

## **Gender-Role Portrayals in Children's Television Advertisements**

**Félix Neto\***

*Universidade do Porto, Portugal*

and

**Adrian Furnham**

*University College London, UK*

### **ABSTRACT**

Using content analysis, gender role stereotyping in Portuguese television commercials aimed at children was examined. The goals of the study were to: (1) provide current data on level and content of gender stereotyping in Portugal; (2) compare levels of stereotyping in three countries, namely Portugal, the USA and Great Britain. One hundred and twenty two commercials were content analysed by two raters, one male and the other female, to check reliability. The advertised products covered by this analysis included toys, food, mass media communication equipment and others. Each advertisement was coded according to twelve criteria including the ethnicity and gender of the people appearing, gender of central figure and of any "voice-over" in the commercial, presence or absence of music, other sales-related content, activity, aggression and loudness. The results concerning gender-role were equivocal. Six of the nine analyses revealed significant differences among advertisements recorded in Portugal, United States and Britain. The implication for the regulation of advertisements to children is discussed.

Television has become a major source for acquiring cultural information during one's development. The influence and power of television on the beliefs and behaviours of viewers remains probably the most important area of research for media re-

\*Address correspondence relating to this paper to Félix Neto, Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação, Universidade do Porto, Rua do Campo Alegre, 1055, P-4150 Porto, Portugal, e-mail <fneto@psi.up.pt>. The authors wish to thank an anonymous reviewer for the help on an earlier version of this paper.

searchers. There is now fairly widespread conceptual agreement and empirical support for the view that television can and does profoundly influence both children and adults (e.g., Bryant and Zillman, 1994; Frueh and McGhee, 1975; Gunter, 1995; Jennings, Geis, and Brown, 1980; McGhee and Frueh, 1980; Miller and Reeves, 1976). As Courtney and Whipple (1983) have noted it "can influence intellectual development, change attitudes, contribute to aggressive behavior in children, teach children how to become consumers, encourage prosocial attitudes and behaviours, be an agent of political socialization, and teach racial stereotypes." (pp. 45-46).

Gerbner (1978) has described television as the "cosmic force" or the unquestioned environment into which one is born, such as pre-Reformation religion provided the social milieu in pre-industrial times. In most developed countries television has the widest audience of any medium. It is watched by all types of people regardless of national origin, race, social class, gender or age, and it is watched very frequently, often 3 to 4 hours per day. Recent British figures suggest the average individual watches 3.16 hours per day or over 22 hours per week (Furhnam and Imadzu, 2002). It has been estimated that in Portugal, the average time per day spent with television advertisements in the four Portuguese channels, from January to July 1996, was 11 hours (Publico, 28 November, 1996).

There are essentially two different, but compatible, views as to the role of television in society. The older view, though still supported by many, sees television as uni-casually influencing society. It is therefore a very powerful force. The more modern view is that children learn to stereotype by sex role early in life. Fried (1982) stated "before entering school, children are exposed to sex-typed models in television, movies, toys and games, child-rearing practices, and attitudes of individuals who people children's formative years" (p. 25). Around age five, children start to model the behaviours of adults, become more independent and develop their self-identity.

Although the contents of television advertisements have been extensively examined for gender differences, mainly in Anglophone cultures, less is known in other cultures. This study purposes to fill this gap; it is based on a sample of Portuguese television advertisements played in Portuguese, and thus contributes to the cross-cultural scope of such analyses. This research is the first to look at the gender-role stereotyping in Portugal children's television advertisements. But also as Buijzen and Valkenburg (2002, p. 349) have pointed out "a relatively small

number of studies have concentrated on the content of advertising aimed at children".

During the 1970s and 1980s, Portugal, like most developed countries, experienced substantial increases in the proportion of women in the workplace. In 2000 the female employment rate was 44.9% (Instituto Nacional de Estatistica, 2001). In the context of the European Union, Portugal is one of the countries with the highest female employment rate. The Government increased legislation to prohibit gender discrimination and appointed CIDM (Comissao para a Igualdade e Direitos da Mulher) whose office constitutes the governmental mechanism to obtain equality of opportunities and of rights. Surveys of family roles indicate some shifts in the patterns of division of household labor. In 1997/98 women constituted 56% of the students enrolled in college education. In sum, in recent decades Portugal, a small Catholic European nation, has experienced ideological, political and economic pressures concerning gender roles similar to those of other Western nations, and in this context it is of interest to assess the extent to which the mass media have responded to developments in the surrounding society. Portuguese television is seen in Portugal and by large populations from other countries (African countries speaking Portuguese and Portuguese emigrants around the world).

The purpose of this research is to explore the nature of gender stereotypes in Portuguese television advertising aimed specifically to children. The study will compare those data with earlier advertising research. Comparisons of stereotyping across nations contribute to a better understanding of stereotyping and its relationship with cultural factors.

Stereotypes in advertising on children's television programs have been a special problem because of their potential impact on gender socialisation and, subsequently, children's views of themselves and other people (Gunter, 1995). It is as a socializing agent that television is particularly powerful. Because viewing television involves the observation of others' behaviour and its reinforcement contingencies (Bandura, 1977), television is considered to be a major vehicle through which children learn about appropriate behaviors, particularly gender-appropriate behaviors, and about the relative desirability of performing those behaviors (Gunter, 1995).

