Non-Stereotypical Portrayals of Gender Roles in Advertising

What does it signal about the brand and does it generate social effects?

Abstract

While marketers still frequently rely on stereotypes when depicting women and men in advertising, research shows that challenging them can have positive brand-related and social effects. Prior research has primarily focused on physical characteristics, ethnicity or sexuality, while gender role stereotypes is an under-researched area. This thesis will, therefore, explore if using non-stereotypical gender role portrayals in advertising can send positive signals about the brand, and generate positive social effects.

A quantitative experiment was conducted in a questionnaire-based format. The experimental group was exposed to a print ad with a non-stereotypical portrayal of gender roles as stimuli, while the control group's ad showed a stereotypical portrayal. The collected data from 234 respondents was used to measure the parameters *signaled brand-ability, signaled effort on behalf of the advertiser* and *perceived product quality*, as well as the brand-related effects *ad attitude, brand attitude, and purchase intention*. Also, the social effects *empathy* and *social connectedness* were measured.

The study found that advertisements, which challenge stereotypical gender roles, signaled greater brand-ability and greater effort on behalf of the advertiser than traditional ads. These signals enhanced perceived product quality and brand-related effects. Furthermore, the non-stereotypical ads increased levels of social connectedness. An implication which can be drawn from these finding is that incorporating more norm-breaking gender role portrayals in advertising can be beneficial on a brand-level and a societal level.

Keywords: Gender roles, Non-stereotypical advertising, Signaling, Social effects, Brand-related effects

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Definitions

Brand-related effects of advertising: consumer reactions that are related to the sender and/or the persuasive purpose of the ad, such as ad attitude, brand attitude, and purchase intention.

Empathy: recognizing and experiencing others' perspectives and feelings.

Gender roles: the role or behavior learned by a person as appropriate to their gender, determined by the prevailing cultural norms.

Gender stereotypes: certain attributes, such as physical characteristics, trait descriptors, role behavior, and occupational status that differentiate women and men.

Marketing signals: brands use market signals such as price, warranties and advertising to credibly convey information about the brand and its product to the consumer.

Non-stereotypical advertising portrayals: a non-stereotypical advertising portrayal shows a person in a way that does not adhere to the stereotype for the social category to which they belong.

Perceived ability of the brand: to which extent the consumer perceives a brand to be leading, modern and successful based on the advertisement. High levels of perceived ability of the brand signal that the brand is able to improve existing products and create new, innovative products in the future.

Perceived effort on behalf of the advertiser: the level of cognitive effort a consumer perceives that a brand has invested in an advertisement. High levels of perceived effort signals that the brand is successful, confident in the product advertised, and that product quality is high.

Perceived product quality: consumers' opinion of a product's or a brand's ability to fulfill his or her expectations. It may have little or nothing to do with the actual excellence of the product, and is based on the brand's current public image, consumer's experience with the

brand's other products, and the influence of the opinion leaders, consumer's peer group, and others.

Stereotypes: generalized and widely accepted beliefs about the personal attributes of members of a social category, such as gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation, which leads to the perception of group members as generic exempla of a type rather than individuals.

Social connectedness: the extent to which a person feels connected to other people. It involves the sense of belonging and relatedness between people and is an important concept in understanding and evaluating advertisements.

Social effects of advertising: consumer reactions, such as social connectedness or empathy, that need not to be related to the sender or the persuasive purpose of the ad. They also have the ability to enhance brand-related effects.

The nextopia effect: when consumers rate a brand's coming products more favorably than their current ones.

1. Introduction

If you think about it, every advertisement we are exposed to is really just a construct of different elements. Zooming in on each element, and observing them separately, it is likely you will find that the literal message, the person depicted in the ad, and the product advertised feel disconnected from each other. If we would experience advertisements element by element, it might seem a little strange that an advertisement for a BMW M2 Coupé featured a girl in red dress, the copy "Meet two sensations" and three blue cars in the background (Törner 2014). Fortunately, consumers rarely distinguish the different elements of an ad but rather process it as a whole. How the message is perceived often goes far beyond what is explicitly expressed, as the human brain will use cognitive shortcuts when processing an ad (Macrae, Milne & Bodenhausen 1994, Ashmore 1981).

When consumers process the way women and men are portrayed in ads, it will consciously or subconsciously, affect both their perception of the brand and the ad, but also how they view themselves and others (Åkestam 2017b). Marketers have historically and do still, frequently use gender role stereotypes when portraying women and men in ads. A woman in an ad for home or beauty products or a man in an occupational setting in an authoritarian role is something we've all seen before. Consumers are continuously exposed to these types of ads, even though we move towards a more gender equal society where women and men's roles are becoming less rigid. Some might argue it is because the ads still are effective, and "if a thing ain't broke, don't fix it", but we would like to explore the counter-argument; "what if we could do better?" What if non-stereotypical gender roles portrayals in advertising could send more positive signals about the brand, and lead to a feeling of connectedness between women and men, compared to traditional ads? With this as a starting point, this thesis aims to explore the effect on non-stereotypical gender roles in advertising.

1.1 Background

The objective of this section is to provide a background of gender role stereotypes in advertising and its brand-related and social effects, by presenting a review of current research and recent developments in the field. This will lead to an explanation of the problem area of existing research, choice of main and secondary research question and why this can be of relevance for marketers, researchers, and policymakers.

1.1.1 The presence of gender stereotypes in advertising

Marketers frequently rely on gender stereotype portrayals of men and women when advertising products and this topic has been subject to advertising research since the 1950s (Venkatesan, Losco 1975). A stereotype is defined as generalized and widely accepted beliefs about the personal attributes of members of a social category, such as gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation, which leads to the perception of group members as generic exempla of a type rather than individuals (Taylor, Stern 1997). Regarding gender, this can be specifically translated to certain components, which differentiate women and men, such as physical characteristics, trait descriptors, role behavior, and occupational status (Knoll, Eisend & Steinhagen 2011). An example of frequently occurring gender stereotypes in ads is when a man is portrayed as the active person, while the woman is passive or dependent (Åkestam 2017b).

1.1.2 The brand-related effects of gender stereotypes in advertising

Several studies have shown that stereotypical portrayals lead to lower levels of brand-related effects, such as ad attitude, brand attitude, and purchase intentions than advertising without such portrayals (Eisend, Plagemann & Sollwedel 2014, Feiereisen, Broderick & Douglas 2009, Limbu 2016). There are also other studies contradicting those findings. Consumers react differently to stereotypical advertising, depending on if they perceive themselves to be part of the social group being portrayed or not. If they do not categorize themselves as part of the group, the reaction can be neutral or potentially positive (Johnson, Grier 2012). In the field of marketing signal theory, it has also been established that an advertising stimulus, such as a gender stereotype, can send signals about the brand and its products and that these signals, in their turn, can influence brand-related effects (Kirmani, Rao 2000).

1.1.3 The social effects of stereotypical portrayals in advertising

When women and men are depicted in stereotypical ways, such as women being concerned with physical appearance, and men as authoritarians, it can reinforce stereotypes and indirectly negatively affect the consumer socially, in terms of distorted self-image, body perception, social misinterpretations and self-destructive behavior (Eisend 2010, Pollay 1986). This can prime thoughts, affect expectations and limit self-development for members of the social category being portrayed (Åkestam 2017b). This was illustrated by a study where females, exposed to a gender-stereotypical stimulus, underperformed on a math test (Davies et al. 2002). However, indirect effects of advertising are not necessarily negative. On

the contrary, positive social effects have been observed when investigating the influence of non-stereotypical advertisements. The effects do not have to be connected to the brand behind the ad, neither does it have to be related to the persuasiveness of the message (Dahlen, Rosengren 2016a). Non-stereotypical portrayals in ads have influenced the consumer's state of mind and emotions, such as level of perceived empathy; (Escalas, Stern 2003) as well as social connectedness; (Lee, Robbins 1995), Other examples are; social comparison (Gulas, McKeage 2000), creativity (Rosengren, Dahlén & Modig 2013), body ideals (Bissell, Rask 2010), and benevolent behavior (Chang 2014, Defever, Pandelaere & Roe 2011).

Eisend's (2016) suggests that social effects have an impact on brand-related effects and that the purpose of creating positive social effects would be to increase the consumer's brand-related reactions when the individual reflects on united values (Eisend 2016). Dahlen and Rosengren (2016), on the other hand, argue that the positive social effects from advertising non-stereotypical portrayals can go beyond creating only brand-related effects; it can be an important and useful tool used to spur positive developments on a societal level (Åkestam 2017b, Dahlen, Rosengren 2016b). This occurred in a recent study where an ad empathized the values of benevolent behavior, which made the experimental group more willing to donate blood (Defever, Pandelaere & Roe 2011).

1.1.4 Advertising mirroring or molding society

There is an ongoing debate regarding if, and how, using stereotypes in advertising can impact society. Two opposing views exist, referred to as "the mirroring argument" and "the mold argument". The first one refers to how advertising "mirrors" already existing values, which in the case of depicting gender roles means that the portrayals in advertising are based on norms and expectations that have previously existed or still prevail in society. Consequently, they confirm rather than challenge existing norms, and the gender portrayals in advertising are thus not always up to speed with society and instead show attributes that are outdated (Eisend 2010). Historically, reflecting norms have been more frequently occurring in advertising than portrayals questioning those norms (Eisend 2010, Holbrook 1987). The opposing "mold argument" does, contrary, suggests that advertising can mold, shape or form the receiver of the ad's values and beliefs. It is argued that advertising will consist of content that is expected to spur consumption, rather than reflect society (Pollay 1986). Thus, Ganahl (2003) proposes that the use of gender roles in advertising could create, shape and reinforce beliefs about gender attributes and values in society (Eisend 2010, Ganahl, Prinsen & Netzley 2003b).

The use of gender stereotypes in an advertising message has been motivated by its ability to simplify the message and 'convey ideas and pictures quickly and clearly' (Courtney, Whipple 1974). If advertising mirrors society, then from a marketer's point of view, stereotypes could be used to enable cognitive shortcuts. Thus, the receiver would process the ad more easily (Macrae, Milne & Bodenhausen 1994, Ashmore, Del Boca 1981). Furthermore, it becomes a question of following society's values rather than attempting to challenge or transform them (Eisend 2010). However, if advertising instead molds society, brands can carry values of the current era and challenge stereotypes. This reasoning is also referred to as "popular public opinions" (Davidson 2015). Brands could thus proceed in a proactive way, where they choose to address values and ideas, which they believe are important for today's society.

1.1.5 Recent developments

In recent years, several international leading brands, such as Unilever and Procter and Gamble, have altered their advertising strategies and actively focus on featuring non-stereotypical portrayals (Sweney 2016). In 2017, The U.K.'s Advertising Standards Authority also decided to ban ads featuring gender stereotypes (Hall 2017). Brands who have been lagging behind in this regard, such as American Apparel have been heavily criticized and boycotted by consumers (Winberg 2014). American Apparel portrayed gender inequality in their advertising, which is considered a negative social advertising effect that in turn had a negative impact the brand. At the other end of the spectrum, there are companies such as Dove, who have positioned themselves at the forefront of the discussion regarding how gender is depicted in advertising. They describe it as "we're on a mission to help the next generation of women realize their full potential" and they frequently carry out campaigns such as "antisexism campaign" and "give the she stereotypes a makeover - women in the media" (Dove 2017, Gilliland 2016). Dove's campaigns are examples of how positive social advertising effects can be used as a tool to create positive brand-related effects. The trend of more gender equal advertising is not expected to languish. Recently, the #Metoo movement was born, which has spurred the discussion regarding gender equality even further and is expected to affect future advertising campaigns (Khasru 2018, Butler 2018).

