

**Research Project – Post-Graduate Studies, Department of Communication**

**Title:** Female stereotypes in household appliances advertising and their social role in Spain: the perpetuation of a no-longer-existing female condition.

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**Resume:** The following dissertation proposes a qualitative approach on the matter of advertising, society and construction of identity, based on the effect of household appliances commercials in constructing female identity of Spanish women today. Conclusions will be drawn based on a juxtaposition of social background and advertising content and on how Spanish women of today perceive the evolution of female imagery depicted in advertisements. The aim is to demonstrate how much commercials mirrors society and how far it reinforces paradigms no longer existing.

**Key words:** Advertising and Spanish women, Advertising and Paradigms, Gender Studies, Household Appliances Commercials, Advertising and History, Advertising and Sociology.

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## Table of Contents

1. Abstract .....	3
2. Introduction.....	4
3. State of the question: female representations and gender roles in advertising....	6
4. Relevance of the study.....	17
5. Objectives.....	19
6. Hypotheses.....	20
7. Methodology.....	21
7.1 Conducting the interviews.....	24
8. Economic and social settings: the 1960's and today.....	28
8.1 Women and work.....	28
8.2 Women and politics.....	34
8.3 Women and social/family life.....	36
9. Analysis of the advertising material.....	41
9.1 Commercials of today.....	41
9.2 Commercials from the 60's.....	48
10. Research results.....	57
10.1 Identification with the protagonist/situation in the advertisements.....	57
10.2 Perspective of the men/women relation.....	61
10.3 Identification of gender-oriented signs and women's reflection upon it..	63
11. Conclusion and final considerations.....	66
11.1 Relevance of the study vs. State of the question.....	66
11.2 Methodology.....	67
11.3 Research results vs. Hypotheses.....	70
11.4 Final considerations.....	74
12. References.....	77
13. Annexes.....	83

## **1. Abstract**

Recently, the issue of mass media, advertising and their influence on the building of our culture and social values has been broadly debated by both academics, from a sociological standpoint, and public entities aimed at regulating media content – especially television.

The following dissertation proposes a qualitative approach on the matter, based on the effect of household appliances commercials in constructing female identity of Spanish women today. Conclusions are drawn based on a juxtaposition of social background and advertising content between the 60's and the past decade, and, most importantly, on how Spanish women of today perceive the evolution of female imagery depicted in advertising from these two periods.

The aim is to demonstrate how much advertising mirrors society and how far it reinforces paradigms no longer existing, through the use of semiotics and symbology which are not always clear to the target audience, who fails to realize such influence of this medium.

## 2. Introduction

*“By presenting, in a caricatured way, scenery where the woman must be a ‘woman’, advertising – a reflector and agent of society, confirms as a fact a ‘natural’ behavior that is not at all according to the interests of women’s world itself”* (Herne, 1993: 31). The conclusion made by Claude Herne in his *“La définition sociale de la femme à travers la publicité”*, in 1993, shows clearly the power of advertising in helping society to define specific models of behavior for men and women and submitting the latter to a specific and limited role.

The analysis proposed by Herne does not come out accidentally in the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With the boom of technology and economic growth in the second half of the century, the western urban woman finds herself on the threshold of her final emancipation: she is no longer bound to be a housewife, but can choose to be a professional and pursue a career, she can be economically independent and stand for her personal goals, desires and motivations.

As *“advertising does not exist in isolation from the rest of society, it mirrors in some way the ‘reality’ that surrounds it”* (Jhally, 1987: 200), one assumes that publicity from this period on should therefore portray a woman at the peak of her independence, show no judgment of values between genders and propose no specific roles to men and women.

By watching television or opening a magazine today, seventeen years after Herne’s study, one can easily perceive how advertising has actually done little or no change while “reflecting” the image of women in society. The format that advertising is using to perpetuate a sexist image might have changed, but the message at its core seems to remain the same – even though, according to Herne, *“this social definition is not perceivable at a first glance”* (Herne, 1993: 5).

This dissertation proposes to use examples of representation of women in advertising fifty years ago and today and, by considering economic and social changes in this period, to indicate how advertising should be reflecting a different woman in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century than it actually is.

The goal is, by looking at these two examples – or “mirrors” – through the eyes of “modern” women, to investigate whether they are conscious of a non-explicit message that is being perpetuated by advertising, and whether they feel identified with this message.

### 3. State of the question: female representations and gender roles in advertising

In the past century, Heidegger's idea of a mass-produced stereotypical identity vs. the construction of an individual identity with self-defined critical consciousness (Heidegger ed. 2002) was a constant issue of abstract analysis in different fields within humanities. In psychology, Jung analyzed the existence of archetypes, the collective unconscious and the formation of being, identifying, for instance, the mother's archetype as feeding, nurturing and soothing, while the father had a stern, powerful and controlling role (Jung 1953). Semioticians like Umberto Eco wrote about the "*existence of various codes and sub-codes and the variety of the socio-cultural circumstances in which a message is emitted*" (Eco, 1984: 5).

The study of the female role and its representations in the arts has been particularly discussed in various papers over the past few years, as the issue has received more relevance recently. The establishment of democracy in post-dictatorial countries such as Spain in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has allowed the idea of gender parity to assume an important role in social and political discussions, as well as to generate action rather than to maintain its previous formal character.

A few examples are the creation of the *Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women* by the United Nations (UN) in 1979, and the creation of the *Instituto de la Mujer en España* (Women's Institute in Spain) in 1983, an autonomous institute which, under the Ministry of Equality, works for "*removing the obstacles so they (women) can be a part of culture, work, political and social life*". The Institute recognizes that household work (such as taking care of the house structure, house cleaning, meal preparation, childcare) "*has been underrated*". The Institute's approach to this issue is to try and quantify this so called "*invisible work*", as the better quantification of such work is considered crucial to make it more recognizable.