Given the possibility that children might acquire negative stereotypes (Neto, 1997; Neto, Williams, and Widner, 1991) through television viewing has aroused concern among parents, educators, members of advertising industry and researchers. Some studies

have approached specifically the nature of gender role portrayals in advertisements that are directed at younger members of the audience, or which appear during children's televisions (Furnham, Abramsky and Gunter, 1997).

Research on stereotyping in advertising to children provides a pattern of results broadly similar to that reported for commercials and programming intended to adults (Browne, 1998). For instance, advertisements on children's television have been found to contain a preponderance of male characters (Doolite and Pepper, 1975), with boys in more dominant, active roles, and use male more frequently than female voiceovers. When characters have been shown in occupational roles, men generally work outside the home, and women are in domestic roles such as parent, spouse, or homemaker (McArthur and Eisen, 1976). In addition male-oriented advertisements contain more visual and aural cuts, loud music and boisterous activity, whereas female-oriented advertisements contained more fades and dissolves, soft music and quiet play (Welch, Huston-Stein, Wright and Plehal, 1979). Boys and girls typically manifest different personal and social characteristics, with boys being more autonomous, aggressive, and inventive (Sternglantz and Serbin, 1974). There are also many more cartoon characters, some of indeterminate gender (Gunter, 1995). Peck (1979) looked at commercials aimed at children in Australia and concluded that the level of stereotyping was similar to that observed in the United States. This conclusion was based on the ratio of male to female characters (a ratio of seven to one), the frequency with which male characters played major roles in the commercial, and small incidence of female voiceovers (6% of the total). Previous content analyses (Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2002; Furnham et al., 1997; Klassen, Jasper, and Schwartz, 1993; Macklin and Kolbe, 1984; Smith, 1994) showed consistency in gender stereotyping in past decades. Thus, in children's commercials, as in adult-oriented advertising, there is evidence of significant gender bias.

This study had two major aims. First, it attempted to determine current levels of gender stereotyping in Portuguese television advertising deliberately designed for children by using the content-analysis approach which is the common method used in previous studies conducted on gender roles. Despite the potential influence of television advertising on children, few content analyses of children's advertising have been published, and none has been published in Portugal. Few studies have been conducted in languages other than English (Furnham and Mak, 1999). Neto and Pinto (1998) examined the portrayal of men and women in a

sample of Portuguese television commercials. The results indicated that men and women appearing in this sample were portrayed in not independent ways, in line with traditional gender role stereotyping. These findings revealed that Portuguese television commercials manifest very similar traditional gender role stereotypes to those found in studies made in Western countries. Second, this study also aimed to evaluate the differences between this study and other studies conducted in different cultural settings, thus to evaluate the distinguishing characteristics of national advertisements targeting children in terms of gender roles portrayals. The issue of cross-national variation in gender stereotyping in advertising to children has been particularly neglected and few studies have examined such stereotyping in more than one country concurrently.

Specifically the study attempted some cross-national analysis of comparable data from America and Britain (Furnham et al., 1997). Furnham and Mak (1998) argue in their review of twelve studies on five continents, all comparisons on sex-role stereotyping in television commercials are difficult. However most studies have been carried out with rigor, and replications have demonstrated the robustness of the fundamental finding that men and women are portrayed differently in television advertisements. Nevertheless, studies such as these provide important naturalistic data in sex-role stereotyping of different countries.

Furnham et al. (1997) examined commercials aimed at children in the United States and England. They found more similarities than differences between the two national markets in terms of the nature of gender-role portrayals, with males generally occupying more central and authoritative positions. Only two analyses yielded significant differences (of eleven). Girls outnumbered boys in American commercials, but the opposite was true of British commercials. Hispanic males were present in American commercials but not in British commercials. These similarities were found between countries that resemble each other in industrial development, language and child-rearing practices. However Furnham and Mak (1999) found that on the whole gender stereotyping was fairly consistent across cultures over 25 years. Despite the similar trends in gender stereotyping, the degree of stereotyping differed from country to country.

A rationale for the choice of Portugal was that this country has unique aspects of history and national character, including variations in personal values and interest in feminist issues that could differentially affect advertising content. For example, research about gender stereotypes indicates that the process of

acquiring stereotypes is universal across cultures, though the degree to which children in different countries hold stereotypical views of men and women is not. Williams and Best (1990) found the same sequence of gender stereotype learning in all countries studied, but found country related variations in the number and kind of traits ascribed to men and women. American and British gender stereotypes were more similar than Portuguese gender stereotypes in terms of the characteristics associated with each gender and the favorability of these traits (Williams, Best, Ward, and Neto, 1990). Similarly if we compare the three countries through the four value dimensions (power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism/collectivism, and masculinity/feminity) of cultural variation (Hofstede, 2001), there are more similarities on the four dimensions between England and United States than between Portugal and each one of these countries. Thus if the television reflects the values of a society we can expect more similarities in children's television advertisements in England and United States than in Portugal.

Thus in light of previous research the following hypotheses are proposed:

(a) It is expected that traditional gender role stereotypes would be found in children's Portuguese television advertisements. In particular ratio of male and female characteristics, voice-overs, credibility, location, target gender, end comment, activity, aggression, loudness in Portuguese TV commercials will be more consistent with traditional gender stereotypes, in agreement with what has been found in Portuguese television commercials (Neto and Pinto, 1998).

(b) It is expected to find more similarities than differences among countries in the advertisements targeting to children. However when differences appear, it would be found more similarities between American and British commercials than between Portugal and each one of the two other countries.