1.2 Problem area & research gap

Recent studies have shown that non-stereotypical portrayals of gender roles in advertising are evaluated more favorably and seen as more credible than stereotypical portrayals (Eisend,

Plagemann & Sollwedel 2014). In addition, it can lead to positive social effects, which in turn mediates positive brand-related effects (Åkestam 2017b). However, the existing body of research has to a large extent focused on the brand-related effects of non-stereotypical advertising (Taylor, Stern 1997, Johnson, Grier 2012) or on the negative effects, which can occur when not including or erroneously portraying groups in advertising (Borgerson, Schroeder 2002, Richins 1991). Studies in the field of the marketing signal theory have, for instance, investigated the signals of efficient versus creative advertising (Modig, Dahlén & Colliander 2014), if wasteful advertising increased signaled credibility (Ambler, Hollier 2004), and what advertising repetitions signal about brand quality (Kirmani 1997), but the signal effects of using non-stereotypical gender roles is yet to be investigated.

Previous studies investigating positive social effects of non-stereotypical advertising have had sexual orientation as the stereotypical component and studied the social effects social connectedness and empathy. An investigation of whether similar effects would occur for the gender role components; role behavior and occupational status, have not yet been carried out by the marketing research community. Studies have also to a large extent focused on the physical characteristic attribute of gender stereotypes, while research regarding role behavior and occupational status is limited (Åkestam, Rosengren & Dahlen 2017a). Numerous requests for further research on advertising's social effects have taken place (Chang 2014, Defever, Pandelaere & Roe 2011), still only one percent of academic advertising research articles between the years 1980-2010 examined social effects (Kim et al. 2014).

Concurrently, brands and marketers need to meet the new demands of consumers who expect brands to not only provide a satisfactory product but also to engage and take a stand on social and political issues (Oster 2018). To meet these demands, additional research is needed to clarify what non-stereotypical gender roles in advertising signals and if previous research regarding social advertising effects can be applied to other types of non-stereotypical advertising as well. A research gap is thus identified, and the findings from covering this area can potentially benefit marketers, researchers, policymakers, and by extension, our society.

1.3 Purpose and research questions

As an addition to the growing body of literature on effects of advertising, the purpose of this thesis is to explore a topic in which previous research is limited; the influence non-stereotypical gender portrayals in advertising potentially have on market signals about the

brand, brand-related effects, and social advertising effects. More specifically if it can increase perceived effort on behalf of the advertiser and perceived ability of the brand, and positive social effects through increased social connectedness and empathy.

The main research question is: Can non-stereotypical portrayals of gender roles in advertising generate positive marketing signals about the brand compared to stereotypical advertising?

The secondary research question is: Can non-stereotypical portrayals of gender roles in advertising generate positive social effects compared to stereotypical advertising?

A brand's marketing signals are evaluated through measures of perceived effort on behalf of the advertiser and perceived ability of the brand, and the social effects through social connectedness and empathy.

1.4 Delimitations

As described in section 1.3, the thesis aims to explore a topic where previous research is limited. The notion "gender roles" incorporate the four different and independent components role behavior, occupational status, trait descriptors and physical characteristics (Knoll, Eisend & Steinhagen 2011). The scope is limited to the two parameters role behavior and occupational status. Trait descriptors are excluded from the scope due to the complication of observation. This limitation has also been done in previous research (Eisend 2010). Furthermore, traits descriptors are a complex and complicated to visualize in a print ad, compared to a video ad. As the study is built on a survey with print ads, trait descriptors would be hard to portray, hence excluded from the scope. The demarcation of physical characteristics is due to the extent of already existing research (Åkestam 2017b). Studies have often focused on the physical appearance attribute of gender stereotypes, while research regarding role behavior and occupational status is limited (Åkestam, Rosengren & Dahlen 2017a, Åkestam, Rosengren & Dahlen 2017b). To summarize, the scope is limited to examine the gender roles components occupational status and role behavior.

Further limitations are made in regards to sampling. The data collection was geographically limited to Sweden, partly due to the time frame of the thesis but also because Sweden is considered to be a highly developed and sophisticated market, that rapidly adopts new trends

(Export.gov 2017). Furthermore, Sweden is considered to have come a long way in regards to gender equality and gender role norms, compared to other countries. In 2017, Sweden topped the EU Gender Equality Index (Mashial 11 October 2017). This should be taken into consideration when reviewing the results of the study as they mainly will be valid for the Swedish market and countries who have come equally far in the development towards gender-equal societies. Potential outcomes could also be an indication of what could be applicable in the future for other developed countries that are expected to move towards more gender-equal societies. The demographic questions in the survey collected information about the respondent's age and gender. If more information regarding demographics were collected, it could have been ensured that the sample had a more truthful reflection of the Swedish population.

1.5 Expected contribution

Since the scope is within a research gap, the study intends to contribute to research in this under-studied field. Through a contribution to existing body of research, the aim is to increase the knowledge of the subject. As our scope is limited, we hope further research will be carried out on the dimensions excluded from this study in the future.

Gender equality is a frequently discussed topic and one of the United Nations' 17 goals for sustainable development (United Nation 2016 August). As described by Eisend (2010), the notion of gender equality is mainly based on the gender components occupational status and role behavior. The socio-economical and cultural environment can directly influence these parameters, through politics and regulations and by examining these two components we hope to contribute and add to the debate. As the focus lies on two components, which are directly affected by the social environment, instead of two parameters, which are spawn from biological elements, we believe the social effects gain additional explanatory value (Eisend 2010). Marketers' need for an increased understanding of consequences from marketing has been an ongoing discussion for several years (Bloom, Gundlach 2001), and it is of interest to policymakers to understand how stereotypes in advertising can affect consumers (Eisend 2010). We hope to contribute and provide a basis for these discussions through our findings. In summary, by shedding light on this under-researched area, we hope to contribute to the debate regarding gender roles in advertising. Even though we do not believe this study alone can lead to any significant effects, we are confident it will provide some new insights, which can be taken into consideration by marketers, researchers, and policymakers.

2.Theoretical Background

This section aims to present theory and research in the field of gender roles in advertising and other theoretical areas of relevance for the thesis. The five hypotheses, which will be tested in this study, are derived from this framework.

2.1. Portrayal of gender roles in advertising

As explained in section 1.1.1, a stereotype is defined as generalized and widely accepted beliefs about the personal attributes of members of a social category, such as gender, ethnicity or sexual orientation. This leads to the perception of group members of that social category as generic exempla of a type rather than individuals (Taylor, Stern 1997). Stereotypes in advertising occur when a portrayal of a person is consistent with a general stereotype or an advertising stereotype (Åkestam 2017b). More specifically are gender stereotypes beliefs that certain attributes differentiate women and men (Eisend 2010, Ashmore, Del Boca 1981). The definition of a non-stereotypical advertising portrayal is “to show a person in a way that does not adhere to the stereotype for the social category to which they belong" (Åkestam 2017b, Taylor, Stern 1997, Mastro, Stern 2003). The four components of gender role stereotypes defined in section 1.1.1, each has a masculine and a feminine version. As an example is the feminine version of role behavior stereotypes being passive and dependent, while the masculine version is to be active and the authoritarian.

Gender stereotypes are a frequently occurring phenomenon in advertising (Eisend 2010), and have also been a highly researched and discussed topic by academia, the media and by marketers (Åkestam 2017b). According to Eised (2010), the most frequently used gender stereotypes in ads are women and men’s occupational status. At the same time, studies have shown that the use of stereotypes in advertising has decreased in recent years. As been highlighted this far, there is research showing a move towards a less stereotypical stance in advertising (Eisend 2010, Wolin 2003, Furnham, Mak 1999). However, there is also literature providing contradictory findings, arguing that the use of stereotypes in advertising is increasing (Eisend 2010, Ganahl, Prinsen & Netzley 2003b, Milmer, Higgs 2004). If the use of gender stereotypes is in fact increasing or decreasing is of importance as negative effects from using them have been observed in prior research. The potential negative consequences will be highlighted in this section. It has been confirmed that stereotypical portrayals can lead to presumed negative influence across both genders, meaning that the consumer believes the

stereotype in the ad to influence other consumers to a larger extent than themselves negatively. Furthermore, it can create ad reactance, as consumers experience that the advertisement limits their freedom of choice of being different from the stereotype portrayed in the ad. Ad reactance has, in turn, led to negative brand-related effects, such as a more negative attitude towards the ad and brand (Antioco, Smeesters & Le Boedec 2012, Halliwell, Dittmar 2004). Stereotypical portrayal of women's physical appearance has also proven to impact the consumer's body image negatively. Furthermore, stereotyping role behaviors can damage the opportunity of self-development for women as it reinforces the belief that women are expected to be dependent and caring (Richins 1991, Buunk, Dijkstra 2011). Additionally, it has also been stated that advertising stereotypes in general could be harmful to people of all ages (Magra 2017). As all above mentioned negative effects have been observed when using stereotypes in advertising, it is of great interest to further understand what an alternative approach, using non-stereotypical portrayals, could potentially lead to (Åkestam 2017b).

The interest for non-stereotypical portrayals has grown both in the practical and theoretical field in recent years. They are more frequently occurring in advertising, and the body of research on non-stereotypical portrayals is growing rapidly (Åkestam 2017b). Deviating from the norm has led to positive brand-related effects but also positive social effects. The positive brand-related effects include enhanced levels of ad attitude, brand attitude, and purchase intention. As outlined in the introduction, various positive social effects have been observed. Two important studies investigating the social effects consumer perceived empathy and consumer perceived social connectedness were conducted recently. A study with homosexual couples as an advertising stimuli primed consumers to think about themselves and other people, and reflecting over their similarities. They were thereby affected socially, specifically by increased levels of social connectedness and empathy (Åkestam, Rosengren & Dahlen 2017a). Similar positive social effects have been found when using ethnically diverse portrayals. The use of such portrayals created an image of shared reality, which increased the awareness of others as well as self, which generated higher social connectedness and empathy (Åkestam 2017b, Åkestam 2017a).

2.2 Marketing signal theory

Signaling is used to solve problems arising from asymmetric information, which occurs when two parties have unequal amounts of information regarding a transaction. One of the transactions in which information asymmetry frequently occurs is when a customer purchases

something from a brand. As consumers today are unable to try all available options before a purchase, the seller who is the better-informed party will use different market signals, such as price, warranties, and advertising to decrease the amount of perceived uncertainty in the decision-making process. Marketing signals are therefore of greater importance when a consumer is unfamiliar with a brand and its products (Kirmani, Rao 2000). The content of an ad can thus send signals beyond the literal message (Dahlén, Rosengren & Törn 2008).

2.2.1 Perceived effort on behalf of the advertiser

In advertising, signaled product quality is not only conveyed through specific claims in the advertising messages, but also through perceived advertising effort. Perceived cognitive effort functions as signals about the company's product offering, and in extension perceptions of the brand (Kirmani, Wright 1989). If the advertiser is perceived to be spending a lot of cognitive effort on how to market its product, it signals that the advertiser is confident in its product as they are willing to invest thought and time. This is seen as a proof of the brand's superiority and excellent product (Ambler, Hollier 2004). Signaled effort is closely related to but not fully overlapped with the signaled expense, which is how much the consumer perceives that the brand has spent on the ad. Similarly to marketing effort, it sends signals about the brand and its products, but differs from the signaled effort as the level of expense spent on an ad can be perceived as great by using a large format print ad but the actual ad content might not signal great levels of cognitive effort (Modig, Dahlén & Colliander 2014).

Previous research has also found that consumers can assess if the perceived effort on behalf of the advertiser is greater than normal. When consumers were exposed to ads with creative content as stimuli, they evaluated the effort on behalf of the advertiser as greater compared to non-creative ads. The creative ads signaled confidence, and in turn higher perceived product quality (Dahlén, Rosengren & Törn 2008). As consumers are expected to perceive that non-stereotypical ads to require more time, thought and effort compared to producing traditional ads, we expect the use of non-stereotypical advertising to function as a signal of effort on behalf of the advertiser. Similar to how consumers perceive creative advertising as stimulus, we expect that non-stereotypical gender role portrayals as stimulus will signal greater effort on behalf of the advertiser than stereotypical ads (Dahlén, Rosengren & Törn 2008).

H1: Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will signal a greater effort on behalf of the advertiser than stereotypical ads.

