

# **Reshaping the Man in the Mirror:**

## *The effects of challenging stereotypical male portrayals in advertising*

### **Abstract**

Norm-breaking gender portrayals in advertising is a relatively new phenomenon. So far, researchers have mainly focused on the implications of ads that challenge female gender role and body stereotypes; a concept known as femvertising, that has been shown to have positive effects on both brands and consumers. This paper aims to examine if similar effects can be achieved through the use of norm-breaking male portrayals in advertising, introducing the theoretical concept *menvertising*.

A quantitative, questionnaire-based experiment was conducted with 800 respondents across Sweden. The control group was exposed to a print advertisement featuring a traditional and stereotypical portrayal of men commonly seen in ads, whereas the experimental group was exposed to an advertisement that challenged the stereotypical portrayals of men in advertising. The measured parameters were *ad attitude*, *brand liking*, *advertising reactance* and *third-person perception*.

The study's results imply that brands can benefit from using non-stereotypical portrayals of men in advertising, since menvertising ads were shown to generate positive ad attitude and brand liking. Additionally, the effect on female consumers was found to be substantially larger than for male consumers. The findings suggest that the menvertising-effects on ad attitude and brand liking could partly be explained by the Third-Person Effect and the theory of Advertising reactance.

### **Keywords**

Male portrayals, norm-breaking ads, menvertising, femvertising, equality, idealized body images, gender role stereotypes, firm-level effects, brand liking, ad attitude, third-person effect, advertising reactance.

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## Definitions

**Advertisement:** In this thesis, advertisement refers to a paid print announcement used by firms for commercial purposes; to market their products or services, or as a call for attention. The abbreviation “ad” is frequently used within academia, as well as in this paper.

**Advertising attitude:** The experienced level of favourability toward an ad at a specific occasion of exposure. (Commonly referred to as *ad attitude*.)

**Advertising reactance:** This theory has been used to explain situations where consumers react negatively to advertising imagery or communication methods which they perceive to limit their freedom of choice.

**Brand liking:** A consumer’s entire evaluation of a specific brand and all associations related to it.

**Femvertising:** The empowerment of females in advertising through challenging norms and ideals. (Rosengren, Åkestam & Dahlén, 2016).

**Gender roles:** A set of social values and conceptions based on an individual’s sex or sexuality.

**Menvertising** (definition proposed by the authors): Advertising that challenge male body ideals and masculine gender role stereotypes.

**Norms:** a situation or type of behaviour that is expected and considered to be typical and normal.

**Third-Person Perception (TPP):** A phenomenon where people are inclined to think that advertising influences other people to a larger extent than themselves.

**Third-Person-Effect (TPE):** The effect of TPP on behavior and beliefs.

# 1. Introduction

Once upon a time in Advertising-land, ads were like distorted mirrors. The men and women who lived there did not see their true reflections in these mirrors, but unattainable ideals and gender role stereotypes. As time went by, the women in Advertising-land started questioning why their true reflections could not be seen in the mirrors. Some of the mirror makers began to create mirrors that reflected how the women actually appeared in front of them, and the historically distorted female reflection in advertising slowly started to straighten out. Suddenly, the dream of a “happily ever after” for the women in Advertising-land was no longer out of reach...

As with any fairy tale, a great one always has a great ending – but the one about Advertising-land leaves one major question lingering: What about the *men*?

Facing an increased interest from consumers toward advertising that challenges stereotypical portrayals, advertisers are currently “cashing in on feminism” (Davidson, 2015), and the trend does not seem to wane. The stereotypical female roles that used to dominate the advertising scene have little by little begun to dissolve, in favor for more progressive portrayals and somewhat more realistic body representations (Gentry & Harrison, 2010), a phenomenon referred to as *femvertising*. Femvertising-ads still represent a small fraction of total ads in the marketplace, but several highly successful campaigns have shown that the use of it often is positive for brands, and the practical evidence has also found academic support (e.g. Rosengren, Åkestam & Dahlén, 2016).

With that in mind, the mirror-makers in Advertising-land cannot afford to overlook half of the population anymore: it is about time to discover what the effects of challenging the male stereotypes in advertising could be. It is about time to introduce the concept of *menvertising*.

## 1.1 Background

This section aims to give a thorough understanding of the role that gender portrayals have previously played in advertising and the shift that the relationship is currently undergoing, and why it is relevant to marketers. The current knowledge in academia and practical evidence from the marketing industry lead to a definition of the problem area and the research questions of this thesis.

### 1.1.1 Advertising mirroring norms

Advertising has historically reflected rather than challenged the social norms and stereotypes that exist in society. This marketing phenomenon is called *mirroring* (Eisend, 2010). Stereotypes are common in advertising, seen as oversimplified images of individuals or items (Oxford Dictionary, 2016). Historically, advertisers have used stereotypes to increase sales since it is believed that they can create a need in the consumers’ minds to fulfill the idealized norm; and consumption becomes the means of reaching that state (Pollay, 1986). However, as a result of oversimplifying individuals, social groups can be evaluated by others in a false and

distorted way (Knoll, Eisend & Steinhagen, 2011). Moreover, the use of idealized stereotypes can lead to indirect negative effects such as distorted self-images and body perceptions, social misinterpretations and self-destructive behavior (Eisend, 2010; Pollay, 1986).

### 1.1.2 Advertising shaping norms

Brands are carriers of the values and beliefs of their customers (Aaker, Benet-Martinez & Garolera, 2001). Many brands have therefore adopted a proactive position in reflecting the values and interests that are trending among consumers; what is being talked about, cared about and shared. It is dawning upon advertisers that consumers like ads that break the traditional norms, for example the female gender role, and so they have discovered a new way to make money (Davidson, 2015).

Gender inequality is a topic that has been intensively discussed in Sweden during the last decade, and is a wave that many brands have tried to ride. A recent example is the retailer Åhléns and its campaign *Bryt Klädmaktsordningen* ([Eng.] Break down the power structure of clothes) (2016). The brand described the advertisement as a statement and an act of challenging the gender norms and power structures in society. Simultaneously, Åhléns was criticized for exploiting their consumers' involvement in the gender equality movement with profits as its main objective (Björk, 2016).

The social trend of feminism and gender role awareness in the Western world has generated new advertising concepts. A prevalent example is femvertising, defined as 'the empowerment of females in advertising', a concept that has grown very popular in a short amount of time (Rosengren, Åkestam & Dahlén, 2016). There are many examples of femvertising ads which have been hugely successful and popular, for example Dove's "Campaign for Real Beauty" (2004), and P&G/Always' "Like a girl" (2014). The Cannes Award *The Glass Lion* has been especially made for campaigns that challenge gender norms, a clear indication that the interest in reshaping the gender stereotypes through ads reaches beyond a temporary media buzz. (Cannes Lion Award, 2017). Further, academic research by Rosengren, Åkestam & Dahlén (2016) found that femvertising ads imply additional positive effects for brands.

### 1.1.3 Portrayals of the male stereotype in advertising

While femvertising has been successful, the stereotypical portrayal of the ideal male roles and physiques in advertising has remained more or less unquestioned over time. (Gentry & Harrison, 2010; Fowler & Thomas, 2015). As shown by Kervin, (1990), the stereotypical male portrayals used in 1930's advertising was frequently used even fifty years later, and Gill (2007) observes that the male body has in fact been subject to increased levels of sexualization and objectification in media over the last decades. The common characteristics of males in advertising include white, young men that are muscular and slim with specific facial features, and who conform to a masculine gender role of strength and independency (Gill, 2007).

Some examples of norm-breaking portrayals of men in advertising do exist. For example, one increasingly common phenomenon is *dadvertising*, in which portrayals of dads who are

engaged in and capable of childcare and household work are featured (Bukspan, 2016). Examples of brands who have applied the dadvertising concept included Dove and Audi (Waxman, 2015; Nudd, 2017). However, the ads that challenge the masculine ideal and gender norm still represent a negligible fraction of total ads.

## 1.2 Problem area and research gaps

Research has shown that men feel restricted by the stereotypical portrayal of males in advertising and that idealized ads have a multitude of negative effects on men (Gardiner, 2013). Moreover, the use of norm-breaking ads can be positive for brands (e.g. Rosengren, Åkestam & Dahlén, 2016). To this date, however, the firm-level effects of ads that feature norm-breaking male portrayals is a topic that has rarely been touched upon within academia, despite wishes expressed by the marketing research community for further studies on the topic (Fowler & Thomas, 2015). Simultaneously, the advertising industry has shown little interest in breaking the male stereotype (Gentry & Harrison, 2010). In order to reduce doubts regarding the effects of ad campaigns that challenge male stereotypes, and thereby allowing for firms to consider their implementation, marketers need to be provided with a clear image of how such campaigns are received by the consumers they target. A substantial gap in the existing research can thus be said to exist, and the consequences of covering this gap could be important for both brands and individuals in society.

During the last decades, the main discussion within marketing research on gender stereotypes in ads has concerned women and the female stereotype (Fowler & Thomas, 2015). This may seem to make sense from a feminist perspective, since the historically limited portrayals of the female role have been in more urgent need of liberation and change. Moreover, the conventional idea is that men cannot be truly harmed by oppressive masculine stereotypes, due to their privileged position in society (Gentry & Harrison, 2010). Studying how men could be harmed by the masculine gender roles and ideals has often been considered senseless and ridiculous, and has sometimes even been regarded as a threat to the movement toward the empowerment of women (Sommer, 2000). However, the gender roles in society do not exist independently, but are rather defined in relation to each other in a binary dichotomy. Reshaping one role is therefore difficult if the other one is kept static, and female empowerment is not likely to be obtained without a corresponding dissolution of the fixed male stereotype (Gentry & Harrison, 2010).

For the purpose of achieving gender equality, media is not a powerless tool; researchers agree that gender interaction and gender role portrayals in advertising highly affect our perceptions of the relationship between genders (e.g. Goffman, 1979; Shields, 2013). Thus, marketing actions that lead to a more flexible and dynamic concept of masculinity can have a real impact.

For marketing researchers, it is important to continue the studies into how advertisers can benefit from using portrayals that challenge traditional gender stereotypes. In addition, it is necessary to thoroughly study the underlying mechanisms that drive the effects of such ads, so that effective campaigns can be developed. The concept of femvertising has already become a research topic, and will hopefully be examined more thoroughly in the near future. In order to



open up for a more holistic field of research within the field of norm-breaking advertising, a natural next step is to deepen the understanding of ads that break the masculine stereotypes.

*“Marketers may want to embrace promoting more realistic body images in their advertising to not only prevent any negative effects that these images may have on men’s self-worth, but also to gain success in the marketplace.”* – Kendra Fowler & Veronica Thomas, 2015

### 1.3 Purpose and research questions

As a contribution to the movement toward gender equality, the purpose of this thesis is to shed light on an overlooked area; the effects on ads and brands of advertisements that challenge stereotypical and idealized portrayals of masculinity, and what mechanisms that can explain these effects. An advertising concept that challenge male stereotypes will be referred to as ‘menvertising’ throughout the paper.