## METHOD

### Sample of Commercials

Children's programmes were taped from the three commercial television stations in Portugal (one public channel – RTP1 – and two private channels – SIC and TVI) over seven consecutive days in December 1998. Taping occurred morning between 8.00 and

noon for each station during children's programming targeted at children. The sampling strategy was one of convenience to ensure a representative selection of advertisements. In these children programmes, products advertised were mostly target to children. Animated commercials were not eliminated because most cartoon characters have an obvious gender detectable by name, physical features, voice, or clothing. Repetitions and commercials aimed at parents were eliminated yielding the final sample of one hundred and twenty two commercials. The commercials featured toys (56%), media tools (27%), food (10%), and other products (7%). The finding of a high percentage of toy advertising in children's Portuguese commercials is consistent with other recent studies. For example, in a content analysis of U.S. children's television advertising Browne (1998) finds that 55.4% of them were for toy products.

### Coding Procedure

It should be pointed out that nearly all the content-analytic studies in this area have followed the McArthur and Resko (1975) categories not for theoretical but for comparative reasons. Nevertheless, the coding categories appear clear and comprehensive and provide a parsimonious picture of the gender-role stereotyping in television advertisements.

We conducted content analysis to gain basic information on the content of the commercials in children's programmes. This method was chosen because it is deemed best at giving "a scientific, quantitative, and generalizable description of communications content" (Kassarjian, 1977, p. 10). Much of the literature on gender-role stereotyping in television has come from studies that analyse the content of television advertisements (Furnham and Mak, 1999; Gunter, 1995). Since advertisements supposedly project "typical" images of the interactions of males and females and their environment, they can provide an insight into the nature of the gender roles in any given society at a particular time. Variables were drawn from previous research on gender stereotyping in commercials. Before being included on the coding form, they were pretested by two psychologists to improve clarity, precision, and ease of completion. The assessments were thus refined to ensure that they adequately reflected the content of the commercials.

The coding scheme was based on that of Furnham et al. (1997) and on earlier Portuguese study (Neto and Pinto, 1998) for the nine

attributes presented in Table 4 and on that of Macklin and Kolbe (1984) for the three attributes presented in Table 2. Any character portrayed in a central role visually, vocally or both, was deemed to be a central figure. This is nearly always the actor's celebrity or primary spokesperson who is essential to the "story" or setting of the advertisement. For each advertisement the most prominent portrayed central figure was selected for subsequent coding.

The nine attributes presented in Table 4 are: *Central Figure* (whether key person in the advertisements was male, gender unidentifiable, or none); *Voice Over* (male, female, or none); *Credibility Basis* (whether central figure in advertisements was a producer "user", an "authority" or information source, or neither of these things); *Music* (any or none) at any time in advertisement; *End Comment* (the presence or absence of a brief remark at the end of the advertisement); *Target Gender* of the product (girls, boys, both) of each advertisement; *Total Humans* (the total of each gender, adults and children in the total advertisements); *Ethnicity* (ethnic groups of the characters overall); *Non Human* characters (animals or cartoon characters, male, female and animals). The three attributes presented in Table 2 are: *Active/passive* behaviour refers "to the level of activity displayed by the characters in the advertisement" (Macklin and Kolbe, 1984, pp. 37-38). A seven-point scale was used for activity assessment, ranging from 1 for "very stationary" to 7 "very rapid movement". The attribute *aggression* refers to "physical attacks upon individuals, verbal beratement in a wide variety of forms, and attacks against inanimate objects by individuals - all performed with a hostile intention" (Macklin and Kolbe, 1984, p. 39). Aggression was rated on a scale of 1 =low and 7=high. The *loudness* refers to volume of speech, music, and sound effects, ranging from 1 for "quiet" to 7 for "loud".

### Coding reliability

In order to ensure coding reliability, or what Krippendorff (1980) calls agreement, the actual coding involved repeated viewing of the advertisements by two persons, one male and one female, both Portuguese, white, and graduated psychologists participated initially in a group training session where twenty commercials were coded. Each coder was then required to view independently all other advertisements. Interjudge reliability was estimated from the coefficient of agreement between the judges (Kassarjian, 1977).

The reliability was .92 for "central figure", .98 for "sex of voice over", .93 for "credibility", .98 for "music", .96 for "end comment",

.91 for "target gender", .93 for "total w humans", .99 for "ethnicity", and .90 for "non humans", .81 for activity, .85 for aggression, and .76 for loudness. Using Krippendorff's (1980) method, the overall reliability was found to be .95. This method was used by nearly all other studies in this area (Furnham and Farager, 2000).

Only one measure had reliability level below .80 standard recommended for content analysis (Kassarjian, 1977). This assessment was loudness level (reliability=.76). This measure (as well as activity and aggression) was evaluated on a seven-point scale. Because of the wider range of possible judgments, the expected probability of agreement is lower than dichotomous (present, not present) measures. Consequently, this lower interjudge agreement was not considered substandard in terms of reliability.