2.2.2 Perceived ability of the brand and the nextopia effect

In addition to the signaled effort, an ad can also be a signal of the ability of the brand. Brand-ability, which is corporate ability but on an individual, advertised brand level, refers to the consumer's belief that the brand can improve the quality of existing products as well as to generate new, innovative products because the brand is smarter and more innovative than the competition. Consequently, perceived ability of the brand will create expectations of a consumer's future encounter with the brand and its products. High brand-ability can, in turn, positively affect the success of new product introductions and marketing activities, and in extension the financial market evaluation of the brand. It may, therefore, be one of the most critical sources of sustainable competitive advantage (Luo, Bhattacharya 2006).

Furthermore, research shows that consumers value future encounters with a brand more than past experiences with the brand. This is called the nextopia effect, a phenomenon where consumers rate a brand's future products higher than their existing ones, and where demand for a product is higher before it is launched, than after. The nextopia effect is believed to be a consequence of the technological development and increased consumer buying power in recent years. This has made consumers increasingly aware of all the options available, which has made them focus on the unattainable; products that are not yet launched, that could outperform existing products. The expectations about the future can be based on non-product-related actions, such as signals discerned through advertising. If an ad sends signals of high brand-ability, it will enhance the expectations about future encounters with the brand. Research regarding the nextopia effect has also shown that consumers will base their opinions about current products on their expectations of future products, which make signaling brand-ability vital for brands as it can affect the consumer's perception of the entire product portfolio (Dahlen & Karsberg, 2016).

Similarly to categorizing non-stereotypical advertising as a signal of effort on behalf of the advertiser, we believe it also functions as a signal of brand-ability. In a similar manner as advertising with portrayals of non-stereotypical ethnic portrayals signals progressiveness (Joseph 2014), or creative ads signaling innovativeness (Ambler, Hollier 2004), it is expected to increase perceived brand-ability as the company will be perceived as leading, modern and successful. This is supported by findings that consumers feel that traditional, stereotypical advertising portrays gender in an obsolete way, as women and men do not need to conform to traditional roles and behavior anymore (Follows 2017).

H2: Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will signal a greater ability of the brand than stereotypical ads.

2.3 Perceived product quality

As the quality of many products is unobservable before purchase, perceived effort on behalf of the advertiser has been proven to be an effective way to mediate perception of product quality. The underlying logic behind this connection is that if brands want to signal high quality and put a lot of cognitive effort into advertising a product, it must make true claims, as the true quality will be revealed to the consumer after purchase. Further, if the product would not be up to par with signaled quality, repeat purchases would not occur, and consequently, the brand would be unable to get a return of investment from the advertisement campaign (Bagwell, Ramey 1988, Kihlstrom, Riordan 1984, Milgrom, Roberts 1986, Nelson 1974). As consumers interpret signaled brand-ability as an ability to improve the existing product offering as well as creating new products that are considered innovative in comparison to competing brands, and consumers will base their opinions about current products on their expectations on future products, it should also have a positive effect on perceived product quality (Dahlen, M., Karsberg, J. 2016). To sum it up, as the use of non-stereotypical advertising is expected to function as a signal of effort on behalf of the advertiser as well as a signal of brand-ability, it is thus hypothesized that it will lead to higher perceived product quality than stereotypical ads.

H3: Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will generate higher levels of perceived product quality than stereotypical ads.

2.4 Brand-related effects

With the vast number of products offered to consumers today, and with many high-quality products in the market, signals of high product quality is not always enough to ensure success (Dahlén, Rosengren & Törn 2008). In addition to product quality, brands need to build brand equity to be successful in the long run, which increases when customers react favorably in terms of behavior, choices or attitudes, to a brand's marketing activities, such as advertising (Hoeffler, Keller 2003). Links have also been found between brand equity and financial returns, as high brand equity will lead to future revenue (Madden, Fehle & Fournier 2006). Commonly used measures of advertising effectiveness are brand attitude, advertising attitude and purchase intention, which are therefore studied in this thesis (Lutz 1985).

2.4.1 Brand attitude, advertising attitude and purchase intention

Brand attitude is the consumer's complete evaluation of a brand and is a function of the associated attributes and benefits that is notable about the brand. It is of great importance as it works as a basis for consumer behavior, such as purchase decision and choice of brand. It is especially essential when the customer lacks motivation or ability to evaluate a product's quality (Keller 1993). When consumers evaluate a brand favorably, the brand attitude helps amass brand equity and in turn, a strong brand, which will lead to several marketing advantages such as increased loyalty, higher margins and the attraction of new customers, compared to unknown brands (Hoeffler, Keller 2003).

Attitude towards the ad is defined as a consumer's affective response to an advertising stimulus at a particular occasion. A favorable response has shown to have a positive impact on advertising effectiveness and is therefore desirable (Lutz 1985). Ad attitude is often also a mediator for both brand attitude and purchase intention (MacKenzie, Lutz & Belch 1986). Purchase intention is how willing a customer is to buy a certain product or service and is dependent on factors such as brand attitude, ad attitude and the perceived value obtained from buying the product (Grewal et al. 1998).

Several studies carried out by the marketing research community have shown that non-stereotypical advertising leads to higher levels of brand attitude, ad attitude, and purchase intentions, compared to advertising featuring stereotypical portrayals (Eisend, Plagemann & Sollwedel 2014, Feiereisen, Broderick & Douglas 2009, Huhmann, Limbu 2016, Martin, Veer & Pervan 2007). Drawing upon previous findings in the field of marketing signals, which have shown that advertising signaling greater perceived effort and brand-ability have a favorable impact on brand and ad attitude, we propose that similar results would occur for ads with non-stereotypical gender roles portrayals (Ambler, Hollier 2004, Kirmani 1997, Rosengren, Modig & Dahlen 2015).

Furthermore, as the viewer is exposed to advertising of non-stereotypical portrayals, they are expected to be primed to think about themselves and others. Because of this priming, the consumer will generate increased social connectedness and empathy, which in turn makes the consumer ”reward” the ad as well as the brand for making them feel positive feelings, and assess them more favorably (Åkestam 2017b). In addition, research shows that consumers

appreciate when brands put effort behind the ad, which non-stereotypical ads are expected to signal and evaluate the brand more favorably because of that reason (Schultz, Bailey 2000). Extending the marketing signal literature and prior findings regarding non-stereotypical advertising, to advertisements that feature non-stereotypical portrayals of gender roles, it is hypothesized to have a positive effect on brand attitude, ad attitude and purchase intention either direct or mediated by perceived effort or perceived brand-ability.

H4a: Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will generate higher levels of brand attitude than stereotypical ads.
H4b: Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will generate higher levels of ad attitude than stereotypical ads.
H4c: Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will generate higher levels of purchase intentions than stereotypical ads.

Figure 1: illustration of potential mediating effects

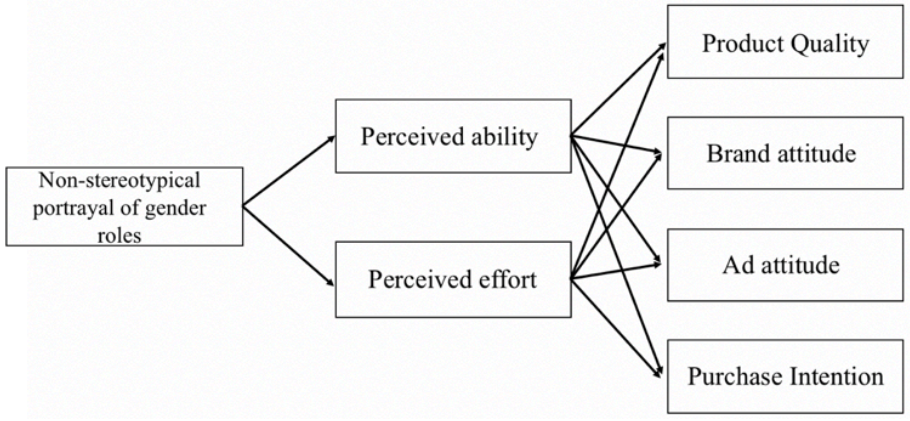


Figure 1 illustrates the mediating effects perceived ability of the brand and perceived effort on behalf of the advertiser are hypothesized to have on product quality, brand attitude, ad attitude and purchase intention.

2.5 Positive social effects of non-stereotypical advertising

According to Dahlen and Rosengren (2016) social effects are "consumer reactions, such as social connectedness, empathy, or self-esteem that need not be related to the sender or the persuasive purpose of the ad". Social effects differ from extended effects as they focus on consumer's relation to others and their wellbeing, while extended effects involve all effects not related to the brand (Åkestam 2017b). In 2013, The American Marketing Association restated their definition of marketing to "marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value

for customers, clients, partners, and society at large" (American Marketing Association 2013). Through this reiteration, the societal effects of advertising are emphasized. Marketers have since shown an increased interest in portraying minorities in advertising, to generate positive social effects (Åkestam, Rosengren & Dahlen 2017b).

Previous research has primarily focused on the negative social effects of advertising (Richins 1991, Dahlén, Rosengren & Smit 2014). Recently, it was proven that it also could lead to positive social effects (Defever, Pandelaere & Roe 2011, Åkestam, Rosengren & Dahlen 2017b, Fitzsimons, Cartrand & Fitzsimons 2008). Positive social effects have been found for cases such as portrayals of the female body in a non-stereotypical manner, portrayals of homosexuality in advertising, and portrayals of ethnic diversity. These non-stereotypical ads have generated social effects such as increased social connectedness and empathy, as well as simultaneously generating positive effects on ad and brand attitude compared to stereotypical ads. Social effects have in previous research shown to derive from cognitive priming theory as well as self-categorization theory (Åkestam 2017b).

Cognitive priming is an implicit memory effect; it occurs when an individual is exposed to one stimulus, which leads to an unconscious reaction, which is in line with a pre-existing mental schema (Davies et al. 2002, Åkestam, Rosengren & Dahlen 2017b). As described in section 1.1.3, advertising can cause this unconscious reaction, such as the before-mentioned example where a gender stereotypical ad primed females to act in line with an existing gender stereotype, and consequently underperform on a math test (Davies et al. 2002).

According to the theory of self-categorization, the salience of social groups is not fixed (Turner et al. 1994). Advertising can thus generate a reaction where consumers focus on their differences or similarities with the people in the ad, and based on that categorizes themselves and the people in the ad. Previous research argues that non-stereotypical portrayals can prime the audience to think of others and reflect on their social properties. An ad can thereby alter a consumers' self-categorization, and for a limited time affect the person socially. Furthermore, a non-stereotypical portrayal in advertising can create this cognitive process of reflection as the consumer notices that the advertisement is unusual (Åkestam 2017b, Brumbaugh, Grier 2006, Grier, Brumbaugh 1999). The consumer then becomes more likely to notice the people in the ad and reflect over their relationship to the people in the ad. This implies that individuals could be primed to address similarities or dissimilarities within groups (Åkestam,

Rosengren & Dahlen 2017b), hence generating higher salience of social categories (Turner et al. 1994).

2.5.1 Consumer perceived social connectedness

The definition of social connectedness is to what extent a person feels connected to other people (Lee, Robbins 1995, Hutcherson, Seppala & Gross 2008). It is a fundamental human emotion and correlates with both a physical and a mental health condition (Hutcherson, Seppala & Gross 2008). It is a social effect of importance to marketers and also used to create a more aggregated society (Åkestam, Rosengren & Dahlen 2017b, Solomon 2014). Previous research on social connectedness has shown that social connectedness can offset the unfavorable consequences of advertising, such as materialism and egocentrism (Pollay, 1986; Zinkhan, 1994). Instead, it can encourage positive social effects of the consumers' contended state (Dahlen, Rosengren 2016b).

Building upon previous research of social priming and self-categorization theory, we expect that portraying non-stereotypical gender roles in advertising emphasize the similarities between the two genders, rather than the differences. This is supported by the fact that mainstream portrayals are not strong priming cues which affects a consumer's self-categorization, or perceived social connectedness (Richins 1991, Åkestam, Rosengren & Dahlen 2017b). Therefore, deriving from the research of Åkestam et al. (2017) it is expected that portrayals of non-stereotypical gender roles in advertising could create a sense of shared reality, thus prime the viewer to relate to others as well as themselves, hence creating an increased level of social connectedness (Åkestam 2017b).

H5a: Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will generate higher levels of consumer-perceived social connectedness than stereotypical ads.