The main research question is;

*Do menvertising advertisements have a positive effect on brands, compared to traditional advertisements?*

Where the effect on brands is estimated through the measures of advertising attitude and brand liking.

To develop a more thorough understanding on how norm-breaking male portrayals could be used efficiently in advertising, the sub research question is:

*Can the potential effects of menvertising advertisements on consumer attitudes be explained through the theories of Advertising reactance and the Third-Person Effect?*

### 1.4 Delimitations

A variety of stereotypes are frequently used within marketing, but due to the existing research gap within the field of male stereotypes in advertising and the effects of challenging them, this study was limited to study male stereotypes only. This paper will take two aspects of the stereotypes into account; social roles and physical features, since these have been the two main groups of gender stereotypes that has been examined in previous research (e.g. Gentry & Harrison, 2010).

The survey was conducted online, where there is a substantial risk that respondents do not finish the survey if they find it tiresome. Images are easier to include in an online survey than for example videos, since videos would require that respondents leave the survey page. To minimize the rate of survey drop-outs, the types of media included in the survey was therefore restricted to print ads only.

The source of respondents for the experiment was the research firm Nepa, and the study was therefore limited to include respondents from Nepa's sampling network. The geographical area was limited to Sweden.

## 1.5 Expected contribution

By studying the effects of challenging male stereotypes in advertising, our hope is to contribute with some insights on this under-researched area. More specifically, this thesis is expected to contribute with academic knowledge on how and why ad and brand attitudes change when consumers are exposed to ads that feature norm-breaking portrayals of men, compared to traditional ads. Moreover, we believe that bringing the question into the spotlight could be a first step toward a gender-wise more holistic approach to the field of stereotypes and their effects within marketing research.

We do not believe that the results from this thesis alone will be sufficient for firms to change their marketing strategies from one day to another. However, any significant results may spark the interest among academics for more research on the topic. If a larger body of research is accumulated, it could in the long run provide marketers with the guidance they need to adapt a marketing strategy that challenges masculine gender stereotypes as well as feminine. This could ultimately lead to advertisers choosing to give a more proactive and truthful reflection of the heterogeneous society we live in today.

## 2. Theoretical framework

In the following section, a theoretical background is laid out and relevant theories and previous research within the area of the effects of advertising that challenges stereotypes are presented. The three hypotheses this paper aims to examine are generated from this framework.

### 2.1 Theoretical background

#### 2.1.1 The role of advertising

Ads are crucial for building sustainable customer relationships; if brands fall short in their communication, customers have been shown to expect the brands to fail in their other offerings too (Dahlén, Rosengren & Smit, 2014). Today more than ever, customers can share good and bad advertising experiences with each other, through for example social media. In the digital world, advertising mistakes that used to be scrapped and forgotten, can now live on forever and keep influencing both intended and unintended target audiences (Dahlén et al., 2013). With the ever-increasing number of brands on the market, customers are becoming more involved and demand more from the companies behind them (Deloitte Consumer Review, 2014).

#### 2.1.2 Advertising mirroring society

According to Eisend (2010), advertising has historically reproduced society's social norms and stereotypes, rather than questioning or attempting to change them. The stereotypes are useful for marketers mainly because of the cognitive shortcuts they enable when the observer is processing the content presented to them (Macrae, Milne & Bodenhausen, 1994; Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981). It has also been argued that stereotypes can offer helpful orientations to customers since they generate expectations and schemas of normative behaviors in everyday life (Knoll, Eisend & Steinhagen, 2011). In short, the use of stereotypes in advertising can increase sales (Pollay, 1986). However, it can also be harmful to both individuals and society as a whole. On a macro level, social groups can be evaluated in a false and distorted way (Knoll, Eisend & Steinhagen, 2011), and on an individual level, consumers' self-images and body perceptions can be affected, potentially leading to self-destructive behaviors (Pollay, 1986). Moreover, research has shown that when consumers are exposed to social stereotypes, it can result in them having a narrower perception of their opportunities in life (Eisend, 2010).

#### 2.1.3 Advertising shaping society

Customers want to see their own values and beliefs reflected in the brands they choose (Aaker, Benet-Martinez & Garolera, 2001). Moreover, brands are starting to recognize that consumers today do not only have the power to support brands and companies with their own wallets, but can also influence other people in what to do with theirs (Deloitte Consumer Review, 2014). For this reason, brands are more often seen as carriers of trending values and political involvements that are seemingly unrelated to their core business. This has been referred to by some as brands taking advantage of popular public opinions (Davidson, 2015).

The strong societal trend of feminism and gender role awareness has generated the new marketing concept ‘femvertising’. The aim of femvertising is to empower females by rejecting gender stereotypes and unrealistic standards of beauty that currently oppresses them (Ciambriello, 2014; Adweek, 2015). There is still a lot of research to be done on the effects of femvertising, but what has been shown so far has been positive for both the senders and the receivers of the ads (Rosengren, Åkestam & Dahlén, 2016). By proactively questioning the gender stereotypes, the advertising industry itself is moving in a new direction as opposed to the traditional mirror role it has possessed.

#### 2.1.4 The male stereotype in advertising

The image of men in advertising has not undergone extensive changes toward more realistic portrayals over the last decades (Gentry & Harrison, 2010; Fowler & Thomas, 2015; Kervin, 1990); more the opposite (Gill, 2007). As mentioned earlier, a concept called ‘dadvertising’ attempts to portray dads as involved in the household and with children, without ridiculing them. Dadvertising is a relatively new phenomenon, but one cannot say that the corresponding societal change was recent; since the 1970’s, the number of American stay-at-home dads has doubled (Morin, 2013). This ‘new’ concept thus reflects the result of the socioeconomic changes in America that have taken place during at least 40 years. A similar delay in the relation between societal changes and advertising portrayals can be observed in Sweden. The movement toward shared parental leave was initiated already in the late 70’s through the introduction of the first paternity leave schemes (Haataja, 2009). Arriving today, 85% of Swedish fathers now take paternity leave (Bennhold, 2010), but the shift has not been portrayed by the advertising industry until less than a decade ago (Åkestam, 2015).

The side-effects of the stereotype portrayal of the ideal male are harmful on many levels (Gardiner, 2013). To name a few, men’s emotions are stifled, the male-to-male relationship becomes constrained and the perceptions men have about themselves are distorted. This builds fences around their expected masculinity so high that the only fear-driven choice seems to be staying within these walls (Gardiner, 2013). Moreover, research has shown that men are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with their bodies and physical appearances, and that eating disorders are becoming more frequent as well (Zelman 2005; Phillips & de Man, 2010), in the pursuit of resembling the ideal man. This has led to critique from male audiences, where 74% of men globally claim that advertising is portraying unrealistic and unattainable ideals (Gentry & Harrison, 2010).

### 2.2 Measuring the firm-level effects of norm-breaking advertising

The value of a brand, the brand equity, is ultimately determined in the marketplace by the consumers and their choice behavior, which is often influenced by the consumer’s personal responses to the brands’ marketing activities. A brand is thereby considered to have larger value in terms of equity when consumers respond more favorably to its marketing activities when the brand is identified, in comparison to when it is not (Hoeffler & Keller, 2003). Consequently, the consumers’ attitudes towards advertisements is of great importance, since the ads provide

the platform upon which associations to the brand are built, and these associations are the key shapers of brand identification. In the study of this thesis, the effect of menvertising ads on brands is measured through the variables *advertising attitude* and *brand liking*.

Within marketing theory, advertising attitude is referred to as the experienced level of favorability toward an ad at a specific occasion of exposure. It has been argued that advertising attitude is an important mediator for the consumer's purchase intentions and brand choice behavior (Shimp, 1981; MacKenzie, Lutz & Belch, 1986). According to Keller et al. (2008), another possible consequence of positive ad attitude is increased brand awareness, brand recall and word-of-mouth. Consequently, the measure *advertising attitude* can be used for measuring many important short-term effects from advertising.

Brand liking is closely related to, but not entirely overlapping with, ad attitude. Keller et al. (2008) describe brand liking as a consumer's entire evaluation of a specific brand and all associations related to it. Consequently, it is a measure that evolves slowly over time, since it is mainly based upon the extent to which the consumer agrees and identifies with the messages and values communicated by the brand. A positive association added to a consumer's holistic view of the brand is equivalent with an increase in brand liking, in which the consumer's perception of the brand is improved. This is an important consequence, since strong brands have been proven to have a multitude of advantages over lesser known brands. According to Hoeffler & Keller (2003), ads from strong brands get more attention and more positive reactions from consumers, their products are perceived as being of a higher quality and more desirable, and customers are willing to pay higher price premiums. To conclude, *brand liking* is a useful measure of the effects of advertising campaigns on the long-term economic performance and competitiveness of firms.

A large number of studies have investigated the effectiveness of ads that challenge female stereotypes (Zawisza & Cinnirella, 2010). For example, brands which are connected to traditional gender roles are shown to be less favored by consumers (Lyonski & Pollay, 1990). Modern and liberated portrayals of the female gender role have been shown to generate more effective ads and communication (Whipple & Courtney, 1985), and female respondents who have been exposed to femvertising ads report increased levels of brand and advertising attitude (Rosengren, Åkestam & Dahlén, 2016). However, as stated earlier in this paper, the experimental studies that has been conducted on the effects of breaking the *male* stereotype in ads are considerably rare. In 2010, a total of three (3) studies had been conducted according to Zawisza & Cinnirella (2010). Nevertheless, the existing results indicate positive impact on brands; breaking male stereotypes in radio advertising was shown to result in higher purchase intentions (Debevec & Iyer, 1986), consumers preferred androgynous male models over traditional masculine ones (Garst & Bodenhausen, 1997), and the preference for advertised products were shown to increase when the ad portrayed non-traditional men rather than traditional (Vantomme, Geuens & Dewitte, 2005). To conclude, research indicates that ads that challenge norms can be more effective than traditional ads, independent of the gender portrayed. This is supported by Åkestam (2015) who claim that stereotypical ads in general are not proven to be more efficient than other ads and Zawisza & Cinnirella (2010), who found that

advertising effectiveness increased for both male and female versions of the ads when norm-breaking rather than traditional gender roles were presented.

Altogether, previous research shows that that norm-breaking female portrayals in advertising generates both better ad attitude and brand liking among viewers, compared to advertising that display more traditional and stereotypical portrayals. Moreover, the few experiments that has been conducted on the effectiveness of norm-breaking male ads indicate that menvertising ads can generate similar effects on brands. It is therefore hypothesized that:

**H1a:** Menvertising ads will generate higher ad attitude than traditional ads.

**H1b:** Menvertising ads will generate higher brand liking than traditional ads.

## 2.3 Advertising Reactance

Attempts have been made to discover which underlying psychological mechanisms could cause the effect of non-stereotypical and norm-breaking advertisements on ad attitude and brand liking. One of these theories is called advertising reactance.