### RESULTS

To test our hypotheses two sets of analyses were made. In the first one Chi-square analyses with Yates correction where appropriate and t-tests were carried out to establish the relationship between the sex of the central figure and the categories of each of the dependent variables shown in Table 1 and 2. For these analyses we have taken into account only commercials in which the gender of the central figures could be determined, that is, sixty two males and forty-one females. Animated commercials were not eliminated because most cartoon characters have an obvious gender detectable by name, physical features, voice, or clothing. In the second one, chi-squares were also calculated for country differences with each coding category. For these analyses the Portuguese sample included one hundred and twenty two commercials, including too commercials in which the gender of the central figures could not be determined. This was the same procedure followed by Furnham et al. (1997).

The overall results are summarised in Tables 1 and 2 for Portuguese commercials by gender.

*Sex of voice over.* As frequencies assigned to the category none/neither were below five in the cells, the analysis was not carried out with this category. This analysis revealed a significant sex of voice over effect ( $X^2 = 79.4, p = .001$ ). Male characters appear more frequently in advertisements with male voice-overs. Ninety percent of male central figures had male voice-overs. On the other

TABLE 1

Percentage of Male and Female Characters Depicted in Advertisements by Attribute Coding Category

	Males (n = 62)		Females (n = 41)		X <sup>2</sup>
	%	n	%	n	
Sex of voice over					
Male	90.0	56	5.0	2	79.4a
Female	5.0	3	93.0	38	(df=1)
None/neither	5.0	3	2.0	1	
Credibility					
Using product	34.0	21	54.0	22	4.0
Authority on product	50.0	31	37.0	15	(df=2)
Neither	16.0	10	9.0	4	
Location					
Home	21.0	13	27.0	11	.67
Away from home	23.0	14	24.0	10	(df=2)
Fantasy	56.0	35	49.0	20	
Target gender					
Boys only	24.0	15	0.0	0	42.1 a
Girls only	6.0	4	63.0	26	(df=2)
Both	70.0	43	37.0	15	
Music					
Present	95.0	59	100.0	41	--
Absent	5.0	3	0.0	0	
Comment					
Present	76.0	47	88.0	36	2.3
Absent	24.0	15	12.0	5	(df=1)

a p < .05.

hand, female characters appear more frequently in advertisements with female voice-overs. Ninety-three percent of female central figures had female voice-over.

*Credibility.* There was no significant effect ( $X^2 = 4.0$ ,  $p = .13$ ). Males were more likely to be portrayed as authorities on a product than females (50% and 37%, respectively), and females were more likely to be portrayed as "user" than males (54% and 34%, respectively). However, this difference was not significant.

*Location.* The result was not significant ( $X^2 = .67$ ,  $p = .71$ ). The percentages showed that females were more often depicted in a

TABLE 2

Means and Standard Deviations for the Male and Female Characters Depicted in Advertisements on Activity, Aggression and Loudness Ratings

	Males (n = 62)		Females (n = 41)		t value	Significance of t
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Activity	4.1	1.7	2.8	.98	4.3	.001
Aggression	2.3	1.9	1.2	.66	3.8	.001
Loudness	4.3	1.2	3.5	.70	3.7	.001

TABLE 3

Pearson Product Moment Correlations among Ratings

	Activity	Aggression
Aggression	.61**	
Loudness	.70**	.60**

\*\* p < .01.

home setting (27%) than males (21%). However, this difference was not significant.

*Target gender.* There was an overall significant effect ( $X^2 = 42.1$ ,  $p = .001$ ), showing that men were more often in advertisements targeting both genders and boys only (70% and 24%, respectively) than females (37% and 0%, respectively), and females were more often in advertisements targeting girls only (63%) than males (6%).

*Music.* We did not carry out an analysis because the frequencies in the absent category were extremely low; music was present in 95% of advertisements with male central figure and in all advertisements with female central figure.

*End comment.* The analyses showed no significant difference of the central figure and the presence or absence of an end comment ( $X^2 = 2.3$ ,  $p = .13$ ), showing that most advertisements did have an end comment. Females (88%) were more likely to have an end comment than were males (74%). However, this difference was not significant.

TABLE 4

An Analysis of the Coding Analysis on Portuguese, USA and GB sets of Commercials  
(Numbers Represent Absolute Frequencies)

	Portugal (N = 122)		USAb (N = 67)		GBb (N = 67)		X <sup>2</sup>
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
1. Central figure							
Male	62	50.8	35	52.0	19	28.3	30.5a (df = 4)
Female	41	33.6	27	40.0	14	21.0	
None/neither	19	15.6	15	8.0	34	50.7	
2. Sex of voice over							
Male	63	51.6	37	55.2	40	59.7	3.2 (df = 4)
Female	47	38.5	20	29.9	19	28.4	
None	12	9.8	10	14.9	8	11.9	
3. Credibility							
Using product	56	45.9	40	59.7	39	58.2	6.5 (df = 4)
Authority on product	47	38.5	20	29.9	24	35.8	
Neither	19	15.6	7	10.4	4	6.0	
4. Music							
Present	117	95.9	59	88.1	54	80.6	11.4a (df = 2)
Absent	5	4.1	8	11.9	13	19.4	
5. End comment							
Present	101	82.8	65	97.0	64	95.5	12.8a (df=2)
Absent	21	17.2	2	3.0	3	4.5	

TABLE 4 (cont)

Characters	Portugal (N = 122)		USAb (N = 67)		GBb (N = 67)		X <sup>2</sup>
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
1. Target gender							
Girls only	37	30.3	17	25.0	9	13.4	9.1 (df=4)
Boys only	17	13.9	5	8.0	8	11.9	
Both	68	55.7	45	67.0	50	74.7	
2. Total humans							
Adult men	57	18.5	36	15.6	56	30.9	30.2a (df=6)
Adult women	44	14.3	22	9.6	28	15.5	
Boys	79	25.6	81	35.2	53	29.3	
Girls	128	41.6	91	39.2	44	24.3	
3. Ethnicity							
White people	294	95.5	184	82.9	160	88.4	22.6a (df=2)
Other people	14	4.5	38	17.1	21	11.6	
4. Non human							
Real animals	4	1.7	23	19.2	16	15.8	85.7a (df=2)
Cartoon males	82	34.3	19	15.8	13	12.9	
Cartoon females	63	26.4	16	13.3	4	4.0	
Cartoon animals	90	37.6	62	51.7	68	67.3	

a p &lt; .05.

b Data from Furnham et al. (1997).