2.5.2 Consumer perceived empathy

According to Mehrabian and Epstein (1972) the definition of empathy is "recognizing and experiencing others' perspectives and feelings". This parameter involves how a person can see something from someone else's perspective and feel compassion for that person (Archer et al. 1981). Consumer perceived empathy is built on four dimensions of empathy; fantasy, emotional concern, perspective taking and personal distress (Davis 1983). Empathy is an important behavioral characteristic needed for individuals to function in society (Galinsky, Ku & Wang 2005).

Similar to social connectedness, empathy has the potential to offset the unfavorable consequences of advertising. Through the counteraction of the negative influence, it stimulates positive social effects, for example, acceptance and non-discrimination (Dahlen, Rosengren 2016b, Eisend 2010). Previous research has also proven that advertising can, through portrayals of "others" and "self", prime the individual to feel empathy on a broader spectrum, beyond the bounds of the advertising or its scenario (Åkestam 2017a).

Studies have shown how advertising can evoke strong emotional reactions, such as a feeling of empathy (Escalas, Stern 2003). This reaction derives from the individual's capability of building connections between themselves and portrayals of others in the ad (Stout, Leckenby 1986). It is also proven that the salience, the ability of an individual to connect to other social groups, is not predetermined. Thus, if an individual generates salience to different social groups, it could increase the levels of self-others overlap. This, in turn, creates higher levels of empathy (Galinsky, Ku & Wang 2005). Building on this reasoning along with priming of social categories, we expect ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will generate more thoughts about the people in the ad, compared to traditional ads. As a result, the salience of abstract social groups and consumer-perceived empathy will increase (Turner et al. 1994).

H5b: Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will generate higher levels of consumer-perceived empathy than stereotypical ads.

2.6 Summary of hypotheses

H1	Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will signal a greater effort on behalf of the advertiser than stereotypical ads
H2	Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will signal a greater ability of the brand than stereotypical ads
H3	Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will generate higher levels of perceived product quality than stereotypical ads
H4a	Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will generate higher levels of ad attitude than stereotypical ads
H4b	Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will generate higher levels of brand attitude than stereotypical ads
H4c	Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will generate higher levels of purchase intentions than stereotypical ads
H5a	Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will generate higher levels of consumer-perceived social connectedness than stereotypical ads
H5b	Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will generate higher levels of consumer-perceived empathy than stereotypical ads

3. Methodology

3.1 Choice of approach and research method

Since the problem area is within a research gap, the hypotheses have been derived from existing research and theory. To empirically test and evaluate the theoretical framework, a deductive approach is well suited to research the measured effects. A quantitative method was therefor used, and the analysis built on statistical approaches (Bryman, Bell 2011).

To research different responses to stereotypical and non-stereotypical portrayals of gender roles in advertising, a pre-study and main-study was conducted. Both studies were designed as a one-way experimental questionnaire. The purpose of the pre-study was to determine if the ads containing the developed stimuli were suitable for the main study. As the pre-study conferred the most suitable pictures, these were then used for the main study. A total of six

images were used in the main-study, and these were randomly assigned to each respondent. Thus, each respondent was only presented with one picture, and these changed between the respondents with the purpose to randomly collect equal sizes of data for each picture. Except for the images, was the main study identical to each respondent, and designed in a one-way questionnaire format. The survey was designed in a manner so questions were replied to immediately after exposure to the picture, to decrease the probability of causality between exposure and respondent's reaction (Bryman, Bell 2011). The validity was also taken into account as the respondents were randomly assigned to the control group or experimental group. Thus, decreasing the risk of self-selection bias and enabling the comparison of the two groups (Söderlund 2010).

3.2 Survey design

The survey, designed in the survey tool Qualtrics, was created to enable a collection of data with the objective of providing empirical evidence to test the hypotheses developed. The survey introduction and question set were in Swedish, the native language of the sample group. In the introduction of the survey, it was explained that the purpose of the study was to investigate the effects of different advertising concepts of a product for both men and women, that all answers were anonymous and that the logo in the ad was blurred to avoid undesirable brand-related associations and effects because of that. Following the introduction, each respondent was randomly assigned to the experimental group or the control group. Both groups were presented with a stimulus consisting of a simulated print advertisement and a question set. The experimental group stimulus was a non-stereotypical portrayal of gender roles in advertising, while the control group stimulus was a stereotypical portrayal. To increase the generalizability of the results, a total of six stimuli were used where three of them were randomized evenly to respondents in the experimental group and the other three similarly randomized evenly to respondents in the control group (Vaux, Fidler & Cumming 2012). Furthermore, a printed advertisement was chosen as the experimental medium due to the ease of manipulation of pictures and ads into believable, simulated ads. Logos and brand names were blurred, and as the ads were simulated, had they not run on the Swedish market where the experiment was conducted, to avoid effects from previous exposure to an ad or brand associations. Each image portrayed both a man and a woman.

The questionnaire consisted of 10 questions, of which 8 had sub-questions. The selection of questions was based on previous research to ensure that appropriate measures were used for

the relevant parameters. Apart from the demographic questions, the closed questions consisted of two different question types. The first type asked the responded to rate to which extent he or she agreed with different statements. The second question type asked the respondent to form an opinion regarding specific aspects of the advertisement. The statement questions were measured with the Likert scale with opposing alternative of agreement at the scale ends (Lange, Selander & Åberg 2003). The opinion questions were measured with bipolar semantic scales (Malhotra 2010). To overcome potential respondent mistrust, the first questions were brand related, followed by more personal questions regarding social belonging and empathy (Malhotra 2010). Finally, selected key demographics were collected (Söderlund 2005).

Suitable for measuring attitudes in a quantitative study, answers regarding perceptions and beliefs were indicated on an interval scale (Bryman, Bell 2011). To capture smaller deviations between respondents than what is possible with a five or seven-point scale, a 10-point scale was used. This choice of an even-number scale is motivated by its ability to extract the risk of respondents expressing indifference and choosing the middle option on the scale. The lowest value (1) and negative opinion/reaction was placed on the left side of the scale, while the highest value (10) and positive opinion/reaction was placed on the right side (Malhotra 2010).

3.2.1 Stimuli design

Print ads were chosen as the experimental medium due to the ease of manipulation. The question of whether to use already existing advertisements or create new, simulated print ads was considered. However, since the selection of real non-stereotypical advertisements is limited, a decision to develop simulated print ads was made. From this decision, a manipulation of the appropriate elements could be determined, and thus the risk of traditional marketing effects decreased (Dahlén, Granlund & Grenros 2009). The pictures were edited in Adobe Photoshop to create truthful print ads, and a blurred logotype was added. Each picture pair had one experimental picture, an image that portrays gender roles in a non-stereotypical manner, as well as a control picture, with a stereotypical gender-roles portrayal. To avoid other stimuli to affect the results, the pairs were, except for the composition, as alike as possible with similar surroundings, ethnicity, gender, and age. Since the scope is limited to the stereotypical gender role components role behavior and occupational status, they were also the two stimuli featured in the ads.

3.3 Pre-study

The objective of the pre-study was to determine if the developed stimuli ads visualizing the independent variable was satisfactory and suitable for the main study. By asking the respondents to rate perceived level of stereotypicality in the pictures, it could be determined if the stimuli manipulation of the stereotypical variable was satisfactory (Söderlund 2005). An unsatisfactory stimuli design can compromise the validity of the results from the main study if it is unclear what induced the measured effects. To avoid biases, each individual answered either the pre-study or the main study. The pre-study was designed in the survey tool Qualtrics and distributed in January 2018 through online message tools and via e-mail. In the questionnaire, all respondents were exposed to 22 different stimuli advertisements (11 pairs) where five of the pairs portrayed stereotypical and non-stereotypical gender occupational status, while four pairs showed stereotypical and non-stereotypical role behavior. The attributes in the pictures were chosen based on previous research that have established what is considered to be stereotypical portrayals of gender roles in advertising (Åkestam 2017b). To increase reliability, all respondents were asked to rate perceived stereotypicality in each picture on two dimensions; perceived stereotypicality of gender roles and perceived stereotypicality of gender roles in advertising.

3.3.1 Results pre-study

Results from pre-study: n=36, 50 % male, 50 % female respondents. The mean age was 31. The difference in mean values of the stimuli was tested using paired samples T-test. The difference in mean values shows that the perceived level of stereotypicality was significantly lower for non-stereotypical ads compared to stereotypical ones.
$M_{stereotypical} = 7.3$ compared to $M_{non-stereotypical} = 2.88 < 0.01$. Items 'This is a stereotypical portrayal of gender roles', 'This is a stereotypical portrayal of gender roles in advertising', measured on 10-point Likert scales (1 = 'Don't agree at all', 10 = 'Agree completely'), Cronbach's Alpha = 0.81.

The results from the pre-study confirmed that the stimuli ads had been manipulated satisfactorily and that they were suitable for the main study. Six stimuli pictures, three pairs were chosen based on that they had the highest vs. lowest perceived level of stereotypicality. Of the three selected pairs, two of them show an occupational status and one role behavior. There was no significant difference between the pairs, and the six cells were collapsed into two cells; the main study, and the control group. There was a statistically significant

difference in mean between the non-stereotypical and stereotypical ads on a significant level ($p < 0.01$).

3.4 Main study

3.4.1 Parameters of the main study

Perceived effort on behalf of the advertiser

To measure the consumer's perception of what the company signals in the advertisement, the parameter signaling was measured through two questions. The first question regarded perceived signaled effort on behalf of the advertiser, and was measured with three items; 'I feel that the company has put a lot of time behind the ad', 'I feel that the company has put a lot of effort behind the ad', and 'I feel that the company has put a lot of thought behind the ad' (Modig, Dahlén & Colliander 2014). Answers were measured on a 10-point scale with the following bipolar items at the scale endpoints: 1 = 'Little' and 10 = 'A lot'. An index was computed using these three parameters measuring signaling. Cronbach's Alpha (main survey) = 0.913.

Perceived ability of the brand

The second question regarded perceived signaled ability of the brand, and was measured with three items, 'The company is leading, 'The company is successful' and 'The company is modern' (Dahlén, Rosengren & Törn 2008). Answers were measured on a 10-point Likert scale where 1 = 'Do not agree at all' and 10 = 'Agree completely'. An index was computed using these three parameters measuring signaling. Cronbach's Alpha (main survey) = 0.900. The parameter will in section 4.0 be referred to as "signaled ability brand".

Consumer-perceived product quality

The measure perceived product quality was included in the questionnaire to capture if the level of perceived product quality differed between the stereotypical advertisement compared to the non-stereotypical advertisement. The parameter was measured by the question 'What is your opinion of the company's product quality?' and as the logo was blurred out in the picture, the descriptive text 'state your spontaneous opinion, even if the product information is limited' was added. The respondents were then asked to indicate their answers on 10-point scales with the following bipolar items at the scale endpoints: 'High/Low', 'Lower than average/Higher than average', 'Worse than competing brands/Better than competing brands'

(Dahlén, Rosengren & Törn 2008). An index for product quality was computed using these three parameters. Cronbach's Alpha (main survey) = 0.957.

Advertising attitude

The attitude towards the advertisement was measured to determine the respondent's direct reaction to the stereotypical ad compared to the non-stereotypical ad. The parameter was measured by the question 'What is your opinion of the advertisement?' and the respondents were asked to indicate their answers on 10-point scales with the following bipolar items at the scale endpoints: 'Bad /Good', 'Dislike/Like', 'Unpleasant /Pleasant' (Holbrook 1987). An index for the ad attitude was computed using these three parameters. Cronbach's Alpha (main survey) = 0.949.

Brand attitude

The attitude towards the brand was measured to determine if the respondents would have a different opinion of the brand when shown the stereotypical advertisement compared to the non-stereotypical advertisement. The parameter was measured by the question 'What is your opinion of the brand?' and as the logo was blurred out in the picture, the descriptive text 'state your spontaneous opinion, even if the brand is anonymous' was added. Similar to when measuring advertising attitude, the respondents were asked to indicate their answers on 10-point scales with the following bipolar items at the scale endpoints: 'Bad /Good', 'Dislike/Like', 'Unpleasant /Pleasant' (Holbrook 1987). An index for the ad attitude was computed using these three parameters. Cronbach's Alpha (main survey) = 0.965.