According to the *theory of psychological reactance* (Brehm, 1966), people have strong motives to preserve their personal freedom. If these freedoms are reduced, or threatened to be so, the individual will react with a negative feeling and a strong urge to regain them. The theory of reactance has been successfully applied to the field of marketing research before (e.g. Fitzsimons & Lehmann, 2004; Edwards, Li & Lee, 2002; Thorbjørnsen & Dahlén, 2011; Rosengren, Åkestam & Dahlén, 2016) since the cause of reactance is of situational character and thus applies well to the natural setting of advertising situations. Within marketing theory, the phenomenon of reactance has been used to explain situations where consumers react negatively to advertising imagery or communication methods which they perceive to limit their freedom of choice. This is the *advertising reactance*.

Previous research within the field of reactance toward stereotypical and idealized contents in marketing has focused on reactance toward female stereotypes. Rosengren, Åkestam & Dahlén, (2016) conclude that female consumers experience advertising reactance when they perceive narrow gender-role portrayals to limit their personal freedom, which results in lower levels of ad attitude. Furthermore, female audiences have been shown to react defensively to the traditional norms that stereotypical ads impose on them (Wan et al., 2013).

However, the theory of advertising reactance is not a feminine but a human phenomenon. It is therefore likely that the theory of advertising reactance can be applied also to explain reactions toward male stereotypes in advertising. The image of masculinity in advertising is limited to a narrow set of stereotypes, with little room for diversity in terms of physical appearance or social behavior (Gentry & Harrison, 2010). According to Gentry & Harrison, the constant exposure to such advertising creates pressing expectations on men to behave and look in a manner that

is consistent with these stereotypes, in order to be perceived as ‘masculine’ by society. This is likely experienced by men as a limitation to their freedom of expression and behavior.

To conclude, previous research has found advertising reactance to be part of the explanation to why advertising that challenges female norms generate higher levels of ad attitude among female respondents. There is reason to believe that the same relationship could prevail also in the menvertising context, due to the norm-challenging nature of the menvertising ads compared to traditional ads. It is therefore hypothesized that:

**H2:** Menvertising ads will generate lower advertising reactance among male respondents than traditional ads.

## 2.4 The Third-Person Effect

The effect of certain advertising concepts on ad attitude and brand liking could be explained using the indirect effects approach, in which it is assumed that people shape their behavior and responses to advertising based on the ad’s perceived influence on other people (Dahlén et al., 2013). As a consequence, the consumers’ reactions will occur even if they are based on perceptions that are incorrect (Gunther & Storey, 2003; DeLorme, Huh & Reid, 2006). It is therefore important for marketers to understand both dimensions of the indirect effects approach – the perceptual component (how a message is believed to influence others) and the behavioral component (how the perceptual component affects the individual’s actions) – in order to fully understand this underlying mechanisms that affects the seemingly direct effects of advertising in at least some extent. The third-person effect hypothesis has been subject to extensive research and has been confirmed to be very robust (Sun, Pan & Shen, 2008).

According to Davison (1983), people are inclined to think that advertising influences other people to a larger extent than themselves, a phenomenon that is usually referred to as the ‘Third-Person Perception’ (TPP). Several explanations for the TPP have been brought up in previous research, but the one that dominates is the theory of motivated reasoning and self-enhancement processes (Perloff, 1999), in which it is stated that people tend to believe that they can better shield themselves from harmful messages and persuasion than the average person. These findings are well aligned with people’s unconsciously distorted perception of themselves as generally performing better than average within a variety of desirable skills, the so called ‘above-average effect’ (Babcock & Loewenstein, 1997).

The TPP have been shown to shape people’s behavior and beliefs through the so-called Third-Person Effect (TPE) (Davison, 1983). The TPE naturally has implications for marketers, since consumers have been found to overestimate the extent to which harmful advertisement messages affect other people compared to themselves (Dahlén et al., 2013). What is more, previous research shows that this distorted perception results in negative attitudes towards the brand; not because the customers feel harmed themselves, but because they are concerned about others (Youn, Faber & Shah, 2000).

As framed by the founder of the TPE theory within marketing communications, Davison (1983, p. 3):

*“[any] effect that the communication achieves may thus be due not to the reaction of the ostensible audience, but rather to the behaviors of those who anticipate, or think they perceive, some reaction on the part of others.”*

Why is the TPE important in the menvertising context? Using gender stereotypes in advertising is not unproblematic. Studies within both popular press and academia show that stereotypical portrayals have negative effects on individuals (e.g. Pollay, 1986; Richins, 1991; Coltrane & Messineo, 2000; Groesz, Levine & Murnen, 2002; Grabe, Ward & Hyde, 2008). Also, consumers believe that idealizing advertisements affect others in a negative way by giving them a distorted image of how humans look (Choi, Leshner & Choi, 2008). Therefore, we hypothesize that traditional ads are perceived by the audience to have a larger negative impact on the observing audience (including themselves) than menvertising ads, due to a widespread social and academic belief that stereotypes are harmful to society.

**H3a:** Respondents will perceive traditional ads to have a more negative impact on observers than menvertising ads.

Previous research show that the use of stereotypes in advertising leads to lower ad attitude, and this relationship has been explained using the TPE theory. The effect of ads featuring norm-breaking *male* portrayals on the TPP concept has, to the knowledge of the authors, not yet been tested. Nevertheless, the psychological mechanisms behind the TPP and TPE concepts are not suggested to apply to women to a larger extent than men, and therefore, it seems likely that the effect should be similar for stereotypical male and female portrayals. Hence, we hypothesize that a Third-Person Perception prevails:

**H3b:** Respondents will perceive traditional ads to have a larger negative impact on others than on themselves (i.e. a Third-Person Perception prevails).

Research by Dahlén et al. (2013) imply that the firm-level effects of norm-breaking ads can be partly explained through the indirect approach; that the third-person perception can affect consumers' attitudes and behavior when a stereotypical advertisement is perceived to be upsetting or harmful to others. It is therefore hypothesized that:

**H3c:** The Third-Person Perception mediates the effect of menvertising ads on ad attitude.



## 2.5 Summary of hypotheses

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### Summary of hypotheses

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- |            |  |
|------------|--|
| <b>H1a</b> | Menvertising ads will generate higher ad attitude than traditional ads.                                      |
| <b>H1b</b> | Menvertising ads will generate higher brand liking than traditional ads.                                     |
| <b>H2</b>  | Menvertising ads will generate lower advertising reactance among male respondents than traditional ads.      |
| <b>H3a</b> | Respondents will perceive traditional ads to have a more negative impact on observers than menvertising ads. |
| <b>H3b</b> | Respondents will perceive traditional ads to have a larger negative impact on others than on themselves.     |
| <b>H3c</b> | The Third-Person Perception mediates the effect of menvertising ads on ad attitude.                          |
-

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Choice of approach and research method

The hypotheses of this thesis were formulated based upon the existing theories and previous research presented in the section *Theoretical framework*. As the study uses a deductive approach, the intention was to empirically test and evaluate the theoretical framework as applied to a menvertising-campaign (Bryman & Bell, 2015). As recommended by Bryman & Bell (2015), a quantitative method was chosen for the study, to provide the basis for drawing general conclusions using statistical methods for analysis.

The study was conducted using an experimental, one-way, between-subjects research method. The method provides internal validity to the experiment by comparing the responses of an experimental group with the responses of a control group. Apart from the stimulus, the survey was identical across respondents. The distribution of respondents into the experimental and control group was randomized, thus ensuring that differences between the two groups could be attributed to the manipulation of the stimuli in the experiment (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Also, randomized allocation of respondents into experimental and control groups limits the risk of self-selection bias, and the method ensures comparability between the groups (Söderlund, 2010).

### 3.2 Survey design

The survey consisted of an introduction, a stimulus (an image of a print advertisement) and a set of questions, posed in Swedish since the survey respondents were sampled from Sweden. The introduction and the questions were identical across the experimental and control version, but the stimulus image differed between the control and the experimental group. The stimulus in the control group survey was a print advertisement showing a traditional, stereotypical advertising portrayal of a man, and the stimulus in the experimental group survey showed an advertisement with a portrayal of a man that challenges stereotypes. Logos and brand names were blurred in order to limit the risk that any previously experienced impressions of a specific brand did not affect the respondents' reactions toward the ads used in the experiment.

In the introduction, the respondent was informed that the study was conducted by researchers interested in a new advertising concept, that the concept had been developed to market products for men from a well-known brand, and that the name and logo of the brand had been blurred to avoid any potential effects of brand recognition.

After the introduction, each respondent was randomly designated to the control or the experimental survey group. Academics recommend that numerous stimuli are used, in order to increase the generalizability of the results (Vaux, Fidler & Cumming, 2012) and therefore, a total of 12 stimuli were used. The control and experimental surveys each contained six different stimulus images which were evenly distributed across the respondents, so that each respondent was randomly assigned one image for observation before proceeding to the questionnaire. There

were two types of ads, type 1 focusing on physical appearances, and type 2 portraying social roles.

The survey consisted of thirteen questions, of which ten had sub-questions. Answers were indicated on an interval scale, the recommended choice for measuring perceptions and beliefs in quantitative studies (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Ten-point scales were used, since they allow for capturing smaller deviations between respondents than seven or five point scales. This is of great value when examining new marketing concepts since the effect of the first, short exposure is often small. Additionally, the use of an even-number scale eliminates the risk that lazy respondents always choose the middle option when faced with a question that require some thinking effort. The lowest number (1) and the negative reactions (dislike, don't agree at all) were placed on the left end of the scale and the high numbers (10) and positive reactions (like, agree completely) were placed on the right end, as advised by Malhotra (2010).

Since the questions were answered by the respondent directly upon stimulus exposure, the probability is high that any differences in results between the groups are due to a causal relationship with the stimuli (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

### 3.3 Preparatory studies and stimuli development

Bryman & Bell (2011) recommend that experiments are designed to imitate reality as much as possible, in order to make the results applicable in real-world decision-making. However, advertisements that portray men who challenge stereotypes without being portrayed as ridiculous are difficult to find, as experienced by the authors of this thesis. The lack of examples of menvertising ads made it necessary to develop a set of brand new print ads that could be used as stimuli images in the experiment. The images were chosen with great care and subsequently manipulated by art directors so that they closely imitated how advertisements usually look. In order to avoid potential biases, individuals did not participate more than once in the studies (pre-pre study, pre-studies or main study).

#### 3.3.1 Pre-pre-study

Before developing the advertisement images, the set of characteristics that should be present in the stereotypical vs. norm breaking stimuli had to be defined. It was desirable to develop the stimulus images based upon characteristics that were statistically significantly perceived by the respondents as being stereotypical vs. stereotype-challenging, and not only in general but also specifically within advertising. Therefore, a pre-pre-study was conducted in order to measure a) the perceived level of stereotypicality for a set of statements related to the physical and behavioral characteristics of men and b) whether these were typical within advertising. The aim of the pre-pre-study was to determine which characteristics that were deemed by consumers to represent stereotypical vs. norm breaking male portrayals in advertising, so that suitable stimulus ads could be developed.