T-tests ratings for *activity*, *aggression* and *loudness* were performed (Table 2). Results indicated that commercials with male central figures were significantly more active than commercials with female central figures,  $t(101) = 4.3$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Commercials with male central figures were also more aggressive,  $t(101) = 3.8$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Aggressiveness among boys involved throwing, hitting, making faces, and using toys in mock efforts to kill or maim an object or person. Those actions were rarely observed among girls. Commercials with male central figures were also significantly more loud than commercials with female central figures,  $t(101) = 3.7$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Ratings of activity, aggressiveness and loudness are significantly correlated (Table 3).

It is possible to compare some of the present data with American and British data from Furnham et al. (1997). The overall results are summarised in Table 4 for the three countries. Differences between Portuguese, American and British advertisements were analysed using chi-square, as in previous analysis.

*Central figures.* Central figures in advertisements on children's television were different among the three countries ( $X^2 = 30.5$ ,  $p < .001$ ). They were more likely to be male and female in Portugal (51% and 34% respectively) and USA (52% and 40%) than in UK (28% and 21 % respectively). The gender of the central figure was more likely to be unidentifiable in the case of UK (51%).

*Sex of voice over.* Voice overs did not showed a significant statistical effect over the countries ( $X^2 = 3.2$ ,  $p > .05$ ). Males voice overs were 52% in Portugal (55% in USA, 60% in UK) and females 39% (45% in USA and 40% in UK).

*Credibility.* Even if the central figure in the advertisements in the three countries was for the most part to be depicted as product user than an authority on the product, this association was not significant ( $X^2 = 6.5$ ,  $p = .16$ ).

*Music.* Music showed a significant statistical effect over the countries ( $X^2 = 11.4$ ,  $p = .003$ ). Music was more likely to be present in advertisements on children's television in Portugal (96%) than in USA and UK (88% and 81 % respectively). In spite of that, music was present in a clear majority of advertisements in the three cultural contexts.

*End comments.* End comments were more present in USA and UK advertisements (97% and 96% respectively) than in Portuguese advertisements (83%). The association was statistically significant ( $X^2 = 12.8$ ,  $p = .002$ ) as Table 4 shows.

*Target gender.* Most of the advertisements were judged to be aimed at both boys and girls (56% in Portugal, 67% in USA, and 75% in UK). If the sex was singled out as the primary target group

this was more likely to be girls (30% in Portugal, 25% in USA, and 13% in UK) than boys (14% in Portugal, 7% in USA, and 12% in UK), though this association was not statistically significant ( $X^2 = 9.1$ ,  $p = .06$ ).

*Total humans.* The count of "human characters" showed a significant statistical effect over the countries ( $X^2 = 30.2$ ,  $p = .001$ ). In the three countries adult men outnumbered adult women. There were differences in the samples in terms of the prevalence of boys and girls. In the Portuguese and American samples girls outnumbered boys, whereas in the British sample the opposite was true.

*Ethnicity.* The most numerous ethnic group was whites, but in Portugal other ethnic people were less prevalent than in American and British advertisements ( $X^2 = 22.6$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In Portuguese advertisements appeared only eleven black males, one black female, and two Asian females.

*Non-humans.* Among "non-humans" characters, cartoon animals were the most numerous in the samples. However cartoon males and females were more numerous in Portugal advertisements than in the USA and UK ones ( $X^2 = 85.7$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The present study contributes to the literature by examining gender representation in children's television advertisements. The purpose of this study was to analyse the Portuguese advertisements targeting children from the perspective of gender roles, thus comparing them to findings of previous studies conducted in other cultural settings. The hypothesis that traditional gender roles stereotypes would be found in children's Portuguese television advertisements was partially supported. The current findings have showed associations which are in line with traditional gender role stereotypes and consistent with the findings obtained in earlier studies in advertisements in different countries. In line with previous studies in which men outnumbered women (Furnham, Babitzkow and Ugucioni, 2000; Furnham and Bitar, 1993; Furnham and Voli, 1989; Harris and Stobart, 1986; Livingstone and Green, 1986; Manstead and McCulloch, 1981; Mazzella et al., 1992; Mwangi, 1996; Neto and Pinto, 1998), the results of this study revealed a predominance of males as central figures (60%) compared with females (40%). There were more male voice-overs (59%) compared with female voice-overs (41%). Even if different methods of measurement may blur comparisons, it can be noted



that Macklin and Kolbe (1984) found similar figures: male voice-overs were present in 61.1% of males ads, and female voice-overs were present in 42.8% of female ads. The expectation of male voice-overs to be more frequent in ads with male central figures and female voice-overs in ads with female central figures was found. A clear relationship existed between the sex of voice-over and the sex of the central figure. However the high percentage of female voice-overs (93%) in ads with female central figures is a surprising finding. Future studies should investigate this trend. A similar imbalance occurred about the target gender. Most of the advertising with male central figures were targeting both genders, while those with female central figures were targeting girls. Even when the product was aimed at girls, males are more likely to appear in television advertisements for it.

