

Women in Advertising

Roles changing, says UTSA marketing professor, but at a slower pace than 4 years ago

By SUSAN BOE

San Antonio.

The roles of women in advertising are changing, but at a much slower pace than four years ago.

That's the report from Dr. Ron Carey, assistant professor of marketing at The University of Texas at San Antonio, who says women are still "number 2" in American advertisements.

"In 1972 we saw a drastic change in advertising from the traditional female roles," Carey said. "However, in the four years since, the changes have been more gradual."

A recent study by Carey showed that men's roles are also changing, with men being shown in more executive and high status positions.

The UTSA professor examined the roles of both men and women in recent issues of Life, Newsweek, the New Yorker, Reader's Digest, Saturday Review, Time and U.S. News and World Report — the same magazines used in a study four years earlier by other researchers.

"Advertising is an important source for stereotypes," explained Carey about the need to study sex roles in ads.

His research revealed that from 1970 to 1976 the proportion of women shown at work outside the home had increased from 9 to 24 percent. However, the number of women shown as workers was still only half as many as males (48 percent) and the rate of increase for women had slowed greatly (only a 2 percent change since 1972).

The occupations held by working men and women in ads also varied significantly in the 1976 study. "The number of men depicted as high level business executives nearly tripled between 1970 and 1976 (from 10 to 27 percent), but women are still not shown in this category," Carey noted.

As workers, 12 percent of the women in the ads were professionals, 18 percent were entertainers, 19 percent were salespersons and 52 percent were non-professional white collar workers.

"None of the women was a blue collar worker (none of the men was either) and no females were shown as soldiers or policemen," Carey commented.

As nonworkers, the number of women shown in family roles decreased from 23 percent in 1970 to 5 percent in 1976, although the majority of the change occurred between 1970 and 1972.

"Seventy-one percent of both the non-working men and the women were pictured in recreational roles, while 24 percent of the women and 25 percent of the men were used as 'decorations.'"

"It's interesting that most of the decorative women were young and pretty while most of the men were distinguished and successful looking," he explained.

From his study, Carey concludes that advertising reflects society rather than attempting to change it. "After all, the purpose of advertising is to sell a product, not advance some cause," he commented.

"Because of the changing perceptions of a woman's role, advertisers must be careful to appeal to, without alienating, both traditional and liberal women," he continued.

The pressure for advertisers to change

is minimal, Carey admits. "One study showed that even advocates of women's liberation don't react negatively to an ad if the usual use of the product is in the proper setting," he noted.

Yet another survey revealed that more

than three-fourths of the women would buy a product even if the advertisement included a depiction of women with which they disagreed.

Carey concludes that despite negative feelings about the illustration of women in

advertising, the only reason to expect further change is the advertiser's social conscience.

"Although women are holding new positions in society, these won't be reflected in advertising until they are more widespread," he concluded. •



Dr. Ron Carey, assistant professor of marketing at UTSA, examined the roles of women in magazine advertising