Purchase intention

An additional brand related parameter was added to the main study to measure to what degree the purchase intention was affected by the different advertisements. The respondent's purchase intention was measured with three items, 'I want to know more about the company's products', 'I want to try the company's products' and 'I want to buy the company's products'. Answers were measured on a 10-point Likert scale where 1 = 'Do not agree at all' and 10 = 'Agree completely' (Dahlén, Rosengren & Törn 2008). An index was computed using these three parameters. Cronbach's Alpha (main survey) = 0.910.

Consumer-perceived social connectedness

To measure the social advertising effects, the parameter consumer-perceived social

connectedness was included to determine if the respondent had feelings of belonging to people in the ad. It was measured with three items, ‘I feel like I belong with the people in the ad’, ‘I’m similar to the people in the ad’ and, ‘I feel positive toward the people in the ad’ (Hutcherson, Seppala & Gross 2008). Answers were measured on a 10-point Likert scale where 1 = ‘Do not agree at all’ and 10 = ‘Agree completely’. An index was computed using these three parameters. Cronbach’s alpha (main survey) = 0.847.

Consumer-perceived empathy

As an additional way to capture social effects, the measure consumer-perceived empathy was included. As no satisfactory measure of consumer-perceived empathy was to be found in previous studies similar to the setting of this study, a new measure was derived from the Interpersonal Reactivity Index four dimensions of empathy; fantasy, emotional concern, perspective taking and personal distress (Davis 1983). The four dimensions were measured on one item each. The fantasy dimension was measure with ‘I can easily imagine how I would feel if I were any of the people in the ad’ and the emotional concern was measured with ‘If the people in the ad were real, I would care about their wellbeing’. The third dimension, perspective taking was measured with ‘If I were in an argument with someone right now, I would try to see things from both mine and their perspective’ and finally the dimension of personal distress was measured with ‘If I witnessed someone get hurt, I would be very upset right now’. Answers were measured on a 10-point Likert scale where 1 = 'Do not agree at all' and 10 = 'Agree completely'. An index was computed using these four parameters. Cronbach’s Alpha (main survey) = 0.754.

3.4.2 Survey launch

The survey was created in the survey software program Qualtrics and distributed in February 2018. In order to get respondents from various places within the country of Sweden, the survey was distributed online both by online message tools as well as through e-mail and forums. As aforementioned, to minimize the risk of misinterpretations due to language skills, the survey was written in the official language of the country. Information was also given about all respondents’ anonymousness (Söderlund 2005). After removing incomplete responses and outliers from the data, the final dataset had a total of 234 respondents, 131 men and 175 women, equal to approximately 43 % men and 57 % women.

3.4.3 Sampling

As there was of interest to measure both men's and women's responses to the survey after being exposed to the stimulus, it was designed, so both genders were present in each picture, and the product in the advertisement was relevant for both genders. The aspect of women making most decisions within consumption was emphasized, however since the sample aims to reflect the population as a whole, this was not altered within the sample formation (Garcia 2008). Thus, it was aimed to collect a sample of about 50% men and 50% women. Furthermore, the age span, which is another important sampling aspect, was set to respondents between 20 - 75 years old. This broad age span is motivated by the objective to capture results from which generalized conclusions and implications can be drawn, not only for a particular age group. This is especially important for our scope, as the perspective on gender role norms, can differ between age groups.

3.5 Tools of analysis

The data conducted from the survey in Qualtrics was transcribed to and analyzed in the statistical program IBM SPSS, version 25. A total of 234 responses, larger than 200 respondents made parametric testing possible (Malhotra 2008). To compare means between the experimental group and the control group and to test the hypotheses, independent sample T-tests were performed. Furthermore, mediation analyses were performed, with the Baron & Kenny (1986) mediation analysis procedures, followed by the Sobel test (1982) to calculate the significance of the meditation effects. The significance level was at this stage set to 1% (Sobel 1982, Baron, Kenny 1986). Finally was a bivariate correlation analysis conducted, to measure Pearson's correlation coefficient to examine the relationship between the two examined mediator variables.

3.6 Reliability and validity

3.6.1 Reliability

To attain high reliability were several aspects taken into consideration. First, the sample size was aimed to be a minimum of 200 respondents since this was a feasible sample size to collect within the time frame of the thesis. Secondly, the data collection aimed to reach a broad spectrum of respondents, with different demographic parameters. The large sample size increases the reliability, however, to enhance it even further the data could have been collected over more extended time. Due to the time frame of the thesis, this was not feasible.

Lastly, manipulation of stimuli and survey pictures were taken into account through previously tested measures in correlation with Cronbach's Alpha. The survey was also designed in a manner, so each survey picture was randomly chosen for the respondent, increasing the reliability of the test (Bryman, Bell 2011).

Measures and questions used in the survey were collected from previously used academic papers and similar studies to the largest possible extent. However, as before mentioned, no satisfactory measure of consumer-perceived empathy was to be found. Therefore a new measure was derived from the Interpersonal Reactivity Index four dimensions of empathy; fantasy, emotional concern, perspective taking and personal distress (Davis 1983). All questions were responded to at a 10-point scale, both in terms of Likert scale and bipolar scale (Bryman, Bell 2011) The scale made it possible to identify smaller deviations then a scale with fewer points would enable for.

3.6.2 Validity

This section aims to outline actions taken to ensure the validity of the study and to what degree the research question has been examined in a trustworthy and relevant manner. Internal validity refers to the causality within the study. To ensure internal validity, a causal relationship between two or more variables needs to hold (Bryman, Bell 2011). That means the causal link between the measured effects and the independent variable, within this study; a causal link between the independent variable portrayal of non-stereotypical gender roles in advertising and the measured effects. Since it was an online study, it was not possible to control the surroundings in which the survey was taken, which could, to some extent, effect how the respondent reacted to the stimuli. On the other hand, were introduction and question set the same for all respondents except for the different images in the main study and control group, which increases the validity. Furthermore, most of the variables were measured through multi-item questions. This made it possible to create an index for each variable, hence test the significance using Cronbach's Alpha.

Several actions were taken to get a high level of external validity, which refers to which extent the results of the study can be applied to other contexts and possibility to apply the research in a more general manner. Hence, the design and distribution of the study are important. The questionnaire was distributed online to reach respondents outside Stockholm. However, data on the demographics of the respondents were limited. Preferably the data

should have contained more information to ensure that demographic and geographical variables were representable for the overall Swedish population (Bryman, Bell 2011). This was however not possible due to the time frame of the research. Furthermore, respondents' awareness of the fact that the study took place in an artificial rather than a natural context could potentially have led to results with somewhat lower validity.

4. Results

Below section will present the results of the main study. To support or reject the previously outlined hypotheses, each one will be presented with finding from the data set. Lastly, additional findings will be presented.

4.1 Greater signaled effort on behalf of the advertiser for non-stereotypical ads

The signaled effort on behalf of the advertiser was tested through the indicated level on non-stereotypical ads versus stereotypical ads. Through the application of independent samples t-test, the mean between the two groups was distinguished and compared. The significance level was measured by a one-sided test. Following results were found:

Table 1.
Perceived signaled effort on behalf of the advertiser, measured by independent samples t-test.

	Mean Values					
	Non-Stereotypical Ad	Stereotypical Ad	*Difference*	*Significance*	*Respondents*	*Results*
Perceived effort advertiser	5.037	3.291	*1.746*	*p<0,01*	*234*	*Supported*

Since the perceived effort on behalf of the advertiser showed a mean of 5.037 for the non-stereotypical ad, and the stereotypical ad a mean of 3.290, the effort was perceived as significantly greater for the non-stereotypical ad, with a difference of 1.746. Thus, H1 is supported.

4.2 Greater signaled ability of the brand for non-stereotypical ads

The signaled ability of the brand was researched through the indicated level on non-stereotypical ads versus stereotypical ads. In the same way as applied to the previous hypothesis, in section 4.1, the mean between the two groups was distinguished and compared by independent samples t-test. The significance level was measured by a one-sided test. Following results were found:

Table 2.
Perceived signaled ability of the brand, measured by independent samples t-test.

	Mean Values					
	Non-Stereotypical Ad	Stereotypical Ad	*Difference*	*Significance*	*Respondents*	*Results*
Perceived ability brand	5.114	3.621	*1.493*	*p<0,01*	*234*	*Supported*

The perceived signaled ability of the brand shows a mean of 5.114 for the non-stereotypical ad, and the stereotypical ad a mean of 3.621. The effort was perceived as significantly greater for the non-stereotypical ad, with a difference of 1.493. Thus, H2 is supported.

4.3 Perceived product quality for non-stereotypical ads

The perceived product quality was tested through the indicated level on non-stereotypical ads versus stereotypical ads. The mean between the two groups was distinguished and compared by independent samples t-test. The significance level was measured by a one-sided test. Following results were found:

Table 3.
Perceived product quality, measured by independent samples t-test.

	Mean Values					
	Non-Stereotypical Ad	Stereotypical Ad	*Difference*	*Significance*	*Respondents*	*Results*
Perceived product quality	5.302	4.482	*0.821*	*p<0,01*	*234*	*Supported*

The perceived product quality has a mean of 5.302 for the non-stereotypical ad, and the stereotypical ad a mean of 4.482. The quality was perceived as higher for the non-stereotypical ad, with a difference of 0.821. Support for H3 was thus found.

4.4 Brand-related effects for non-stereotypical ads

To research the brand-related effects for non-stereotypical ads, following three parameters were studied; ad attitude, brand attitude and purchase intention (Åkestam 2017b). The mean for all parameters was distinguished and compared between the two groups through independent samples t-test. The significance levels were all measured through one-sided tests. Following results were found:

Table 4.
Brand-Related effects, measured by independent samples t-test.

	Mean Values					
	Non-Stereotypical Ad	Stereotypical Ad	*Difference*	*Significance*	*Respondents*	*Results*
Brand attitude	5.482	4.584	*0.897*	*p<0,01*	*234*	*Supported*
Ad attitude	5.627	4. 345	*1.282*	*p<0,01*	*234*	*Supported*
Purchase intention	4.018	2.943	*1.070*	*p<0,01*	*234*	*Supported*

Brand attitude was perceived as significantly higher for the non-stereotypical ad (5.482) versus the stereotypical ad (4.584), creating a difference of 0,897. Thus, H4a is supported.
Ad attitude was perceived as significantly higher for the non-stereotypical ad (5.627) versus the stereotypical ad (4.345), creating a difference of 1.282. Thus, H4b is supported.
Purchase intention was perceived as significantly higher for the non-stereotypical ad (4.018) versus the stereotypical ad (2.943), creating a difference of 1.070. Thus, H4c is supported.

4.5 Mediation analysis

The reasoning behind H3 and H4a-c was based on the belief that perceived effort on behalf of the advertiser and perceived brand-ability would mediate the effect on perceived product quality, brand attitude, ad attitude and purchase intention. Both mediators were expected to impact the dependents. The mediation effect was tested with the Baron & Kenny (1986) mediation analysis procedures (table 5), followed by the Sobel (1982) test to calculate the significance of the mediation effects (table 6). Perceived efforts on behalf of the advertiser and perceived brand-ability have been shortened to ‘signaled effort’ and ‘signaled ability’ in the equations below.