In the study, 26 examples of male portrayals were listed, and the respondents were asked to rate each statement based on whether they agreed upon the portrayal being a) “*a stereotypical portrayal of masculinity*”, and b) “*a typical portrayal of masculinity in advertising*”.

41 respondents participated in the pre-pre-study; 51.2% female, 48.8% male, mean age 22.6. The statements for which there was no significant correlation between the answers to questions a) and b) were removed, since the intention was to detect stereotypes present in advertising.

The characteristics perceived as most vs. least stereotypical are presented in Table A, together with the correlation between items “*a stereotypical portrayal of masculinity*” and “*a typical portrayal of masculinity in advertising*”, where a significant correlation indicates that the characteristics are not only perceived as stereotypical but also are relevant within an advertising context. The chosen characteristics were thus perceived by the audience to be clear examples of stereotypical vs. norm breaking portrayals of men in advertising, and could thereby serve as guidance for the development of stimulus images.

**Table A: Percieved stereotypicality of characteristics in advertising**

Description	Stereotypicality (Mean)	Correlation: stereotypical - typical in advertising
“A man with a muscular body”	8.15	0.331 *
“A tall man”	8.12	0.553 **
“A man with thick hair”	6.34	0.600 **
“An independent, self-fulfilling man”	8.20	0.501 **
“An overweight man”	3.93	0.453 **
“A thin man”	3.12	0.608 **
“A short man”	2.34	0.692 **
“A man with thin hair”	4.00	0.594 **
“A man who needs support and help from others”	3.12	0.667 **

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , two-sided test

The mean values of the corresponding characteristics were tested using paired samples T-tests and the differences were statistically significant:

$M_{\text{muscular}} = 8.15$	vs. $M_{\text{overweight}} = 3.93$ ,	$p < .001$
$M_{\text{muscular}} = 8.15$	vs. $M_{\text{thin}} = 3.12$ ,	$p < .001$
$M_{\text{tall}} = 8.12$	vs. $M_{\text{short}} = 2.34$ ,	$p < .001$
$M_{\text{thickhair}} = 6.34$	vs. $M_{\text{thinhair}} = 4.00$ ,	$p < .001$

Items: “*This (portrayal) is a stereotypical portrayal of masculinity*” and “*This (portrayal) is a typical portrayal of masculinity in advertising*”, measured on ten-point Likert scales (1 = “Don’t agree at all”, 10 = “Agree completely”). Cronbachs Alpha > 0.75 for all indices.

### 3.3.2 Stimuli development

Based upon the findings in the pre-pre-study, several advertisements and other images were collected. Art directors edited the images and created a series of realistic print ads with blurred logos. The models in the images were similar in terms of clothing, ethnicity and age. To make a clear distinction from this point forward, the advertisements portraying stereotypical male characteristics (based upon the statistically significant results of the pre-pre-study) are labeled as *traditional ads* and those portraying characteristics that challenge male stereotypes are called *menvertising ads*.

### 3.3.3 Pre-studies

In order to assess whether the stimuli ads would have the intended effect on the audience in the main study, and to verify the outcome of the pre-pre-study, a pre-study was conducted. The survey was conducted in two separate rounds, one for the ads featuring physical appearance, and one for ads portraying social role and personality.

#### *Pre-study 1: physical appearance stereotypes*

In the first pre-study, the respondents were exposed to ten different stimuli advertisements; five showed stereotypical physical appearances and five showed norm-breaking portrayals of physical appearance. Six of these stimuli images (three “pairs” of traditional vs menvertising ads) were after the test considered to be the best choice for the main study, based upon which images that had the highest vs. lowest perceived level of stereotypicality.

Results pre-study 1:  $n = 41$ , 48.8% female, 51.2% male, mean age 29.8. The difference in mean values between the stimulus were tested using paired samples T-tests and the mean perceived stereotypicality was significantly lower for the menvertising ads than for their traditional counterparts:  $M_{\text{menvertising}} = 2.05$  vs  $M_{\text{traditional}} = 8.48$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , Items “*This is a stereotypical ad within the fashion industry*”, “*This ad shows a stereotypical image of men within the fashion industry*”, measured on ten-point Likert scales (1 = “Don’t agree at all”; 10 = “Agree completely”), Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.973.

### *Pre-study 2: social role stereotypes*

In the second pre-study (conducted in two parts due to technical issues), the respondents were exposed to 12 different stimuli advertisements; six showed stereotypical social roles and six showed norm-breaking portrayals of social roles. Six of these stimuli images (three “pairs” of traditional vs menvertising ads) were considered to be the best choice for the main study, based upon which images that had the highest vs. lowest perceived level of stereotypicality.

Results pre-study 2, *part 1*:  $n = 32$ , 50% female, 50% male, mean age 27. The difference in mean values of the stimuli were tested using paired samples T-tests and the mean perceived stereotypicality was significantly lower for the menvertising ad than for its traditional counterpart:  $M_{\text{menvertising}} = 1.64$  vs  $M_{\text{traditional}} = 8.36$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Items “*This is a stereotypical ad within the fashion industry*”, “*This ad shows a stereotypical image of men within the fashion industry*”, measured on ten-point Likert scales (1 = “Don’t agree at all”, 10 = “Agree completely”), Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.854.

Results pre-study 2, *part 2*:  $n = 44$ , 47.7% female, 52.3% male, mean age 25. The difference in mean values of the stimulus were tested using paired samples T-tests and the mean perceived stereotypicality was significantly lower for the menvertising ads than for its traditional counterparts:  $M_{\text{menvertising}} = 2.24$  vs  $M_{\text{traditional}} = 7.61$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . Items “*This is a stereotypical ad within the fashion industry*”, “*This ad shows a stereotypical image of men within the fashion industry*”, measured on ten-point Likert scales (1 = “Don’t agree at all”, 10 = “Agree completely”), Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.761.

### 3.3.4 Results from pre-studies

The results from the pre-studies determined which stimuli that were most suitable for the main study, and confirmed the underpinning assumption of the study; that the menvertising ads were perceived to reflect a less stereotypical male portrayal than the traditional ads, both regarding stereotypical masculine social roles and physical appearances. The differences in mean value between the menvertising and traditional ads were all statistically significant with strong significance ( $p < 0.01$ ).

## 3.4 Main study

### 3.4.1 Parameters of the main study

#### *Advertising attitude*

The measure *advertising attitude* was chosen for capturing the respondents’ instant reactions to menvertising ads as compared to traditional ads. In the main study, the *advertising attitude* was measured through the question “After seeing the ad, what is your opinion on the ad?”, where the respondent indicated their answers on 10-point bipolar scales with the following adjective pairs at the scale end-points: “Dislike - Like”, “Bad - Good”, “Unpleasant - Pleasant” (Holbrook & Batra, 1987). An index for the ad attitude was computed using these three parameters. Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.958.

### *Brand liking*

Possible effects on the brand attitude from using menvertising ads were captured through the measurement *brand liking*. In the main study, the *brand liking* was measured through the question “After seeing the ad, what is your opinion on the brand behind the ad?”, where the respondent indicated their answers on 10-point bipolar scales with the following adjective pairs at the scale end-points: “Dislike - Like”, “Bad - Good”, “Unpleasant - Pleasant” (Holbrook & Batra, 1987). An index for brand liking was computed using these three parameters. Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.978.

### *Advertising reactance*

The measure *advertising reactance* was included in the main study to allow for testing the hypothesis that the firm-level effects of menvertising ads could be explained through the theory of psychological reactance. The measure used in this thesis originates from Hong’s Psychological Reactance Scale (Hong, 1992) and have been adapted by marketing researchers for increased usefulness in studies of situational reactance caused by advertising (Fitzsimons & Lehmann, 2004; Thorbjørnsen & Dahlén, 2011; Rosengren, Åkestam & Dahlén, 2016).

The variable *advertising reactance* was measured on ten-point Likert-type scales with three items: “The ad makes me want to be the exact opposite”, “I do not approve of how the ad tries to affect me”, and “The choice of models in the ad annoys me” (Rosengren, Åkestam & Dahlén, 2016). An index for the brand liking was computed using these three parameters. Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.850.

### *Perceived negative influence and the Third-person Perception*

Another possible underlying reason for the effect of menvertising on ad attitude and brand liking is the third-person effect; the effect of the ad’s perceived influence on others. In previous research (e.g. Dahlén et al., 2013), the third-person effect has been estimated by measuring the impact of the *third-person perception* on attitudes and behavior.

In this thesis, the third-person perception and effect were measured using the question “How much do you think each person/ group will be negatively influenced by this ad?”, with the items: “Me”, “Other females”, “Other males” (Choi, Leshner & Choi, 2008). The perceived influence was indicated on ten-point Likert scales, ranging from “Not at all influenced” (1) to “Highly influenced” (10) (Davison, 1983; Choi, Leshner & Choi, 2008).

The items “Me”, “Other females” and “Other males” were merged into an index variable for the negative influence that the ad is perceived to have on its full audience (“*Perceived negative influence*”), Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.851.

The items “Other females” and “Other males” were merged into an index variable for the perceived negative influence on others (*Third-Person Perception*), Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.789.

### *Perceived advertisement stereotypicality*

The same two-item measure for perceived stereotypicality of the ad that was used in the pre-tests was also included in the main survey, intended to serve as a manipulation check. The measure for perceived stereotypicality made it possible to ascertain that the stimuli images had the intended effect on the respondents also in the main study, i.e. that the menvertising ads were perceived to reflect a less stereotypical male portrayal than the traditional ads.

The measure *perceived stereotypicality* was created using two items, “This is a stereotypical ad within the fashion industry” and “This ad shows a stereotypical image of men within the fashion industry”. Answers were measured on a ten-point Likert scale where 1 = “Don’t agree at all” and 10 = “Agree completely”. Cronbach’s alpha (main survey) = 0.949.

### 3.4.2 Survey launch

The main study was conducted in March and April 2017. A professional research agency (Nepa) was hired for the distribution of the main survey questionnaire to a representative sample of Swedish men and women. The survey was completed online through the online survey tool Qualtrics.

A soft-launch including 22 respondents was run on March 28, with the purpose of ensuring that the survey was working properly. The full launch of the survey was run between March 31 and April 12, 2017. 863 responses were collected, of which 45 were unfinished and thus removed, leaving 818 complete responses for the final dataset.