The results concerning the attributes activity, aggression, and loudness are also in agreement with traditional gender roles stereotypes. As expected, advertisements with male central figures appeared significantly more active than those with female central figures. These results are in agreement with previous findings (Chandler and Griffiths, 2000; Macklin and Kolbe, 1984; Verna, 1975; Welch et al., 1979). As expected, ads with male central figures contained also more aggression behaviors than those with female central figures. These results are also in agreement with previous findings (Macklin and Kolbe, 1984; Verna, 1975; Welch et al., 1979). As hypothesised, ads with female central figures were more quiet than those with males ones.

However, contrary to previous findings among adults in Portugal and in other countries (Neto and Pinto, 1998) no significant associations were found between females and males in this study in terms of credibility, location, music and end comment. These factors may be considerably less important in children television.

This study showed that males and females seem to be moving closer in the frequency of appearance as authority on product, as 50% of male and 37% of female characters were so depicted in the current study. However the figures among adults in Portugal were 77.5% and 29.0%, respectively (Neto and Pinto, 1998). This can be evaluated as an important insight for showing less gender stereotyping in the Portuguese commercials in terms of one of the traditional discrimination criteria in the literature. Another striking finding is that males and females are presented equally out of home. This finding is not in agreement with some previous research. For instance, Smith (1994), p. 33) found that "the setting of the advertisement was probably the most sexually stereotyped

variable studied in this content analysis". The majority of Portuguese advertisements have an end comment reflecting one of the typical characteristics of the creative approach of television advertisements. In terms of end comment both genders are salient. This finding was not the trend in other studies among adults (e.g., Furnham and Mak, 1999).

It is interesting to note that gender stereotyping in Portuguese television appears to be much less prevalent in children's advertising than in adults' advertisements. The results of this study show a pattern between the depictions of men and women in children's Portuguese television advertisements that is different from what has previously been found among adults in Portugal and other countries (Furnham and Bitar, 1993; Furnham and Voli, 1989; Mazzella et al., 1992; McArthur and Resko, 1975). Thus, the findings of this study pointed out a mixed picture. If traditional gender stereotypes emerged in this study, less stereotypical aspects emerged also. This partial reduction of stereotypical content may reflect the realisation of the possible consequences of stereotyping in advertising in recent years. This is unlikely however. It may be that children of a particular age do not respond to very clearly sex role stereotyped advertisements.

The second aim of this study was to examine cross-national similarities and differences of gender stereotyping in television commercials targeting children. This study provided cross-cultural and comparative data on gender stereotyping on children's television advertisements. The similarities across the countries appeared in three cases: sex of voice over, credibility and target gender. These similarities emphasize traditional gender stereotypes.

Despite these similarities in gender stereotypes among countries, six of the nine chi-square analyses revealed a significant difference among advertisements recorded in Portugal, USA and UK. Portuguese commercials tended to show more music, to have more absent end comment, to show more white people, more cartoon males and females than American and British commercials. In two cases Portuguese commercials were closer to American commercials than to British commercials: in both countries central figures were more likely to be male or female, whereas in Britain they were more likely to be unidentifiable. Similarly concerning the "human characters" in both countries girls outnumbered boys, and in UK boys outnumbered girls.

Thus contrary to our expectations we found more differences than similarities among countries in the advertising targeting to children, but in agreement with what was expected when

differences appear, results showed more similarities between American and Britain commercials than between Portugal and each one of the two other countries.

In sum, although many differences between male and female characters remain, Portuguese television advertisements in the current study seem to be presenting a less discriminative and more equal view of the roles of men and women in the society than those of adults. These results showed similarities and differences across the countries of gender role stereotypes in television commercials targeting children.

This study possesses some limitations which deserve attention. First, content analysis is susceptible to bias due to methods of data collection, interpretation, or analysis even when persistent attempts are made to eliminate it. More importantly the salience and sensitivity of various content categories in large part determine the results. The majority of the studies in this area including this one, have followed the coding scheme of McArthur and Resko, and although the majority of them have adjusted it to fit the culture they are analysing, as Furnham (1999, p. 415) pointed out "there always remains the question of whether the coding scheme is sufficiently robust and sensitive to interpret the many subtle nuances, particularly in the area of sex role portrayal". This remains an important issue for future researchers, whose coding scheme is now over 25 years old. Second, the comparisons are complex because of several confounding variables: the studies confound nationality and time, which makes it difficult to single out the cause of any difference. However, the data for the nationalities considered were collected in the 90's. There are also problems concerning the equivalence of the commercials channels in the different countries, but concerning Portugal all commercial channels were studied. Despite these problems, as Furnham and Mak (1999, p. 416) pointed out "it is interesting and important to look for patterns in the data available", and the current study allow us to look for broad trends in the data.