Figure 2: Mediator analyses of the variable Perceived Effort

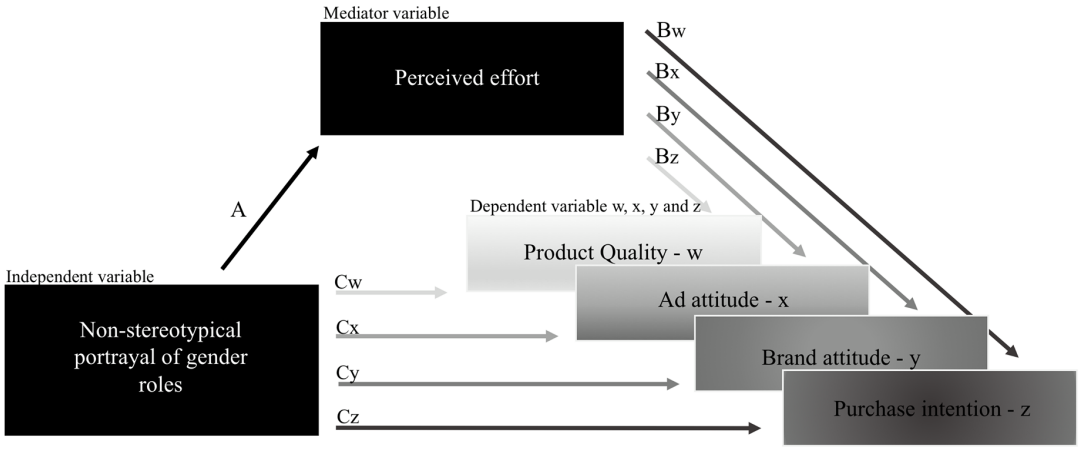
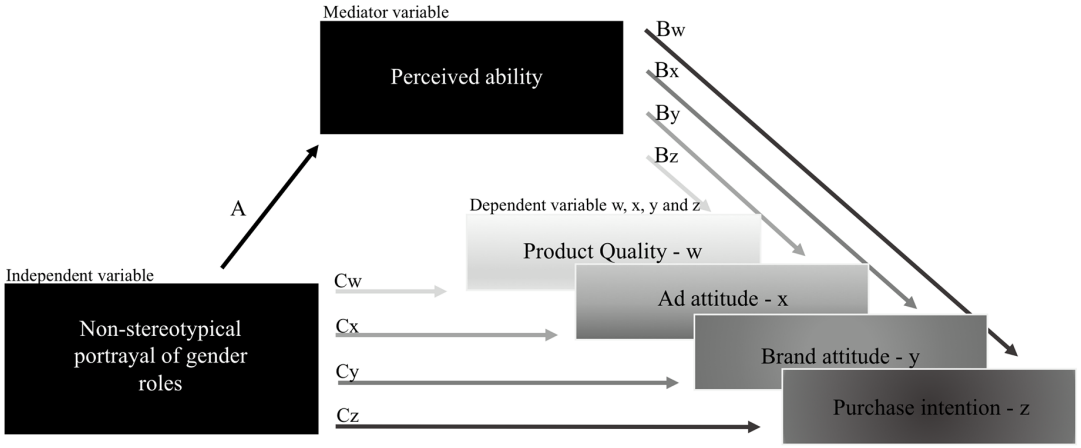


Figure 3: Mediator analyses of the variable Perceived Ability



The mediation analysis' four conditions tested must be satisfied if a mediating effect prevails. The testing procedure is presented together with the results in table 7. No problematic multicollinearity or heteroscedasticity prevailed in in the analyzed regressions.

Step 1: The non-stereotypical ad must significantly correlate with the four dependent variables as it is the single independent variable in regressions (Path C).

If non-stereotypical advertising has an effect on perceived product quality, brand attitude, ad attitude and purchase intention due to the mediation of perceived effort on behalf of the advertiser and perceived brand-ability, then the non-stereotypical ad must have a significantly positive effect on the four dependent variables.

Four simple linear regressions were run with each of the four dependent variables and the non-stereotypical ad as the independent.
Regressions 1-4: $Dependent\ variable_i = (\beta_o + \beta_1 Non\ Sterotypical\ Ad + u_i)$

To test for mediation, the initial calculation control for the total effects of non-stereotypical ads (NSA) on perceived product quality (PQ), brand attitude (BA), ad attitude (AA) and purchase intention (PI) are identical to the calculations for H3 and H4a-c, presented in Table 3 and Table 4. The total effect of the non-stereotypical ad on perceived product quality (mean of 5.302 for the non-stereotypical ad, and the stereotypical ad a mean of 4.482) showed a positive effect (total βNSA → βPQ = 0.205, p < 0,01). The effect on brand attitude was also positive, with a mean value of 5.482 for the non-stereotypical ad, versus the stereotypical ad 4.584 (total βNSA → βBA = 0,201, p< 0,01). In addition, ad attitude was also positively affected (mean of 5.627 for the non-stereotypical ad versus the stereotypical ad 4.345, βNSA → βAA = 0.282, p < 0,01). Finally, the effect on purchase intention was also positive (mean of 4.018 for the non-stereotypical ad versus the stereotypical ad 2.943, βNSA → βPI = 0.259, p < 0,01). **A significant relationship between the non-stereotypical ad and the dependent variables (Path C) could be confirmed.**

Step 2: The non-stereotypical ad must significantly correlate with higher levels of the mediators, signaled effort on behalf of the advertiser and perceived ability of brand (Path A).

Two simple linear regressions were run.
Regression 5: $Signaled\ ability_i = (\beta_o + \beta_1 Non\ Sterotypical\ Ad + u_i)$
Regression 6: $Signaled\ effort_i = (\beta_o + \beta_1 Non\ Sterotypical\ Ad + u_i)$.

The data showed, that in line with H1 and H2, non-stereotypical ads had a positive effect on perceived effort on behalf of the advertiser (EA) (mean of 5.037 for the non-stereotypical ad, and the stereotypical ad 3.291, βNSA → βEA = 0.377, p< 0.01) and perceived ability of the brand (AB) (mean of 5.114 for the non-stereotypical ad, and the stereotypical ad 3.621,

βNSA → βAB = 0.336, p< 0,01. **A significant relationship between non-stereotypical ad and the two mediators (Path A) could be confirmed.**

Step 3: The mediators, perceived ability of brand and perceived effort on behalf of the advertiser, must be significantly correlated with the four dependent variables when the non-stereotypical ad is also included as an independent variable.

First, four multiple linear regressions were run with each of the four dependent variables, where the non-stereotypical ad and signaled effort on behalf of the advertiser were independent variables. Regression 7-10: $Dependent\ variable_i = (\beta_o + \beta_1 Non\ Sterotypical\ Ad + \beta_2 Signaled\ Effort + u_i)$.

This was followed by four more multiple linear regressions, which were run with each of the four dependent variables, where the non-stereotypical ad and signaled ability of brand were independent variables. Regression 11-15: $Dependent\ variable_i = (\beta_o + \beta_1 Non\ Stereotypical\ Ad + \beta_2 Signaled\ Ability + u_i)$.
A significant relationship between the mediators and all of the dependent variables (Path B) could be confirmed.

Step 4: The relationship between the non-stereotypical ad and the four dependent variables (Path C) must become non-significant (full mediation) or have a weaker significance (partial mediation) when perceived ability of brand or perceived effort on behalf of the advertiser is included in the model, compared to when the mediation variables are not controlled for in the model. The effects of Step 4 are estimated through the multiple linear regression equations in Step 3. The coefficient for the non-stereotypical ad decreased and was not significant for any of the four dependent variables when the mediators were added to the regression. The beta coefficients in Table 7 reveals that that perceived brand-ability have a greater effect on the dependent variables than perceived effort advertiser for all dependent variables except for ad attitude. **Path C became non-significant which confirms the mediation.**

Table 5: Regression coefficients, test of mediation by the perceived effort on behalf of the advertiser and the perceived ability of the brand

Variables	Standardized Beta Coefficient	t-Statistic	p <
Dependent variable Perceived Product Quality			
Independent variables			
Non-stereotypical ad	0.205	3.169	0.01
Non-stereotypical ad (after inclusion of perceived effort)	0.010	0.17	n.s
Perceived effort on behalf of the advertiser	0.518	8.547	0.01
Non-stereotypical ad (after inclusion of perceived brand ability)	0.010	0.17	n.s
Perceived ability of the brand	0.676	13.027	0.01
Dependent variable Brand Attitude			
Independent variables			
Non-stereotypical ad	0.201	3.119	0.01
Non-stereotypical ad (after inclusion of perceived effort)	- 0.01	- 0.195	n.s
Perceived effort on behalf of the advertiser	0.563	9.556	0.01
Non-stereotypical ad (after inclusion of perceived brand ability)	- 0.034	- 0.664	n.s
Perceived ability of the brand	0.697	13.734	0.01
Dependent variable Ad Attitude			
Independent variables			
Non-stereotypical ad	0.282	4.475	0.01
Non-stereotypical ad (after inclusion of perceived effort)	0.079	1.352	n.s
Perceived effort on behalf of the advertiser	0.697	13.734	0.01
Non-stereotypical ad (after inclusion of perceived brand ability)	0.083	1.523	n.s
Perceived ability of the brand	0.592	10.847	0.01
Dependent variable Purchase Intention			
Independent variables			
Non-stereotypical ad	0.259	4.087	0.01
Non-stereotypical ad (after inclusion of perceived effort)	0.063	1.054	n.s
Perceived effort on behalf of the advertiser	0.522	8.787	0.01
Non-stereotypical ad (after inclusion of perceived brand ability)	0.044	0.832	n.s
Perceived ability of the brand	0.641	12.172	0.01

Note: n.s = not significant

Significance

The Sobel test (1982) was conducted to determine the significance of the mediation effects. The Sobel constants are; a = unstandardized coefficient for the association between the independent variable and the mediator (path a), b = unstandardized coefficient for the association between the dependent variable and the mediator when the independent variable

is included in the regression (path b), Sa = standard error of a, Sb = standard error of b. The Sobel test showed that all mediations are significant, results presented in table 6.

Table 6: Sobel test constants and statistics

Mediation	Sobel constants	Sobel test statistic	p-value
Dependent: Product Quality Independents: Non-stereotypical ad, Perceived Effort Advertiser	a = 1.746 b = 0.446 Sa= 0.282 Sb= 0.052	5.02013265	<0,01
Dependent: Product Quality Independents: Non-stereotypical ad, Perceived Ability brand	a = 1.493 b = 0.608 Sa= 0.275 Sb= 0.047	5.00609103	<0,01
Dependent: Brand Attitude Independents: Non-stereotypical ad, Perceived Effort Advertiser	a = 1.746 b = 0.543 Sa= 0.282 Sb= 0.057	5.19136809	<0,01
Dependent: Brand Attitude Independents: Non-stereotypical ad, Perceived Ability brand	a = 1.493 b = 0.702 Sa= 0.275 Sb= 0.051	5.05044161	<0,01
Dependent: Ad Attitude Independents: Non-stereotypical ad, Perceived Effort Advertiser	a = 1.746 b = 0.529 Sa= 0.282 Sb= 0.057	5.15051482	<0,01
Dependent: Ad attitude Independents: Non-stereotypical ad, Perceived Ability brand	a = 1.493 b = 0.606 Sa= 0.275 Sb= 0.056	4.85262582	<0,01
Dependent: Purchase Intention Independents: Non-stereotypical ad, Perceived Effort Advertiser	a = 1.746 b = 0.465 Sa= 0.282 Sb= 0.053	5.05869041	<0,01
Dependent: Purchase Intention Independents: Non-stereotypical ad, Perceived Ability brand	a = 1.493 b = 0.595 Sa= 0.282 Sb= 0.049	4.9562661	<0,01

Correlation between the two mediating variables

A Pearson test was conducted to measure correlation between the two mediating variables, the correlation coefficient between Perceived effort on behalf f the advertiser and Perceived ability of the brand was 0.673, $p < 0,01$.

4.6 Consumer-perceived social connectedness for non-stereotypical ads

Consumer-perceived social connectedness was studied through the indicated level on non-stereotypical ads versus stereotypical ads. The mean between the two groups was

distinguished and compared by independent samples t-test. The significance level was measured by a one-sided test. Following results were found:

Table 7.
Consumer-perceived social connectedness, measured by independent samples t-test.

	Mean Values					
	Non-Stereotypical Ad	Stereotypical Ad	*Difference*	*Significance*	*Respondents*	*Results*
Perceived social connectedness	4.715	3.815	*0.900*	*p<0,01*	*234*	*Supported*

The mean for perceived social connectedness was 4.715 for the non-stereotypical ad, and the stereotypical ad had a mean of 3.815. Social connectedness was higher for the non-stereotypical ad, with a difference of 0.900. Thus, H5a is supported.