### 3.4.3 Sampling of respondents

The aim of the study was to examine how menvertising ads affect the relevant target audience for advertising products for men. However, advertisements about products and brands for men are often aimed at both men and women; even though the end consumer is a man, the purchase is often made by, or influenced by, a woman (e.g. Ruby, 1999; Chu, Lee & Kim, 2016; Alreck & Settle, 2002). According to Garcia (2008), women are the decision-makers in 85% of all consumer decisions, including 95% of home products and 89% of vacations. Moss (2013), emphasizes that many brands fail in attracting the sex that account for the clear majority of purchases and consumer decisions, the women. According to industry data (Handeln Utredningsinstitut, 2016), women do not only stand for the majority of clothes purchases online; it is emphasized that they also stand for a substantial fraction of the purchases of men’s clothing. A recent example of this is a very successful campaign made by the brand Old Spice (D&AD, 2011), which sells hygiene products for men. The marketing team at Old Spice estimated that 60% of their body wash sales were purchases made by women and that the female group consequently hold a large influence over the trial and decision of the male group. Their campaign was therefore aimed mostly at women.

To conclude, evidence from theory and practice indicate that the effects of ads on both sexes are equally important to take into consideration for marketers. The population for this study was therefore set to be 50% men and 50% women. The age span of the population was set to



be 18-45 years, since individuals belonging to that age interval are most likely to belong to the target audience of ads for products for men. The sample consisted of 410 women and 408 men, and the mean age was 30 years.

Distribution of respondents in the control and experimental group:

	Number of respondents (n)		
	Total	Men	Women
Control group ( <i>Traditional ad</i> )	407	201	206
Experimental group ( <i>Menvertising ad</i> )	411	207	204

### 3.5 Data analysis tools and tests

When the research agency had distributed the survey to a random sample within the chosen population, the primary data was downloaded from Qualtrics by the authors and imported into SPSS Statistics (version 24) for analysis.

Since the sample size was larger than 30, a normal distribution could be assumed. Mean differences between the control and experimental group were tested with independent samples *t*-tests. Mediation analyses were performed with Baron & Kenny's Causal-Steps mediation tests (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The significance of the mediation tests was calculated using the Sobel First-Order Test (Sobel, 1982). Scale reliability for computed index variables was tested with Cronbach's Alpha. The significance level was set to 5%.

### 3.6 Reliability and validity

#### 3.6.1 Reliability

The reliability of the measurements was secured by only including questions and measures that had been previously approved in academic papers and used in similar studies. Multiple-item questions were used for each measurement variable, the answers were indicated on multi-item scales, and the items were merged into indices where Cronbach's Alpha > 0.7, thereby further strengthening the reliability (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The large sample size (N = 818) also contributed to a high reliability.

### 3.6.2 Validity

#### *Internal*

The only difference between the control group and the experimental group was the type of stimulus: a traditional ad or a menvertising ad. The large number of stimuli images decreased the risk that the effect of the experimental stimuli images on the measurement variables was caused by features other than perceived stereotypicality within each specific ad. In addition, the stimuli were confirmed multiple times to be perceived as intended by the respondents, thus securing their internal validity. From this, one can draw the conclusion that there is a causal relationship between the control/ experimental stimuli exposure and the survey measurements, with a high level of internal validity (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

#### *External*

The random sample of respondents was collected from across the country, which ensured the sample to be representative of the Swedish population; giving the study a high external validity. The brands in the stimuli images were blurred, thus lowering the risk of systematic error caused by brand recognition. Some of the stimuli images were artificial and not real advertisements, which could be a concern according to Söderlund (2005). However, the images were carefully manipulated by two different art directors to look like real advertisements, and they were confirmed to have the intended effect on the respondent, which limits this concern.

## 4. Results

In this section, the results from the main study are presented, the hypotheses are accepted or rejected, and additional findings are presented. The exposure of respondents to a menvertising advertisement or a traditional advertisement is referred to as the menvertising condition and the traditional condition respectively.

### 4.1 Manipulation check: Perceived stereotypicality

The manipulation check reproduced the results from the pre-studies and confirmed that the respondents believed the menvertising ads to show a less stereotypical male portrayal than the traditional ads. The means of the experimental and control group for the variable *perceived stereotypicality* was compared and tested using an independent samples t-test.  $M_{\text{menvertising}} = 3.68$  vs.  $M_{\text{traditional}} = 6.45$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , as presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**  
**Independent Samples *t*-test Results Showing the**  
**Perceived Stereotypicality of the Stimuli**

	Mean values			n
	Menvertising ad	Traditional ad	Difference	
<b>Perceived Stereotypicality</b>	3.68	6.45	0.277 **	818

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , one-sided test

### 4.2 Positive firm-level effects from menvertising

Firm-level effects were studied through estimating the impact of menvertising ads vs. traditional ads on the variables *advertising attitude* and *brand liking*. The between-group mean values were compared using independent samples t-tests, see Table 2.

**Supporting H1a**, measured ad attitude was significantly higher for respondents who had been exposed to a menvertising ad than a traditional ad. ( $M_{\text{menvertising}} = 5.255$  vs.  $M_{\text{traditional}} = 4.977$ ,  $p < 0.05$ .)

**Supporting H1b**, the level of brand liking was significantly higher for respondents who had been exposed to a menvertising ad than a traditional ad. ( $M_{\text{menvertising}} = 5.256$  vs.  $M_{\text{traditional}} = 4.962$ ,  $p < 0.05$ .)

**Table 2**  
**Independent Samples *t*-test Results Showing the Effects of**  
**Menvertising on Ad Attitude and Brand Liking**

	Mean values			n
	Menvertising ad	Traditional ad	Difference	
<b>Ad Attitude</b>	5.255	4.977	0.278*	818
<b>Brand Liking</b>	5.256	4.962	0.294*	818

\*  $p < 0.05$ , one-sided test

### 4.3 No significant experience of Advertising Reactance for men

The effect of menvertising ads on advertising reactance was estimated through an independent samples *t*-test, where the mean values for the variable *advertising reactance* were compared between the control and experimental group. To the best of our knowledge, previous research on advertisement reactance has not indicated that individuals experience reactance if it is not their own freedom that is perceived to be limited. Therefore, only male respondents were included in the tests since the female respondents were not considered to be affected by male stereotypes,  $n = 408$ .

Results show that the experienced level of advertising reactance was lower for male respondents who had been exposed to a menvertising ad than a traditional ad. However, the difference was not significant. ( $M_{\text{menvertising}} = 2.245$  vs.  $M_{\text{traditional}} = 4.376$ ,  $p = 0.305$ . See Table 3)

**Hypothesis H2**, that menvertising ads will generate lower advertising reactance among male respondents than traditional ads, **was therefore rejected**.

**Table 3**  
**Independent Samples *t*-test Results Showing the Effects of**  
**Menvertising on Ad Reactance for Male Respondents**

	Mean values			n
	Menvertising ad	Traditional ad	Difference	
<b>Ad Reactance</b>	4.245	4.367	0.122 *	408

\*  $p < 0.05$ , one-sided test

#### 4.4 The Third-person Effect: a mediator of Ad Attitude

##### 4.4.1 Traditional ads are perceived to have a larger negative influence

Before examining whether a Third-Person Perception prevailed in the study, the underlying assumption that menvertising ads were perceived to be more harmful to their observers than traditional ads was tested. For this, the mean values for the index variable *Perceived Negative Influence* were compared between the control and experimental group using an independent samples *t*-test.

**Supporting H3a**, respondents perceived traditional ads to have a more negative impact on observers than menvertising ads. ( $M_{\text{traditional}} = 4.453$  vs.  $M_{\text{menvertising}} = 4.053$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . See Table 4.)

**Table 4**  
**Independent Samples *t*-test Results Showing the Perceived**  
**Negative Influence of Traditional ads vs. Menvertising ads**

	Mean values			n
	Menvertising ad	Traditional ad	Difference	
<b>Perceived Negative Influence</b>	4.053	4.453	0.400 *	818

\*  $p < 0.05$ , one-sided test

#### 4.4.2 A Third-Person Perception prevails

The third person perception was measured with the variable “perceived negative influence on others”, in this section called *TPP* - Third Person Perception, i.e. how respondents believed other men and women to be influenced by the ad.

To test whether the respondents considered traditional ads to have a larger negative impact on others than on themselves, the mean value for the TPP variable was compared with the mean value for the question “perceived negative influence on me”. The test was performed with a paired samples t-test. Naturally, only the control group was taken into consideration since it had been exposed to a traditional ad, and thus  $n = 407$  for this test.

**Supporting H3b**, the respondents perceived traditional ads to have a larger negative impact on others than on themselves. ( $M_{\text{negative influence on me}} = 4.204$  vs.  $M_{\text{TPP}} = 4.577$ ,  $p < 0.01$ . See Table 5.)

**Table 5**  
**Paired Samples *t*-test Results Showing the Third-Person Perception  
for Negative Influence of Traditional Ads**

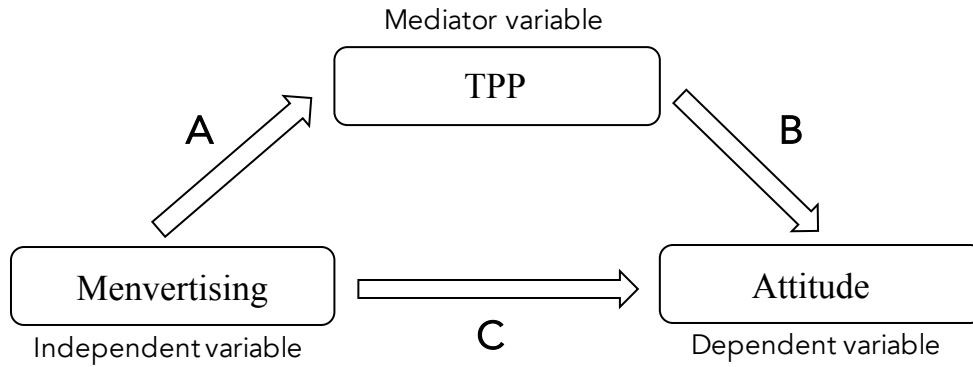
	Mean values			n
	Me	Others	Difference	
<b>Perceived Negative Influence</b>	4.204	4.577	0.373 **	407

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , one-sided test

#### 4.4.3 The Third-Person Effect on Advertising Attitude: Mediation Analysis

It was hypothesized that the TPE is one of the underlying reasons for why menvertising ads generate higher ad attitude than traditional ads, i.e. that TPP is a mediator of the effect of the menvertising condition on ad attitude. If the Third-Person Perception is a mediator for the effect of menvertising ads on ad attitude, it implies that the relationship between the variables Menvertising and Ad Attitude (path C) is in fact caused by the effect of menvertising on TPP (path A), and subsequently the effect of TPP on Ad Attitude (path B), see Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Mediating effect of TPP**



The existence of such a mediation effect was tested using the Baron & Kenny (1986) mediation analysis procedures, and the Sobel (1982) test was used to calculate the significance of the mediation effects. Variables included in the analysis were the previously encountered *TPP* and *advertising attitude*, and the condition variable *Menvertising*: a dummy variable taking the value 1 for the menvertising condition and value 0 for the traditional condition.

The mediation analysis has four steps where the four conditions are tested that must be satisfied if a mediating effect prevails. The testing procedure for each step are presented together with the results in the section below, and in Table 6. No problematic multicollinearity or heteroscedasticity prevailed within in the analyzed regressions.