Because the literature shows few current content analyses of children's advertising, there is a need for more research of this sort, both to replicate the findings of this study and to expand them. In this regard, longitudinal research on similar variables can show trends and changes. As Furnham and Spencer-Bowdage (2002) pointed out "the sex role stereotyping found in television commercials may present a reflection of the sex roles of the society, as well as the target audience for the advert" (p. 481). If the sex roles depicted in advertisements reflect to some extent the situation in society, then this research into sex roles in children's

television advisements in Portugal showed that some of the sex roles are becoming more equal. Undoubtedly, it is necessary to monitor gender role portrayals continuously in the advertisements in a society in order to analyse the changes in the gender role stereotyping in television commercials aimed at children and to evaluate the compatibility of these changes with the changes in the role portrayals of the society. Studies that consider gender's changing image in commercial targeting children will be especially important. Another direction for further research is to consider the influence of television on children. For example, recently Clay (2000) mentioned a literature review having found "many studies about how to make effective ads but not a single study addressing ads' impact on children" (p. 53). More needs to be done to investigate the influence of media on children's gender role stereotypes. In addition, though the content analysis approach taken in this study has its merits, it also runs the risk of only focusing piecemeal on each commercial and neglecting the big picture, the commercial itself (e.g., the mood generated by the commercial). To accommodate this weakness, future research may consider taking an interpretative approach, which gives the researcher more latitude in judging how much cultural factors influence the content of each commercial. Also, this interpretative approach may generate further categories that future research can utilize to classify children's commercials.

The implication of gender stereotyping on television advertisements has been discussed in relation to the cultivation of stereotyped gender beliefs and attitudes (Gunter, 1995; Gerbner et al., 1994). According to this cultivation model, which is informed by social learning theory, regular viewing of gender stereotyped television content may cultivate conceptions of social reality. Television does not create or reflect images, opinions or beliefs. "Institutional needs and objectives influence the creation and distribution of mass-produced messages that create, fit into, exploit, and sustain the needs, values, and ideologies of mass publics. These publics, in turn, acquire distinct identities as publics through exposure to the ongoing flow of messages (Gerbner et al., 1994, p. 23). Research has been carried out that shows effects of television on the gender-role stereotypes held by individuals (e. g., Kimball, 1986). These researchers have concluded that the "messages" about male or female behaviour conveyed by production techniques in advertising, could be influential in cultivating stereotyped gender perceptions among young viewers and reinforcing them in adults.

The concern about the impact of television portrayals on gender

stereotyping has, in part, derived from the fact that television viewing in western societies is widespread. There are therefore plentiful opportunities for viewers to experience exposure to gender stereotyped messages and role models. Thus, the potential exposure of people living in these countries to gender stereotyped role models, including the stereotyped images portrayed by advertisers, could increase the likelihood of cultivated gender stereotyped beliefs and attitudes. Programme regulators and social scientists need to take notice of the consequences of such portrayals.

In conclusion, the findings indicate that children's television advertisements continue to portray gender in stereotypical ways. Although the extent to which television influences young children's development continues to be debated, it is difficult to ignore the stereotypical lessons that children derive about gender from many of the advertisements. Correlational studies indicate an association between television viewing and gender stereotyping (e.g., Thompson & Zerbinos, 1997). Moreover, children's television habits might be related to their likelihood of enacting certain positive and negative social behaviours (e.g., Calvert & Huston, 1987). Thus, there is evidence to validate the concerns of many parents regarding the gender-typed content of children's television programs.