4.7 Consumer-perceived empathy for non-stereotypical ads rejected

Consumer-perceived empathy was examined through the indicated levels on non-stereotypical ads versus stereotypical ads. The mean between the two groups was distinguished and compared by independent samples t-test. The significance level was measured by a one-sided test. Following results were found:

Table 8.
Consumer-perceived empathy, measured by independent samples t-test.

	Mean Values					
	Non-Stereotypical Ad	Stereotypical Ad	*Difference*	*Significance*	*Respondents*	*Results*
Perceived empathy	6.592	6.412	*0.245*	*p=0.245*	*234*	*Supported*

Perceived empathy has a mean of 6.592 for the non-stereotypical ad, and the stereotypical ad a mean of 6.412. Empathy was perceived as higher for the non-stereotypical ad, with a difference of 0.245. However, the result was not significance as $p=0.245 > 0.01$, thus H5b is rejected even though it indicates the hypothesized direction.

4.8 Additional findings

As the data was conducted and analyzed, there was an additional finding regarding the difference in response between women and men. This was non-hypothesized but will be highlighted within this section.

Table 9.
Brand related effects for men, measured by independent samples t-test.

	Mean Values				
	Non-Stereotypical Ad	Stereotypical Ad	*Difference*	*Significance*	*Respondents*
Ad attitude	5.609	4.015	*1.594*	*p<0,01*	*131*
Brand attitude	5.659	4.504	*1.156*	*p<0,01*	*131*
Purchase intention	4.065	2.482	*1.584*	*p<0,05**	*131*

Table 10.
Brand related effects for women, measured by independent samples t-test.

	Mean Values				
	Non-Stereotypical Ad	Stereotypical Ad	*Difference*	*Significance*	*Respondents*
Ad attitude	5.639	4.559	*1.080*	*p<0,01*	*175*
Brand attitude	5.366	4.601	*0.765*	*p<0,05**	*175*
Purchase intention	3.979	3.263	*0.716*	*p<0,01*	*175*

As seen in table 9 and table 10, there was a difference in reactions between women and men when exposed to the ads. Women showed following differences (D) between the stereotypical and non-stereotypical ad; $D_{AA,women} = 1.080, D_{BA,women} = 0.765$ and $D_{PI,women} = 0.716$. Same calculations for men showed differences of; $D_{AA,men} = 1.594$, $D_{BA,men} = 1.156$ and $D_{PI,men} = 1.584$. Results show for Ad attitude $Difference_{men} = 1.594 > Difference_{women} = 1.080$, brand attitude $Difference_{men} = 1.156 > Difference_{women} = 0.765$, purchase intention $Difference_{men} = 1.584 > Difference_{women} = 0.716$. These findings show a significantly higher difference between the two mean values in the experimental and control group, for men than for women, showing that men had a stronger reaction to the ads.

4.9 Summary of results

H1	Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will generate higher signaled effort on behalf of the advertiser than stereotypical ads	**Supported**
H2	Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will generate higher signaled ability of the brand than stereotypical ads	**Supported**
H3	Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will generate higher levels of perceived product quality than stereotypical ads	**Supported**
H4a	Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will generate higher levels of ad attitude than stereotypical ads	**Supported**
H4b	Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will generate higher levels of brand attitude than stereotypical ads	**Supported**
H4c	Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will generate higher levels of purchase intentions than stereotypical ads	**Supported**
H5	Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will generate higher levels of consumer-perceived social connectedness than stereotypical ads	**Supported**
H6	Ads with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals will generate higher levels of consumer-perceived empathy than stereotypical ads	**Rejected**

5. Analysis and discussion

This study aimed to investigate the effects of non-stereotypical gender role portrayals in advertising and to present plausible explanations for the results of the study. The results showed that the use of non-stereotypical gender roles portrayals in advertising had positive effects on marketing signals about the brand, which in turn mediated an impact on perceived product quality and the brand-related effects brand attitude, ad attitude and purchase intention. Furthermore, it was concluded that ads challenging gender stereotypes lead to positive social effects, in terms of increased consumer-perceived social connectedness, but that the effect on consumer-perceived empathy could not be determined. Additional findings investigating the difference in response in regards to gender showed that men had a higher difference in means between the stereotypical and non-stereotypical ads on the parameters ad attitude, brand attitude, and purchase intentions compared to women.

5.1 Marketing signals from thinking outside the gender roles

The study shows that respondents perceived the non-stereotypical ads to signal a greater effort on behalf of the advertiser and a greater brand-ability compared to stereotypical ads. It indicates that the use of non-stereotypical gender roles in ads is an effective way to sending marketing signals, which will rub off on the brand. This is compatible with studies using creative advertising as stimuli to measure effects brand-ability and effort, which produced similar results (Dahlén, Rosengren & Törn 2008). The results also support findings which state that consumers can assess if efforts are above normal as non-stereotypical is expected to require more time, research and thought than applying a more traditional, well-proven advertising concept (Dahlén, Rosengren & Törn 2008).

5.1.1 Challenge gender roles and signal confidence

The underlying logic behind high levels of perceived effort on behalf of the advertiser is that consumers believe only companies who have a high ability to serve the market and who are confident in their product would be able to allocate resources in terms of cognitive effort to their ads, which indicates that the company has been successful previously (Dahlén, Rosengren & Törn 2008). This, in turn, increases credibility and as we extend this reasoning to the discussion of using non-stereotypical ads, it can be argued that companies that dare to take risks by challenge stereotypes are perceived to have a higher level of brand fitness and smartness than other brands who play it safe by using proven advertising concepts. Since the signaled effort proved to have a mediating effect on both product quality and brand-related effects, indicates that the success of a company can be affected by the use of challenging gender stereotypes in their advertising.

5.1.2 Non-stereotypical gender roles an indication of a promising future

Looking closer at perceived brand-ability, it is plausible to believe that the non-stereotypical element in the ads is seen as divergent, different from competitors and as innovative. This, in turn, says less about the brand's historical success which is more related to signaled effort, and instead more about the possibility of future success of the company. Companies, which are innovative and dares to think differently in their ads, send signals of being able to improve their existing product portfolio and create new, innovative additions to it (Dahlén, Rosengren & Törn 2008).

The fact that non-stereotypical gender roles can increase the perceived brand-ability of a company is of great importance due to its connection to the success rate of new product

introductions, marketing activities and the valuation of the company (Luo, Bhattacharya 2006, Brown, Dacin 1997). Previous research indicates that the use of marketing signals, similar to other marketing activities, will have a larger effect on lesser-known brands in comparison to well-known brands (Kirmani, Rao 2000). Even so, we would argue that signaled ability is vital for established brands as well, as it is a way to signal that they are continuously improving and reinventing themselves (Dahlén, Rosengren & Törn 2008). Featuring non-stereotypical gender roles can therefor, be a tool for building customer loyalty as it indicates that the brand will develop innovative, qualitative products in the future.

Since the use of non-stereotypical gender role portrayals enhances perceived brand-ability, which, according to the nextopia effect theory, consumers can use to assess the brand's future products, it can positively affect demand for products that have not yet been launched. Furthermore, as consumers base their opinion of the brand and its current products on the brand's future potential, it can also lead to an increased demand for the existing product portfolio (Dahlen & Karsberg, 2016). Extending the discussion further, this implies that companies that currently try to signal quality by highlighting past performance and brand reputation, should consider altering their communication strategy towards a greater focus on signaling ability, which can be achieved with non-stereotypical gender role portrayals.

5.1.3 Ability greater than effort

The results showed that perceived ability had a higher mean compared to the signaled effort for the non-stereotypical ads. A plausible explanation is that non-stereotypical portrayals as stimuli in ads is more an indication of the brand being modern and innovative, than trying hard and putting a lot of effort into an advertisement. This is in line with previous research stating that ads primarily focus on presenting the brand in a unique and innovative way that will persuade the consumer that it will deliver a superior product compared to the competition, which can be done by signaling ability, rather than trying hard (Dahlén, Rosengren & Törn 2008).

5.2 The mediating effects of marketing signals

Applying advertising signal theory, we found that signaled effort on behalf of the advertiser and signaled ability of the brand was perceived as higher for ads portraying non-stereotypical gender roles and that the two marketing signals, in turn, enhance the consumer's perception of the brand and its offering. The correlation analysis also showed that there was a significant

positive, uphill correlation occurring between the two mediating variables, which can be explained by that effort and ability both signal that the company is successful and can deliver a satisfactory product. This indicates that the marketing signals communicated in the advertising message are essential mediators in the customer-brand relationship. As these signals had a positive effect on product quality, brand attitude, ad attitude as well as purchase intention, it adds to the body of research indicating that customers perception of what an advertisement signals will have an impact on a brand level (Kirmani, Rao 2000, Modig, Dahlén & Colliander 2014, Whysall 2005).

5.3 Non-stereotypical gender roles a signal of product quality

The product quality was assessed more favorably in the non-stereotypical ads, which is in line with previous research findings which indicate that perceived effort and ability will affect perceived product quality when actual product quality is difficult to assess, such as in an ad with a blurred out the logo (Bagwell, Ramey 1988, Milgrom, Roberts 1986, Nelson 1974). Perceived ability, which signals the possibility of future success, had a greater mediating effect on product quality than perceived effort, which says more about the brand's past performance. This in line with findings regarding the nextopia effect, which indicates the consumers base their perceptions of the brand's products on their expectations of future products, rather than past experiences with the brand (Dahlen & Karsberg, 2016).

5.4 Positive impact on brand-related effects

The results of the study showed that the brand-related effects ad attitude, brand attitude, and purchase intention, were evaluated more positively for the non-stereotypical ads compared to the control group and that the effect was mediated by signaled effort and signaled ability of the brand.

The greatest observed difference between stereotypical and non-stereotypical portrayals was on the parameter ad attitude. This outcome could be explained by that ad attitude is the affective response to an advertising stimulus at a particular occasion, while brand attitude and purchase intention is something formed under a longer period (Lutz 1985). Several studies in the field of marketing signals have found connections between perceived brand-ability, perceived efforts and brand-related effects (Dahlén, Rosengren & Törn 2008), similar results were found in our study. A relationship was confirmed between the two mediation parameters and ad attitude. An interesting observation from the mediator analyses was that the parameter

perceived effort had a more significant effect on ad attitude than perceived ability. This stands out as brand-ability had a more significant effect on the brand-related effects brand attitude and purchase intention.

Similar to the analysis of the greater levels of perceived effort, a plausible explanation is that consumers interpret the non-stereotypical ad as a signal of the advertiser as confident and willing to put a lot of cognitive efforts into creating new norm-breaking advertising concepts. That signaled ability also mediated the effect on ad attitude is likely because an ad which deviates from the norm is perceived as divergent and novel, which has a positive impact on ad attitude (Smith et al. 2007). Thus, the consumer will like the ad more because it challenges norms and stereotypes instead of using obsolete and unrelatable stereotypes which consumers are used to seeing in ads. The fact that non-stereotypical gender roles can result in higher levels of ad attitude is of great significance as a consumer's opinion about an ad will create associations of the brand and help form brand attitude, impact purchase intention and in turn positively influence sales (MacKenzie, Lutz & Belch 1986).

The mediator analysis showed that signaled ability and signaled effort influenced brand attitude and purchase intention. As aforementioned did signal ability have the greatest influence on brand attitude and purchase intention of the two mediating variables. This could be connected with how perceived ability indicates that the brand will be able to improve existing products and create new, innovative products in the future, which results in amplified levels of brand attitude and purchase intention. As brand attitude is the foundation of consumer behavior, it is of importance to emphasize that consumers evaluate a brand more favorable due to the use of non-stereotypical gender roles in advertising. To enhance the consumer's entire evaluation of a brand strengthens the brand and enables it to reap the marketing advantages associated with having a strong brand, which includes greater levels of purchase intention (Hoeffler, Keller 2003).

5.5 Social effects

5.5.1 A potential tool for increased social connectedness

As hypothesized in H5, portrayals of non-stereotypical gender roles in advertising did generate higher levels of social connectedness. This implies that a general effect on the consumers' social connectedness can be achieved by using portrayals of non-stereotypical gender roles. The non-stereotypical gender role stimulus used as a priming cue influenced the

parameter social connectedness. In line with the same reasoning and outcome of previous research, where the social priming cue was determined as an explanatory parameter of social connectedness as well as empathy (Åkestam 2017b, Åkestam, Rosengren & Dahlen 2017b).