#### ***Conditions, mediation test procedure and results***

**1.** The menvertising condition must significantly predict higher levels of ad attitude. A simple linear regression was run: Regression 1:  $Ad\ Attitude_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Menvertising_i + u_i$

A significant relationship between *Menvertising* and *Ad Attitude* (Path C) could be confirmed. ( $\beta_1 = 0.278, p < 0.05$ ).

**2.** The menvertising condition must significantly predict lower levels of TPP. A simple linear regression was run: Regression 2:  $TPP_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Menvertising_i + u_i$

A significant relationship between *Menvertising* and *TPP* (Path A) could be confirmed. ( $\beta_1 = -0.304, p < 0.05$ ).

**3.** TPP must significantly predict changes in ad attitude. A simple linear regression was run: Regression 3:  $Ad\ Attitude_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 TPP_i + u_i$

A significant relationship between *TPP* and *Ad Attitude* (Path B) could be confirmed. ( $\beta_1 = -0.170, p < 0.01$ ).

4. The *Menvertising - Ad Attitude* relationship (Path C) must either become non-significant (full mediation) or have a weaker significance (partial mediation) when *TPP* is included in the model, compared to when *TPP* is not controlled for. A multiple linear regression was run:

$$\text{Regression 4: } Ad\ Attitude_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Menvertising_i + \beta_2 TPP_i + u_i$$

The coefficient for the *menvertising*-variable in the fourth regression was not significant ( $\beta_1 = 0.227, p > 0.05$ ). The coefficient for *TPP* was significant ( $\beta_2 = -0.167, p < 0.05$ ).

#### Significance

The Sobel (1982) test was conducted to determine the significance of the mediation effect.

Formula for calculating the Sobel test statistic: 
$$z = \frac{ab}{\sqrt{(b^2 SE_a^2) + (a^2 SE_b^2)}}$$

For the *TPP*-mediation analysis, the constants were:

$$a = -0.304, b = -0.170, SE_a = 0.154, SE_b = 0.034$$

This gives the Sobel test statistic: 1.836,  $p = 0.033$ .

**Supporting H3c**, test results show that perceived negative influence on others (*TPP*) mediates the impact of *menvertising* ads on ad attitude. The four conditions of the Baron & Kenny mediation analysis were met,  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table 6**  
**Mediation Analysis Test Results Showing the**  
**Mediating Effect of the Third-Person Perception**

Step	$\beta_1$	$\beta_2$	Condition satisfied?
1	0.278 * (0.152)		Yes
2	-0.304 * (0.154)		Yes
3	-0.170 ** (0.034)		Yes
4	0.227 (0.150)	-0.167 ** (0.034)	Yes

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , one-sided test  
(Standard errors in parenthesis)



#### 4.5 Additional findings: ‘The gendered reaction’

When examining the data closer with regards to gender, a trend was discovered: male respondents were seemingly unaffected by the menvertising ads.

##### *Firm-level effects*

The menvertising ads generated higher levels of ad attitude and brand liking among the male audience compared to traditional ads (see Table 7a), but the difference was not large and not significant. However, female respondents showed significantly more positive reactions toward menvertising ads than traditional ads. (See Table 7b).

**Table 7a**  
**Individual Samples *t*-test showing the Effect of Menvertising on  
Ad Attitude and Brand Liking for Male Respondents**

	Mean values			n
	Menvertising ad	Traditional ad	Difference	
<b>Ad Attitude</b>	4.989	4.852	0.136	408
<b>Brand Liking</b>	5.039	4.874	0.165	408

\*  $p < 0.05$ , one-sided test

**Table 7b**  
**Individual Samples *t*-test showing the Effect of Menvertising on  
Ad Attitude and Brand Liking for Female Respondents**

	Mean values			n
	Menvertising ad	Traditional ad	Difference	
<b>Ad Attitude</b>	5.525	5.099	0.426 *	410
<b>Brand Liking</b>	5.477	5.049	0.429 *	410

\*  $p < 0.05$ , one-sided test

### *Advertising reactance*

As reported above, the results showed that male respondents did not experience significantly higher levels of advertising reactance when they were exposed to traditional ads, compared to menvertising ads. Also in this case, an interesting finding was that the mean difference in advertising reactance was significantly lower for female respondents. ( $M_{\text{menvertising}} = 3.678$  vs  $M_{\text{traditional}} = 4.568$ ,  $p < 0.01$ .) See Table 8.

No problematic multicollinearity or heteroscedasticity prevailed within in the analyzed regressions.

**Table 8**  
**Individual Samples *t*-test Showing the Effect of**  
**Menvertising on Ad Reactance for Female Respondents**

	Mean values			n
	Menvertising ad	Traditional ad	Difference	
<b>Ad Reactance</b>	3.678	4.568	0.890 **	410

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , one-sided test

It was also found that advertising reactance mediated the effect of the menvertising condition on female respondents' ad attitude. The existence and significance of the mediation effect were tested using the same procedure as in section 4.4.3: The Baron & Kenny (1986) mediation analysis test and the Sobel (1982) test. See the section below and Table 9 for regressions and results.

### ***Conditions, mediation test procedure and results***

Only female respondents were considered in the analysis and the variables included were *Advertising Reactance*, *Advertising Attitude* and *Menvertising*. The four conditions of the Baron & Kenny mediation analysis (1986) were satisfied:

1. The menvertising condition significantly predicted higher levels of ad attitude.

Regression 1:  $Ad\ Attitude_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Menvertising_i + u_i$ .  
 $\beta_1 = 0.426$ ,  $p < 0.05$ .

2. The menvertising condition significantly predicted lower levels of advertising reactance.

Regression 2:  $Ad\ Reactance_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Menvertising_i + u_i$   
 $\beta_1 = -0.890$ ,  $p < 0.001$ .

3. The experienced advertising reactance significantly predicted higher levels of ad attitude.

Regression 3:  $Ad\ Attitude_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Ad\ Reactance_i + u_i$   
 $\beta_1 = -0.370$ ,  $p < 0.001$ .

4. The *Menvertising - Ad Attitude* relationship lost its significance when *advertising reactance* was included in the model, compared to when *advertising reactance* was not controlled for.

Regression 4:  $Ad\ Attitude_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Menvertising_i + \beta_2 Ad\ Reactance + u_i$

$\beta_1 = 0.100, p = 0.318 > 0.05, \beta_2 = -0.366, p < 0.01$ .

*Significance:* Sobel test statistic: 3.466,  $p = 0.000$ .

This finding implies that for female respondents, advertising reactance mediates the effect of menvertising ads on ad attitude. The four conditions of the mediation analysis were met,  $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 9**  
**Mediation Analysis Test Results Showing the Mediating**  
**Effect of Ad Reactance for Female Respondents**

Step	$\beta_1$	$\beta_2$	Condition satisfied?
1	0.426 * (0.225)		Yes
2	- 0.890 ** (0.235)		Yes
3	-0.370 ** (0.043)		Yes
4	0.100 (0.212)	-0.366 ** (0.044)	Yes

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , one-sided test  
(Standard errors in parenthesis)

## 4.6 Summary of results

### Summary of hypotheses and results

<b>H1a</b>	Menvertising ads will generate higher ad attitude than traditional ads.	<b>Accepted</b>
<b>H1b</b>	Menvertising ads will generate higher brand liking than traditional ads.	<b>Accepted</b>
<b>H2</b>	Menvertising ads will generate lower advertising reactance among male respondents than traditional ads.	<b>Rejected</b>
<b>H3a</b>	Respondents will perceive traditional ads to have a more negative impact on observers than menvertising ads.	<b>Accepted</b>
<b>H3b</b>	Respondents will perceive traditional ads to have a larger negative impact on others than on themselves.	<b>Accepted</b>
<b>H3c</b>	The Third-Person Perception mediates the effect of menvertising ads on ad attitude.	<b>Accepted</b>
<b>Additional finding</b>	Female respondents are the main drivers of the effects of menvertising on ad attitude and brand liking	

## 5. Analysis and discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the various effects of challenging male stereotypes in ads (i.e. using menvertising), and to provide some explanations for such observations. The results indicate that the use of non-stereotypical male portrayals in advertising have positive effects for brands in general, with regard to female consumers in particular. As hypothesized, the results also imply that the Third-Person Effect is part of the underlying cause for why ad attitudes toward menvertising ads were higher than toward traditional ads. However, Advertising reactance was, surprisingly, not accepted as an explanatory factor for the male audience.

### 5.1 Firm-level effects of menvertising

#### 5.1.1 Ad Attitude

The study show that respondents exposed to menvertising ads evaluated the ad more favorably than those who saw a traditional ad. This finding is aligned with previous research within the field of norm-breaking advertising: Rosengren, Åkestam & Dahlén (2016) claim that respondents react more favorably to non-stereotypical female portrayals in advertisements. What is more, ads that challenge stereotypes of cultural and ethnical minorities have been shown to positively affect interest toward the ad across all groups of viewers (Dahlén et al., 2013; Martin et al., 2004; Grier & Brumbaugh, 1999).

A possible explanation for this result is that consumers prefer to see trustworthy ads that do not try to affect their buying behavior with idealized, unrealistic imagery. According to Antioco, Smeesters & le Boedec (2012), ads featuring non-stereotypical female portrayals are deemed by consumers as being more trustworthy, which lead to stronger purchase intentions. This could be explained by the fact that consumers are not unconscious of the way stereotypical and idealizing ads try to manipulate and affect their self-esteem, in order to increase sales. Dahlén, Rosengren & Smit (2014) concluded that consumers of both sexes perceive certain types of oversimplified advertising as insulting to their intelligence, leading to lower ratings and lower expectancy of product quality as well as overall rating of the brand behind the ad. When advertisers use the kind of over-simplified and idealized images that are used for gender-role portrayals in ads, customers may feel that the advertiser underestimates their intelligence and misuses their trust. Ads that reflect how the male role is understood in the real world may therefore be seen by consumers as more respectful to their intelligence (Dahlén, Rosengren & Smit, 2014).

The pleasure of novelty is another possible reason for why consumers may prefer non-stereotypical ads. According to the literature (e.g. Gentry & Harrison, 2010), and in line with the results from the pre-pre test, the majority of advertisements in society are still perceived to feature traditional, stereotypical male portrayals. A new and conventional advertising concept like menvertising can therefore be perceived by consumers as innovative and divergent (Chu, Lee & Kim, 2016); factors that have a positive impact on ad attitude (Smith et al., 2007).

The positive reactions that are shown to be triggered by menvertising ads in this study are important for sales, since ad attitude is strongly linked to purchase intentions, brand awareness, brand choice behavior and a variety of other factors that have been shown to increase competitiveness (MacKenzie, Lutz & Belch, 1986; Keller et al., 2008). One could also argue that in the long run, advertisements that create favorable advertising attitudes can generate long-term brand liking and brand strength through classical conditioning; affection is transferred from the ad to the brand when the brand is repeatedly associated to the pleasant experience of its advertisements. (Shimp, 1981). As hypothesized by the authors, the result of the study therefore suggest that portrayals that challenge male stereotypes in advertising can be used to increase sales, just like in the case of femvertising.

