wrinkles and better skin (narrated by woman)

**Program Watched: "Hoarders", Running Time: 1 hour**

- Maytag dish washing machine commercial featuring black woman doing dishes in her home
- Tidy cats cat litter showing white middle aged woman shopping at the grocery store (2)
- Mint-x garbage bag commercial (2)
- Febreze air freshener commercial (2)
- Gain laundry detergent commercial showing a white woman doing laundry
- Women razor commercial
- Secret deodorant commercial
- Kelly Ripa Colgate mouthwash commercial
- Eharmony.com commercial showing a blonde white woman making out with a young white male
- Devious maids commercial sponsored by JC Penny
- JC Penny commercial showing mothers and daughters shopping for clothes together for a sale
- Clairol age defy hair coloring solution focusing on looking younger with better hair
- Cascade laundry detergent commercial showing wives hosting a dinner party and using it to wash dishes (2)
- Charmin ultra strong toilet paper commercial narrated by woman (2)
- Olay makeup remover commercial
- Crest 3d white strips showing young girls trying to get whiter more beautiful teeth (2)
- Herbal essence naked shampoo showing young woman using it. Advertises how it looks better and smells better than other competitors
- Pampers commercials showing mother changing her baby
- Tide pods laundry detergent commercial narrated by woman
- Degree deodorant commercial showing woman doing physical activities and needing it
- Pantene shampoo commercial advertising young woman using it for healthy more beautiful hair
- Tide laundry detergent commercial showing mothers doing laundry
- Disney multi vitamins commercials showing mothers giving them to their kids
- Mr. Clean magic eraser commercial
- Maytag oven commercial depicting a white woman cooking a turkey and veggies
- Shark vacuum featuring multicultural woman vacuuming their homes
- Pandora bracelet commercial urging people to buy them as gifts for mother's day for your mom

**Spike Channel (70% male audience)**

**Program Watched: "Get Him to the Greek" (Movie), Running Time: 2.5 hours**



- Arby's commercial featuring men talking about how good the brisket is at the restaurant
- Kit Kat commercial (4)
- Orbit commercial about a manly coffee cup talking about making out with a woman
- McDonalds dollar menu commercial
- Samuel Adams summer ale commercial
- Spiderman 2 commercial
- Jolly Rancher candy commercial
- Dominos commercial about pizza and boneless wings deal
- Craftsman tools commercial featuring a white man doing different jobs requiring tools (3)
- Men playing baseball: Kia optima commercial
- Pizza hut commercial
- Hershey drops commercial
- State farm car insurance commercial depicting a white man in a store buying the bare essentials (manly?) In the background there is a middle aged white woman buying diapers in bulk! (2)
- Bacardi alcohol commercial showing a white man dressed in a suit partying at a bar
- Doritos commercials with a grown man and young boy
- Burger king commercials featuring a males playing basketball together
- Ice breakers mint commercial featuring a male using one before hitting on a girl
- Schick Hydro razor commercial
- Dominos commercial featuring a bunch of male upper management members and chefs
- Sonic commercial
- Dove men care soap commercial featuring college basketball coach Frank Vogel
- AT&T commercial featuring a man hitting on a woman
- Reese's commercial (6)
- Wendy's commercial featuring a man eating well on the dollar menu
- Ageless male free testosterone giveaway commercial in order to have bigger muscles and a bigger sexual drive (2)
- Hercules movie commercial featuring heavy action manly scenes
- Pizza hut commercials featuring mens softball teams (2)
- Wendy's commercial (3)
- Fram oil change commercial featuring a man changing the oil on his car
- Craftsman.com commercial showing lawn mowers and other products advertised to handy men (2)
- Sonic commercial showing two men talking about their psycho ex girlfriends (4)
- Craftsman tractor commercial featuring a bunch of white men mowing their lawns (2)  
woman carrying in her groceries sees the man and thinks he's hot and drops the bag
- Firestone tires showing a man's stuff being run over by his "crazy" girlfriend
- Gillette razor commercial featuring white male
- Dodge Ram pickup truck showing a bunch of men working on trucks in a car garage and how the pickup is great for manual labor and towing
- Invent help ad showing how many men have submitted their inventions and made money
- Cougarlife.com advertising for older woman to go out with young guys

- HTC phone ad featuring Gary Oldman
- Dial for men soap talking about after doing a day of manly things, it's the only thing that will get the smell off (2)
- Shock top beer commercial featuring men in the wilderness drinking it together
- MLB the show video game commercial
- Verizon everything cell phone plan commercial (4)
- Smirnoff vodka commercial about a woman being ditzy and a man mocking her (2)
- Victory motorcycle commercial about a man riding a motorcycle in a leather jacket
- AutoTrader.com commercial about a man looking for a deal on a new car
- Smirnoff vodka commercial about a man preparing a good drink for his date
- Phillips electronic razor commercial featuring a white male practicing pick up lines in the mirror while shaving. End with "I would f#@% me!" (3)
- Snickers commercial featuring a bunch of male friends hanging out
- Bud light commercial about a man playing ping pong with Arnold Schwarzenegger
- Starburst commercial featuring two men construction workers
- Smirnoff commercial featuring a white man who knows a lot about alcohol and knows more than his girlfriend

**Program Watched: "X-Men" (Movie), Running Time: 30 minutes**

- Metro PCS commercial featuring a pregnant woman being driven to hospital by husband
- Creditkarma.com commercial featuring two women who have bad credit needing to look at their credit scores
- ITT tech commercial featuring a lot of men studying and learning on computers (2)
- Verizon FIOS commercial featuring a family with the mom doing dishes in the background while the father handles the bills for Verizon
- UFC commercial
- Iron Man movie commercial
- ATV commercial showing a man riding an ATV through the forest
- Universal Technical Institute showing a male instructor trying to recruit people to come learn how to fix cars
- Wheat thins commercial featuring three male cops chasing down a man who is eating wheat thins
- TRUEcar.com commercial
- Marine Mechanics institute commercial showing men working on boats and trying to recruit people to enroll in classes
- Arby's commercial
- Progressive commercial showing a man in a woodshop working with tools