This finding implies that there is a unanimous benefit for brands to use portrayals of non-stereotypical gender roles in their advertising. Such advertisements would not only positively impact brand-related effect, but also increase consumer perceived social connectedness and therefore benefit both the brand and the customer. This provides an opportunity for brands to have a positively influence on a societal level by featuring these portrayals in their advertising (Åkestam, Rosengren & Dahlen 2017b).

5.5.2 Empathy in the positive direction

In previous research has the connection between advertising and perceived empathy been established (Escalas, Stern 2003). As described in section 2.5.1, this depends on the individual's capability to build connections between themselves, portrayals of others within the ad and the advertising content (Stout, Leckenby 1986). Due to the salience of social groups, the ability of an individual to connect to other social groups is possible. Thus, if an individual generates salience to other social groups, this could increase the levels of self-others overlap and understanding for other individuals. This, in turn, generates higher levels of empathy (Galinsky, Ku & Wang 2005). The portrayals were predicted to generate awareness of the other gender and creating a sense of a “self” and “others” which was expected to spur the salience of the opposing gender. From this, we derived that non-stereotypical ads would generate higher levels of consumer-perceived empathy than stereotypical ads. As the results were not significant; therefore no general conclusion can be drawn.

Even though the hypothesis was rejected, it does not necessarily imply that non-stereotypical portrayals cannot lead to increased levels of empathy. Previous research with significant results was found for portrayal of homosexual and heterosexual couples. Portrayals of couples could potentially evoke feelings of empathy more easily than the portrayals in the study, as the feeling of being in love can be easier to relate to than portrayals of occupational status and role behavior. Therefore, if the stimuli created for our non-stereotypical advertising evoked equivalent powerful feelings, which enable for salience for other social groups, increased levels of empathy could potentially have been generated.

6. Conclusion and implications

6.1 Conclusion

In the introducing section of this thesis, the research area was presented and the research gap outlined. The under-researched area is closely related to topics, which have been looked into, however, the chosen topic in the scope had yet not been examined. The purpose was to contribute to the body of research of non-stereotypical gender role portrayals in advertising and examine the potential impact on market signals about the brand, brand-related effects, and social advertising effects.

The highly relevant topic of gender equality has been highlighted as equality between women and men are mainly based on the gender components occupational status and role behavior (Eisend 2010), which have been investigated in this thesis. The analysis touches upon the theory of marketing signals and its ability to influence brand-related effects. It further examines the potential connection between brand-related effects and social effects from advertising and the impact on a societal level. The two perspectives of whether advertising molds or mirror society were discussed and outlined as a discussion for further analysis.

Summarizing the findings, ads with non-stereotypical gender roles generated higher signaled effort on behalf of the advertiser and signaled ability of the brand than stereotypical ads. Furthermore, the levels of perceived product quality, ad attitude, brand attitude and purchase intention, were positively influenced by the measured marketing signals. Addressing the social effects, the level of social connectedness increased when the respondent was exposed to the non-stereotypical ad. On the other hand, there were no valid results found for the parameter empathy, thus, the prediction based on the presumption that non-stereotypical ads would generate greater levels of measured effects was rejected. To sum it up, except for empathy, were all other outcomes in line with the proposed results. Lastly, the additional findings show that the brand-related effects were evaluated more favorably for men than women. Given the limitations of the study are the main and the secondary research questions answered below.

Yes, non-stereotypical portrayals of gender roles in advertising can generate positive marketing signals about the brand, in terms of greater levels of signaled effort on behalf of the advertiser and signaled ability of the brand, compared to stereotypical portrayals.

Non-stereotypical portrayals of gender roles in advertising can generate positive social effects, in terms of increased social connectedness, compared to stereotypical ads.

6.2 Implications

Gender equality is a fundamental human right and an ever so relevant subject of concern (Eurostat 2017). While Sweden is considered to be one of the world's most gender equal societies, many would still argue that the country is far from its desired state (Haines 2017, Hodgson 2017, Amarendra 2017, Crouch 2017). To use non-stereotypical portrayals in advertising can contribute to more equality and equal life opportunity between women and men, which is an important implication.

As the results show higher levels of perceived signaled effort and ability, and levels of brand-related effects, increases perceived product quality and positive social effect in terms of social connectedness, this implies that the use of non-stereotypical advertising is beneficial both on a brand-level and on a societal level. From a marketer's perspective, this could spur and inspire them to include this kind of non-stereotypical ads in their marketing strategies. A practical implication that can be drawn from this is that marketers have the opportunity to increase the perceived ability of the brand and perceived effort on behalf of the advertiser, by altering their existing advertising strategy to include more non-stereotypical gender role portrayals in their advertising. An important takeaway is also that these signals about the brand can be enhanced in a more cost-efficient way than perceived advertising expense, which is another way to signal that the brand is confident in the product and successful. While a higher level of perceived advertising expense requires an increased spending on advertising, increased levels of perceived effort and ability could instead be achieved by creating more thoughtful advertisements and avoiding using stereotypical portrayals.

The results are valid for both women and men across a broad age span, which makes it relevant to marketers targeting different consumer segments and eliminates potential speculation that it is exclusively applicable for a younger segment that are more positive to gender equality. From a brand's perspective, the use of non-stereotypical ads can enhance brand-related effects, which in turn increases brand equity and sales. It also enables brands to engage in the issue of gender equality by enhancing perceived social connectedness through the use of non-stereotypical portrayals. In summary, using non-stereotypical gender roles

portrayals can have positive implications for brands and society as a whole. We concurrently encourage marketers to include these portrayals in advertising and be more mindful of how women and men are depicted in advertising in the future.

6.3 Critique and limitations

As the area of research is within a research gap, the findings of the study should be viewed with caution since there are few similar studies to compare the results with. The scope of the thesis has also been limited in several aspects. The notion of gender role stereotypes consists of four different components, however, only two of them were studied in this thesis. Consequently are the findings primarily applicable when featuring role behavior and occupational status in advertising. Furthermore, the stimuli used in the questionnaire only portrayals a few versions of role behavior and occupational status. The print ads were also manipulated with the purpose to be used in the study. Thus, findings were based on simulated ads and not real ones, which could have affected the result.

Due to the limited time frame of the thesis was the data collected at one occasion, and the respondents asked to answer the questions instantly after being exposed to the ads. The study is therefore limited to measuring short-term effects of non-stereotypical portrayals. Moreover, did the survey only contained two demographic parameters; gender and age. Thus, data does not necessarily provide a truthful demographic overview of the Swedish society, and general conclusions drawn from the study should be made with caution. These limitations were however monitored and handled as carefully as possible, as they were known from the start.

An additional limitation that needs to be taken into consideration is that the perceived level of stereotypicality in the print ads was only measured in the pre-study, but not in the main study. It was therefore only validated in the pre-study that the developed stimuli ads were perceived as non-stereotypical for the experimental group and stereotypical for the control group. This is motivated by that the difference in means in perceived stereotypicality between the stereotypical and non-stereotypical ads in the pre-study was so considerable ($M_{stereotypical} = 7.3$ compared to $M_{non-stereotypical} = 2.88$) and the sample group large enough to verify an assumption that the ads would be perceived in a similar way in the main study. For a survey distributed online, there is always a risk of external factors affecting the respondents, which are outside the author's control. Factors such as mindset or external environment could

potentially lead to social influences, unintended reactions or priming. It can therefore not be ensured that the respondent answered truthfully at all times.

6.4 Future research

The scope of the thesis was limited to researching the two components of stereotypicality, occupational status and role behavior, and their influence on marketing signal, brand-related effects, and social effects when included in print advertising. Thus, the findings are based on a study that was carried out only once. As the two studied gender stereotype components have also been identified as under-researched areas in comparison to primarily physical appearance stereotypes, further studies are needed to validate the results. It would also be of interest to investigate if the same results would occur when using the other gender stereotype components personal traits and physical characteristics as stimuli in ads.

In addition, in the study that was carried out, logos and company names were blurred out to avoid prior brand associations. Prior research in the field of marketing signal theory claim that they have a larger effect for a lesser-known brand, it would be interesting to compare the results with a similar study where logos of well-known and unknown brands were included in the ads. The market signaling parameters studied in the thesis were limited to the signaled ability of the brand and signaled effort on behalf of the advertiser, while for example signaled expense was excluded. Therefore we suggest further research on if the stereotypical of gender roles affect perceived expense.

An unexpected finding from the study was the differences in levels of brand-related effects between women and men. Brand attitude, ad attitude, and purchase intention were all given lower ratings for the stereotypical ad by male respondents. Female respondents gave higher ratings on these parameters for the same ad. Similarly, were men rating the non-stereotypical ad higher than females on all parameters. Consequently, was the calculated difference between the experimental ground and the control group greater for men than women. As no plausible explanation for these results was found, it is an area of interest for further research.

As the results on the parameter perceived empathy were excluded due to unacceptable levels of significance, additional research in the field of gender roles and empathy is suggested. Furthermore, were only two social effects researched. Hence it would be if interest to examine other potential social effects generated by non-stereotypical portrayals of gender

roles. This should be emphasized as future findings could be relevant both for marketers and on a societal level. Finally, we also suggest that similar studies are carried out in other geographical areas than Sweden as consumers' perceptions of gender roles in advertising can differ depending on the cultural context.

7. References

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8. Appendix

8.1 Main study

Questionnaire in native language, Swedish

Undersökning om reklam

Följande undersökning har tagit fram för att undersöka effekter av olika reklamannonser. **Enkäten beräknas ta två minuter**. Du kommer se en annons och därefter svara på några korta frågor. Annonsen är framtagen för produkter för både män och kvinnor. För att undvika effekter av varumärkesigenkänning har logotyp suddats ut. Dina svar är anonyma.

Tack för din medverkan!

Vad är din åsikt om **annonsen**?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Dålig	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Bra
Ogillar	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Gillar
Icke tilltalande	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Tilltalande

Vad är din åsikt om **varumärket** bakom annonsen?

Ange din spontana åsikt, trots att varumärket är anonymt.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Dålig	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Bra
Ogillar	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Gillar
Icke tilltalande	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Tilltalande

Vad är din uppfattning om företagets **produktkvalitet**?

Ange din spontana åsikt, trots att produktinformationen är begränsad.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Låg	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Hög
Sämre än genomsnittet	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Bättre än genomsnittet
Sämre än konkurrenterna	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Bättre än konkurrenterna

I vilken utsträckning håller du med om följande påståenden?

	1: Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer fullständigt: 10
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Jag vill **veta mer** om företagets produkter	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jag vill **testa** företagets produkter	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jag vill **köpa** företagets produkter	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

I vilken utsträckning håller du med om följande påstående?

	1: Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer fullständigt: 10
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Jag känner samhörighet till personerna i reklamen	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jag liknar personerna i reklamen	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Jag är positivt inställt till personerna i reklamen	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

I vilken utsträckning håller du med om följande påstående?

	1: Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer fullständigt: 10
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Jag kan enkelt föreställa mig hur jag skulle känna om jag var någon av personerna i annonsen	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Om personerna i annonsen var verkliga, skulle jag bry mig om deras välmående	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Om jag hade en argumentation med någon just nu, skulle jag försöka se saker från både min och deras synvinkel	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Om jag såg att någon gjorde sig illa, skulle jag vara väldigt upprörd just nu	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

I vilken utsträckning upplever du att företaget lagt ned...

	1: Lite									Mycket: 10
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Tid bakom annonsen	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Ansträngning bakom annonsen	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tanke bakom annonsen	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

I vilken utsträckning upplever du att företaget är...

	1: Instämmer inte alls									Instämmer fullständigt: 10
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Ledande	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Framgångsrikt	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Modernt	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Vilket kön tillhör du?

- ○ Man
- ○ Kvinna
- ○ Annat

Hur gammal är du? (siffra)

8.2 Control pictures used in main study







8.3 Experimental pictures used in main study