### 5.1.2 Brand Liking

The study indicates that the menvertising ads have a positive effect on brand liking, an effect which is probably not only due to the increased ad attitude. For example, the inclusion of the measure *brand liking* enabled the authors to partially disregard the effect on consumer attitudes that stem from their pleasure in surprises and creative novelty (Smith et al., 2007), and could allow for estimating the deeper, long-term effects of menvertising ads.

Brand liking strengthens the brand in the long term, and strong brands enjoy a large number of important market advantages over lesser known brands (Hoeffler & Keller, 2003). After only one exposure to a menvertising ad, the increase in brand liking was estimated to be of little economic significance compared to the effects on ad attitude; brand liking takes into account other factors than the pure pleasure (or lack thereof) that one experiences when seeing an ad, such as the evaluation of the messages and values that a brand communicates with its ad, and thus it evolves more slowly over time. In this study, however, the difference in brand liking after one exposure to a menvertising ad as compared to a traditional ad was significant. This finding indicates that the audience approves of the message that the menvertising ad communicates, and that this is favorable for their perception of the brand behind the menvertising ad.

## 5.2 Advertising Reactance

An unexpected finding was that the male respondents experienced very low levels of advertising reactance; the difference between menvertising ads and traditional ads was positive but not significant. This does not point in the same direction as the previous research on femvertising does. In their study on the effects of norm-breaking female portrayals in advertising, Rosengren, Åkestam & Dahlén (2016) found support for the hypothesized reasoning that femvertising ads reduced advertising reactance among female respondents, which consequently had a favorable impact on their ad attitudes. These results were interpreted as an indication that the respondents perceived the non-stereotypical ads as less limiting to their personal freedom, and thus instinctively liked them more than the stereotypical ads. Why didn't the male audience experience the same reaction towards the idealized male stereotypes?

The theory of advertising reactance has, to the knowledge of the authors, not been tested with male models on male respondents before. Consequently, there are no studies to compare these results to, and the authors of this thesis can only present qualified guesses as to why the results differ from what has been observed when testing female models on female respondents.

One possible explanation is that men simply do not – to the same extent as women – feel that the male stereotypes in advertisements limit their personal freedom. In accordance with current and historical gender roles, men are not valued for their physical appearance to the same extent as women, and could therefore be regarded as being less disadvantaged by idealized physiques. Stereotypes and idealized images may therefore be perceived as motivational rather than oppressive, and the pressure from society to conform to the stereotype in terms of looks and behavior is maybe not experienced to be very strong.

Moreover, the male body has only recently become subject to the objectification and sexualization that has characterized the female body since the beginning of advertising (Gill, 2007). Consequently, the negative effects of the idealized male body portrayals have not been as extensively discussed as their female counterpart, and it could be argued that men have not yet learned to feel a self-preserving distaste against them, which could partly explain their lack of experienced advertising reactance toward stereotypical ads. This hypothesis could also explain why the female audience reacted more strongly against the stereotypical ads; they have learned from an early age to defend themselves from the damaging ideals in advertising through disapproving of them, through thinking “I’m not wrong, they are” (Rosengren, Åkestam & Dahlén, 2016). It seems like the female respondents applied this way of thinking also in the context of male stereotypes.

Another explanation could be provided by the phenomenon of masculine gender-role stress (MGRS), which implies that men who identify with the traditional male gender role can experience anxiety and stress in situations where the traditional image of masculinity seems to be threatened (Copenhaver, Lash & Eisler, 2000). Since gender roles are imposed on boys and girls from early childhood (Peterson & Lach, 1990), and are likely to become a deeply rooted part of their identity, MGRS may not always be consciously acknowledged by men. Therefore, MGRS could, to some extent, prevent men from admitting to themselves any feeling of reactance against the idealized stereotypes; it would be to admit that they do not fulfill and conform to the traditional male stereotype upon which they have built their identity.

Furthermore, the female audience was found to experience higher (vs lower) reactance when being exposed to the traditional ads (as opposed to menvertising ads). This finding opens for new interpretations of how advertising reactance can be triggered.

As most women do not identify as men, it can be assumed that they did not feel their freedom to be directly limited by the image displayed in the ad, but by something else. Drawing on this reasoning, one could argue that the advertising reactance does not have to be limited to oneself; it is possible that the women reacted toward a perceived limitation of the freedom of men, of which they disapproved.

It could also be proposed that the women experienced reactance toward the very idea of stereotypes that is present in traditional ads, and that the ad thus became a reminder of the society we live in, where most aspects of a woman's life are restrained by stereotypes, norms and ideals (Gentry & Harrison, 2010; Heilman, 2001; Shapiro & Williams, 2012). This could explain why female respondents reacted strongly against the traditional ads, even though the imagery did not apply to them directly. In addition, the same reasoning could explain why male respondents did not experience significant levels of advertising reactance when exposed to traditional ads. It is possible that the men observed the stereotypicality of the ads, but that the concept of stereotypes does not appear to them as a real limitation of their personal freedom. Due to their historically privileged position as the dominant sex, they have not experienced the negative side of their gender stereotype in the same way as women has (Gentry & Harrison, 2010).

### 5.3 Third-Person Effect

The traditional ads were perceived by respondents to have a more negative influence on the audience than the norm-breaking ads, which was expected since the prevailing consensus, within both popular press and academia, is that gender stereotypes and idealized portrayals are harmful to society. Moreover, the menvertising ads were shown to be perceived by the respondent to have a less negative influence on others than on him/herself than traditional ads; Third-Person Perception. This finding is in line with previous research, but is nevertheless interesting since TPP of male stereotypes has not, to our knowledge, been tested before. The perceived negative influence on others was shown to mediate the menvertising effect on ad attitude, that is: it was not the stereotypicality in itself that led to lower levels of ad attitude, but the perceived negative influence that the ad was perceived to have on others. This finding supports the theory that consumers tend to dislike ads out of concern for others, rather than because they find them harmful to themselves (Youn, Faber & Shah, 2000). This finding is interesting since it implies that the Third-Person Effect might partly explain why menvertising ads lead to higher ad attitude than traditional ads. A collective overestimation of the actual effect on others prevails, but it is nevertheless touching to find that consumers to some extent disapprove of ads out of unselfishness.

### 5.4 Empathy – a key explanatory factor?

The primary focus of this study was not to examine the extended effects of menvertising ads on the social behavior and attitudes of consumers. However, the findings of the study seem to have one explanatory factor in common; the role of concern for others and empathy.

According to Åkestam, Rosengren & Dahlén (2017), portrayals of minority groups (e.g. homosexual couples) in advertising may affect consumers socially through priming them to think about other people than themselves, and thereby affect their perceived social connectedness and empathy. Norm-breaking white men can hardly be categorized as a “minority group” in society, but it could be hypothesized that the scarcity of norm-breaking male portrayals in advertising could give menvertising ads the same effect as a minority group,



since they stand out from the norms within advertising. If this hypothesis holds true, concern about others and empathy can be said to play large roles in interpreting the results of our study: the exposure to menvertising ads lead to increased empathy among female consumers, and empathy is subsequently a mediator of the effects of menvertising on their attitudes toward the ads. It can therefore be inferred from the results that empathy could be both a result of menvertising, and a mediator of its effects.

## 5.5 General discussion and contributions

In short, this study indicates that menvertising ads have positive effects on the brands behind them. This result is aligned with previous findings that show other types of norm-breaking ads, such as femvertising and ads that challenge cultural and ethnical stereotypes, to have similar positive effects. When the result of this study is incorporated into the existing research, one can draw a simple conclusion: ad attitudes increase when stereotypical roles and idealized looks are challenged, regardless of the model's gender or ethnicity. Taken together, consumers seem to enjoy advertisements where the models are realistic humans. This knowledge can be used by advertisers to create campaigns that increase ad attitudes and brand liking among consumers, thereby contributing to increased sales.

The findings of this thesis contribute to the academic research by covering the research gap that exists regarding the effects of challenging masculine stereotypes in advertising. Previous research has shown that brand equity can be improved if marketers use ads that challenge female stereotypes or stereotypes about ethnic minorities (Martin et al., 2004; Rosengren, Åkestam & Dahlén, 2016). By adding 'male stereotypes' to the list of stereotypes that are valuable for brands to challenge, this thesis contributes with relevant findings to the aggregate body of research on how consumers are affected by norm-breaking ads in general.

Furthermore, additional findings show that when examining the gathered data by gender, important differences between the sexes arise. Tests indicate that the female respondents were affected by the norm-breaking ads to a larger extent than the male respondents. These findings can be relevant the field of marketing research, as well as within gender studies and psychology.

A possible explanation for why few brands have adopted menvertising campaigns could be that there are insecurities about whether it would be a lucrative concept or not. The expected societal benefits from challenging male stereotypes will not be enough to drive such a change among firms in the marketplace. In order for brands to adapt a new marketing strategy, there must be credible evidence that benefits can be gained for the brand behind such campaigns, and firms are still lacking such proof.

Hopefully, the results of this thesis may spark the interest among researchers to continue investigating the question of how brands and firms can gain from challenging the male stereotypes in advertising. Marketing activities that feature menvertising-content may well facilitate the gender role shifts by men that are necessary for gender roles to become egalitarian (Gentry & Harrison, 2010). The future findings within the field of menvertising could therefore,

in the long run, contribute to the movement toward gender equality, by providing advertisers with theoretical evidence on how and why consumers are affected by menvertising.

An additional comment is that the menvertising ads also can be considered to be creative due to their novelty aspect (Chu, Lee & Kim, 2016). According to Modig & Rosengren (2014), creative ads are likely to increase brand liking and purchase intentions, and also have positive external effects on consumers such as an increase in their own perceived creativity (Rosengren, Dahmén & Modig, 2013). Taken together, if the concept of menvertising is implemented in advertising practice, it is proposed to be a win-win-win situation for consumers, brands and society as a whole.

## 6. Conclusions and implications

### 6.1 Conclusion

The main research question that this thesis aimed to answer was whether menvertising advertisements have a positive effect on brands compared to traditional advertisements. The experimental study conducted in this thesis indicates that the use of menvertising ads indeed have a positive effect on brands, in terms of increased ad attitude and brand liking, compared to the use of stereotypical advertisements. Additional findings indicate that the female audience was affected by the norm-breaking ads to a larger extent than the male audience.

Furthermore, the question of whether the effects of menvertising advertisements can be explained by the theories of Advertising reactance and the Third-Person Effect was posed. The results show that the effects from menvertising ads can be explained partly by the Third-Person Effect, but not through the theory of Advertising reactance, at least not if the latter is interpreted as in previous research (e.g. Rosengren, Åkestam & Dahlén, 2016) and applied on the whole target audience.