## REFERENCES

- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice-Hall; Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- Browne, B. (1998). Gender stereotypes in advertising on children's television in the 1990s: A cross-national analysis. *Journal of Advertising*, 21, 83-96.
- Bryant, J. & Zillman, D. (1994). *Media effects*. LEA; Hillsdale, N.J.
- Buijzen, M. & Valkenburg, P. (2002). Appeals in television advertising: A content analysis of commercials aimed at children and teenagers. *Communications*, 27, 349-364.
- Calvert, S.L. & Huston, A.C. (1987). Television and children's gender schemata. In Children's gender schemata (L.S. Liben & M.L. Signorella, eds.), pp. 75-88. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.
- Chandler, D.I. & Griffiths, M. (2000). Gender-differentiated production features in toy commercials. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 44, 503-520.
- Clay, R. (2000). Advertising to television: Is it ethical? *Monitor on Psychology*, September, 52-53.
- Comstock, G.I. & Scharrer, E. (1999). *Television. What's on, who's watching, and what it means*. New York: Academic Press.
- Courtney, A.E., & Whipple, T.W. (1983). *Sex stereotyping in advertising*. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath.
- Doolittle, J. & Pepper, R. (1975). Children's TV ad content: 1974. *Journal of Broadcasting*, 19, 131-151.
- Fried, F.J. (1982). *Stereotyping in children's materials*. East Lansing, MI: National Center for Research on Teacher Learning (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No ED215320).
- Frueh, T. & McGhee, P.E. (1975). Traditional sex-role development and amount of time spent watching television. *Developmental Psychology*, 11, 109-114.
- Furnham, A. & Spencer-Bowdage, S. (2002). Sex role stereotyping in television advertisements: A content analysis of advertisements from South Africa and Great Britain. *Communications*, 27, 457-483.
- Furnham, A., Abramsky, S. & Gunter, B. (1997). A cross-cultural content analysis of children's television advertisements. *Sex Roles*, 37, 91-99.
- Furnham, A., Babitzkow, M. & Ugucioni, S. (2000). Gender stereotyping in television advertisements: A study of French and Danish television. *Genetic, Social, and General Psychology Monographs*, 126, 79-104.
- Furnham, A. & Bitar, N. (1993). The stereotyped portrayal of men and women in British television advertisements. *Sex Roles*, 29, 297-310.
- Furnham, A., & Farragher, E. (2000). A cross-cultural content-analysis of sex-role stereotyping in television advertisements: A comparison between Great Britain and New Zealand. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 44, 415-436.
- Furnham, A., & Imadzu, E. (2002). Gender portrayal in British and Japanese TV advertisements. *Communications*, 27, 319-348.
- Furnham, A. & Mak, T. (1999). Sex-role stereotyping in television commercials: A review and comparison of fourteen studies done on five continents over 25 years. *Sex Roles*, 41 (5/6) 413-437.
- Furnham, A. & Voli, V. (1989). Gender stereotyping in Italian television advertisements. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electric Media*, 33, 175-185.
- Gerbner, G. (1978). The dynamics of cultural resistance. In *Heart and home: Images of women in the mass media* (G. Tuchman, A.K. Daniels, & J. Benet, Eds) New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorelli, N. (1994). Growing up with television: The cultivation perspective. In *Media effects* (T. Bryant & D. Zillman, Eds), pp. 17-41. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Gunter, B. (1995). *Television and gender representation*. London: John Libbey.
- Harris, P.R. & Stobart, J. (1986). Sex role stereotyping in British television advertisements at different times of the day: An extension and refinement of Manstead and McCulloch (1981). *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 25, 155-164.
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Instituto Nacional de Estatística (2001). *Anuario estatístico de Portugal*. I.N.E.: Lisboa.
- Jennings, J., Geis, F.L. & Brown, V. (1980). Influence of television commercials on women's self-confidence and independent judgement. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 38, 203-210.
- Kaarjian, H.H. (1977). Content analysis in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 4, 8-18.
- Kimball, M. (1986). Television and sex-role attitudes. In T. M. Williams (Ed.), *The impact of television*. London: Academic Press.
- Klassen, M, Jasper, C. & Schwartz, A (1993). Men and women: Images of their relationships in magazine advertisements. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 22, 30-39.
- Krippendorff, K. (1980). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. London: Sage.

- Livingstone, S. & Green, G. (1986). Television advertisements and the portrayal of gender. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 25, 149-154.
- Macklin, M. C. & Kolbe, R. (1984). Sex role stereotyping in children's advertising: Current and past trends. *Journal of Advertising*, 13(2), 34-42.
- Manstead, A.S. & McCulloch, C. (1981). Sex-role stereotyping in British television advertisements. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 20, 171-180.
- Mazzella, C., Durkin, K., Cerini, E. & Buralli, P. (1992). Sex-role stereotyping in Australian television advertisements. *Sex Roles*, 26, 243-259.
- McArthur, L. Z.I & Resko, B.G. (1975). The portrayal of men and women in American television commercials. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 97, 209-220.
- McArthur, L.Z. & Eisen, S.V. (1976). Television and sex role stereotyping. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 60, 4, 329-351.
- McGhee, P. & Frueh, T. (1980). Television viewing and the learning of sex-role stereotypes. *Sex Roles*, 6, 179-188.
- Miller, M. & Reeves, B. (1976). Dramatic TV content and children's sex-role stereotypes. *Journal of Broadcasting*, 20, 35-50.
- Mwangi, M. (1996). Gender roles portrayed in Kenyan television commercials. *Sex Roles*, 34, 205-214.
- Neto, F. (1997). Gender stereotyping in Portuguese children living in Portugal and abroad: Effects of migration, age and gender. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 20(2), 219-229.
- Neto, F. & Pinto, I. (1998). Gender stereotypes in Portuguese television advertisements. *Sex Roles*, 39, 153-164.
- Neto, F., Williams, J.E. & Widner, S. (1991). Portuguese children's knowledge of sex stereotypes: Effects of age, gender and socio-economic status. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 22(3), 376-388.
- Peck, J. (1979). Children's television advertising: An analysis. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 14(1), 64-76.
- Público (28 November, 1996). "Publicidade para dar e vender".
- Signorelli, N. (1990). Children, television, and gender roles: Messages and impact. *Journal of Adolescent Health Care*, 11, 50-58.
- Smith, L. (1994). A content analysis of gender differences in children's advertising. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 38, 3, 323-337.
- Sternglantz, S.H. & Serbin, L.A. (1974). Sex role stereotyping in children's television programs. *Developmental Psychology*, 10(5), 710-715.
- Thompson, T. L. & Zerbinos, E. (1997). Television cartoons: Do children notice it's a boy's world? *Sex Roles*, 37, 415-431.
- Verna, M. (1975). The female image in children's TV commercials. *Journal of Broadcasting*, 19(3), 301-309.
- Welch, R.L., Huston-Stein, A., Wright, J.C. & Plehal, R. (1979). Subtle sex-role cues in children's commercials. *Journal of Communication*, 29, 202-209.
- Williams, J.E., & Best, D. (1990). *Measuring sex stereotypes: A multinational study*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publication.
- Williams, J.E., Best, D. L. Ward, C., e Neto, F. (1990). Sex stereotypes in Portugal and Singapore. In *Heterogeneity in cross-cultural psychology* (D.M. Keats, D. Munro, E.L. Mann, (Eds), pp. 520-528. Lisse, Netherlands: Swets e Zeitlinger.