### 6.2 Implications

#### 6.2.1 Practical

By approaching and applying menvertising campaigns, firms have much to gain. Apart from the positive effects on individual consumers and society as a whole, a firm's brand equity can be increased: the study in this thesis indicate that the use of menvertising generated increased brand equity in terms of improved brand attitude and brand liking, and, consequently, indicate positive effects for firms in both the short and long term. Furthermore, ads that are perceived to influence others negatively result in lower levels of ad attitude. Therefore, even though the idea of menvertising may appear too progressive to some firms, a general practical guideline should be to seek a marketing strategy in which the gender stereotypes are at least portrayed in a more neutral manner, in order to avoid losses of brand equity.

#### 6.2.2 Theoretical

An intriguing finding was that the female audience was found to experience significantly and substantially lower (vs higher) levels of advertising reactance when exposed to menvertising ads (as opposed to traditional ads). It is therefore proposed by the authors that the theory of advertising reactance could be extended so that not only actual advertising imagery, but also ideas, values and more abstract concepts, as well as the perceived direct effect on others, are included as possible triggers for advertising reactance.

### 6.3 Critique and limitations

Previous research on the effects of norm-breaking portrayals of men in advertising is very limited. Therefore, the authors have in many aspects referred to research on the effects of norm-breaking portrayals of female stereotypes or ethnic/ sexual minorities in advertising. To some extent, generalizations across both genders have therefore been made in order to enable the

research in this paper. However, these generalizations have been supported by psychological theories applicable to both genders, and thus generalization could be justified.

As with any thesis paper of this kind, the scope is limited due to the restricted amount of time. The data was collected at one single occasion, and consequently the respondents were exposed to the stimuli only once before answering the survey questions. The study therefore cannot claim to sufficiently test the effects of long-term exposure to menvertising.

Further limitations include the choice of stimuli, where not all stereotypically challenging physical features or behaviors were covered, but only a selected few. Since not many suitable examples of menvertising ads existed, the stimuli ads for the experiment had to be simulated and not taken from real-world commercials.

Another limiting aspect of the images is that all stimuli ads portraying norm-breaking male roles include a woman, why some respondents may have reacted to the female role instead of the male. However, the authors argue that gender roles are of a binary nature and always perceived in relation to one another, and a gender role cannot be clearly portrayed alone, since it is necessary to display the interaction. In addition, the couples portrayed were heterosexual, which might decrease the perceived level of stereotypicality. However, extensive preparatory testing was carried out before the main survey was distributed in order to assure that the stimuli had been perceived by respondents as intended.

As with any survey, it is not possible to determine whether respondents were fully honest or if their answers were influenced by their perception of what is 'right' or socially acceptable. The respondents may also have been temporarily influenced by something that had an impact on their answers; it is possible that the stimuli contained triggers that we could not predict.

One could further argue that the effects of menvertising ads on ad attitude that were measured in this study were not large enough to have a substantial impact on buying behavior. However, the size of the measured effect did not surprise the authors. In modern advertising theory, ads are generally not expected to have large effects on consumers after one single exposure. Over time, however, the aggregate effect of many repeated exposures will become sufficiently large to really influence the behaviors of consumers. This is in line with the *weak-effect theory of advertising* (Ehrenberg, 1974), which claims that consumer behavior is driven mostly by habit, and that the key factor to change consumer behavior is repeated exposure to ads that generate positive ad attitudes.

Previous research and data from the retailing industry show that it is important to include both women and men in the target audience of ads about men's products, since the women, to a large extent, purchase the products and influence the decisions (Moss, 2013). Consequently, the study was performed on a mixed-gender sample, in order to make the study as relevant as possible for marketers in practice. This assumption forms the foundation for the analyses and discussions concerning the implications, but is not left unquestioned. Even if the numbers pointed toward the positive direction, the menvertising ads did not generate statistically significant positive

effects on attitude and brand liking among male respondents; the majority of the positive effect detected in the data stems from the female part of the sample. Therefore, in specific cases where females are not part of the target audience, menvertising may have less effect. For example, within product categories in which women are underrepresented, such as electronics and construction tools (Handelns Utredningsinstitut, 2016), a menvertising marketing strategy might not lead to any substantial positive changes.

Due to limitations imposed by the methods of the sampling agency, men and women could not be assigned different versions of the questionnaire. If this would not have been the case, some questions could have been modified with regards to gender. Finally, there are more dimensions of marketing and brand success that can be used for measuring ad effectiveness that could have been included explicitly in the questionnaire, such as purchase intentions and word-of-mouth.

## 6.4 Future research

The results from the study conducted in this thesis show that the respondent's reaction differed depending on whether they had been exposed to a menvertising ad or a traditional ad. Two possible explanations for this difference were tested, whereof one was not accepted in this study. We therefore suggest future research to focus on testing other possible causes of this differing reaction schema, such as, for example, progressiveness and the degree to which respondents identify with the traditional masculine role, and previous levels of body image and self-esteem. Moreover, the extended effects of menvertising in terms of increased consumer-perceived empathy should be further examined, as well as the mediating effect of empathy on consumer evaluations of norm-breaking vs. traditional ads.

According to Rossiter, Percy & Donovan (1991), marketing actions must be differentiated depending on brand type (low vs. high involvement decision and informational vs. transformational motivation) in order to be efficient for sales. In the study of this thesis, the brand and product type was not communicated so the effect of menvertising ads on brands and product with differing decision and motivational schemas could not be measured. It could however be an interesting topic for future research, since menvertising is an advertising concept that carries underlying messages and communicate on a value-based level to a large extent. It is therefore possible that the menvertising ads imply a need for processing which is too large if the purpose is to market a low involvement, informational purchase, but that it is more efficient for high-involvement, transformational purchases. On the other hand, menvertising is a concept that catches the consumer's attention through its innovative and novel approach to male portrayals that can be perceived as unique and authentic. This aspect might contribute to making menvertising somewhat more suitable for low-involvement products if they are of the transformational type (Rossiter, Percy & Donovan, 1991).

Furthermore, the effect of menvertising ads were shown to differ with regards to the gender of the respondent. We recommend that future research within marketing, psychology and gender elaborate further on this finding, in order to build a more evidence-based understanding of how norm-breaking advertising influences men and women respectively, and why. A satisfactory

psychological foundation should be able to explain not just why a certain behavior is prevalent in one sex, but also why it is not in the other.

The purpose of this paper was to study the effect of menvertising ads on brands and their equity, rather than the psychological effect on consumers. It is suggested that future research examine the direct psychological effects on consumers of stereotypical vs. norm breaking male portrayals in advertisements, such as changed levels of self-esteem and body image.

The findings of this paper are derived from an experiment where only print-ad stimuli were used. Video is another powerful advertising tool that could be used to give a more vivid and nuanced impression of stereotypes than print ads do. We suggest that further researchers should investigate if the use of menvertising video ads vs. traditional video ads can generate a stronger effect on the ad attitude and brand liking of respondents.

## 7. References

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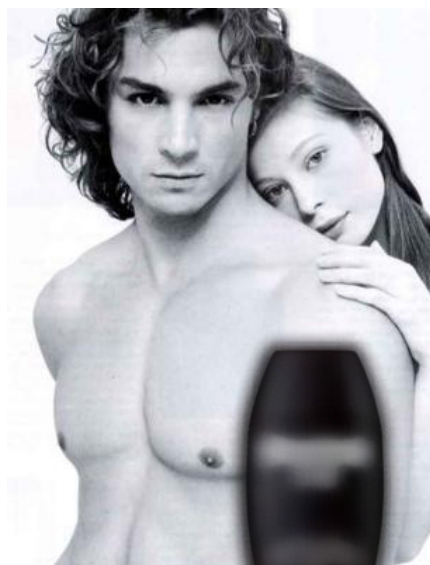
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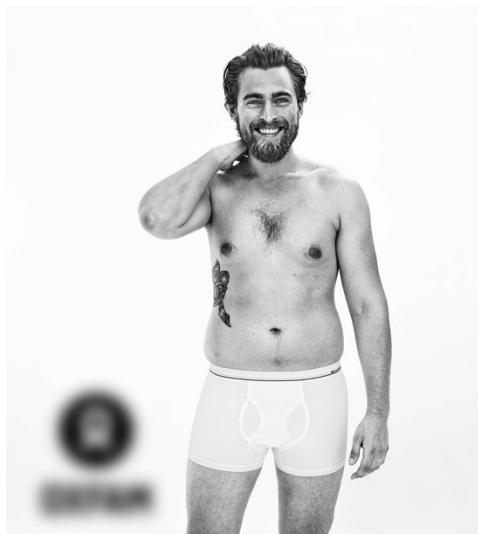
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## 8. Appendix

### 8.1 Stimuli images for traditional condition (control group)



## 8.2 Stimuli images for menvertising condition (experimental group)





## 8.3 Main study: Questionnaire

(Swedish)

### Män i reklamannonser

Den följande studien utförs på uppdrag av forskare som är intresserade av effekterna av ett nytt reklamkoncept. Konceptet är framtaget för att marknadsföra **produkter för män** ifrån ett välkänt varumärke. Varumärkets namn och logotyp har suddats ut för att undvika effekter av varumärkesigenkänning.

Dina svar är anonyma. Tack för din medverkan!

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På nästa sida kommer du se en reklamannons för en produkt riktad till män. Observera annonsen noga och svara sedan på frågorna.

(Stimulus image displayed)

Har du sett annonsen förut?

- ☐ Ja
- ☐ Nej
- ☐ Kanske

De följande frågorna handlar om annonsen. Överanalysera inte, och svara så ärligt som möjligt.

Efter att ha sett annonsen, vad är din åsikt om **annonsen**?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ogillar:Gillar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dålig:Bra	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Oangenäm:Angenäm	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Efter att ha sett annonsen, vad är din åsikt om **varumärket** bakom annonsen?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ogillar:Gillar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dålig:Bra	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Oangenämt:Angenämt	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I vilken utsträckning instämmer du med följande påståenden?

	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer fullständigt
Valet av modell i annonsen stör mig	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Jag gillar inte hur annonsen försöker påverka mig	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Annonstens innehåll får mig att vilja vara den exakta motsatsen	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Hur mycket tror du att följande personer/ grupper skulle **påverkas positivt** av denna annons?

	Inte alls påverkad									Mycket påverkad
Jag	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Andra kvinnor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Andra män	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Hur mycket tror du att följande personer/ grupper skulle **påverkas negativt** av denna annons?

	Inte alls påverkad									Mycket påverkad
Jag	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Andra kvinnor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Andra män	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I vilken utsträckning instämmer du med följande påståenden?

	Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer fullständigt
Annonser är en stereotyp annons från modeindustrin	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Annonser visar en framställning av män som är stereotyp för modeindustrin	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Kompletterande information om dig

Vilket är ditt kön?

- ☐ Man
- ☐ Kvinna
- ☐ Annat

Hur gammal är du? (siffra)

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