An important and recent report emitted by the *Instituto* considered the "*Female Image in (visual) Advertising and Communication*" in 2008 and aimed at pointing out commercials or TV programs which depicted women in a negative way, including "*Assigning women, clearly and differentially, the exclusive responsibility of main care*

*to thirds in the domestic environment, excluding or ascribing to men a secondary role in those responsibilities” (Instituto de la Mujer, 2008: 6).*

The report analyzed advertising and TV programs in public television in 2008, and one of the conclusions was: *“The woman appears now as a mother, housewife and working out of the house, even if the predominant connection to the private sphere and the house is still strong”* and *“the elements which propose transgression of stereotypes seem unnatural”* (Instituto de la Mujer, 2008: 9). The *Instituto* received 317 complaints from viewers in 2008, 18.6% of which regarded household stereotypes.

While in other societies, such as in the United States, gender stereotype roles (in television) have been studied since the 50’s (Valls-Fernandez, Martínez Vicente 2007), in Spain they have been conducted mainly after the dictatorship period, from 1975 on. Consequently a large number of publications have arisen in recent years analyzing different gender approaches in cultural representations, such as literature and fine arts. The vast majority of these publications presents a feminist perspective, either viewing the feminine imagery from a male writer standpoint (such as Kate Millett’s book *“Sexual Politics”*, which presented a new perspective on Henry Miller’s *“Sexus”*) or from female authors engaged in feminist struggles (such as Sylvia Plath).

The gender research issue in Spain, according to a study developed in 2002 by Celia Valiente, tends to be more influenced by the political rather than the social evolution in the country. According to Valiente, there are three reasons to justify this affirmation: i) the fact that Franco’s dictatorship from mid 30’s to 1975 was a *“right-wing authoritarian regime [...] that actively opposed the advancement of women’s rights and status”* (Valiente, 2002: 767), which would obviously justify the absence of gender studies during the period; ii) the fact that most gender specialists were somehow integrated with the Spanish feminist movement, having similar points of interest regarding research; and iii) the fact that most of the financing of gender studies comes from the State, which, up to a certain point, directs the approach of this type of study.

Therefore, gender studies carried out since Spain’s democratic period in the 70’s provide, in their majority, a broad overview of the question rather than a micro-vision (total region vs. peer group, for instance). They are also most of the times based on

national authors and data, as Spanish social research rarely refers to foreign papers and usually has the Spanish population in mind as an audience (Valiente 2002).

The feminist vision in Spanish society, according to studies by Robina Mohammad, has become institutionalized as equality feminism, that is, as a sub-movement of feminism which believes in the parity of genders rather than preaching legal and political differences between men and women (Mohammad 2005). She also states that egalitarian policies have only been developed after the dictatorship, and points out that the creation of the *Instituto de la Mujer* in 1983 was the first step taken by the Spanish government to foment parity between genders. Mohammad also remarks that feminist movements and studies in Spain have been largely influenced by the works of Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan (2005).

Valiente also comments that gender studies are not very well regarded by Spanish academics, as investigators are usually “*women viewed as feminists*” (Valiente, 2002: 769), which has a negative connotation among them. Her conclusion is that, even though there has been a great increase in the number of papers and studies in the gender issue in Spain, “*the gaps in coverage are enormous, [as] there are many dimensions of [some] issues that have not yet been researched at all*” (Valiente, 2002: 779). She believes that the lack of dissemination of the studies already done (as there is no journal or specific publication on the matter in the country today) and the non-existent “*gender department*” (Valiente, 2002: 779) in Universities, which means that gender studies are always related to other areas, are some of the main obstacles to be overcome.

Issues related to the “*mass produced stereotype*” concerning mass media and, more precisely, advertising and its effects on the construction of individuality and society, however, are a far more recent field of study, given the insertion of such media into the lives of the majority in the western world. These recent studies have been conducted, first of all, by philosophers and social scientists as a sort of continuation of the above-mentioned analysis of gender in literature and other forms of arts, as media and advertising have become somehow new kinds of sociological representations, partially replacing the role previously occupied by literature and fine arts.

Something common to all these studies is how they closely relate advertising and gender role to economics - specially based on the works of Karl Marx and the practicality of the social structure in the maintenance of the economic structure: for some authors, it would explain the will to maintain specific roles for different agents of society. Others refer to abstract post-modern sociological concepts such as hyperrealism, the fluidity of roles and identities, and the multiple new forms of relationships, family structures and labor, relating the subject in question to the works of Braudillard, Debord and Lipovetsky: "*We no longer believe that what is projected is necessarily substantial. The presentation of self now relates to 'lifestyle', a cultural construct that is by definition fluid and superficial*" (Gordon, 1996: 301). They also quote changes in legislation and compare women's roles in the economic field to those of past decades.

Some recent studies have recognized that advertising sells the idea of a new concept of "*co-responsibility*", that is, a more balanced presence of men in the house and women in the public sphere, which is the case of the study done by Maria Elósegui in 1998: "*Los Roles de la Mujer y el Varón en la Sociedad Española y su Reflejo en los Anuncios de Televisión*" ("The roles of men and women in Spanish society and their reflections on TV commercials"). However, this text itself verifies (as most tend to do) that there are still some advertisements which maintain the sexist idea of women, which corresponds to her image in the 60's (Elósegui, 1998). Even recognizing some changes in the female image portrayed in advertising, studies acknowledge there are still others to be made, and none can actually conclude that advertising and media do not provide at all a biased gender-oriented viewpoint.

An interesting study on the theme was conducted by Federico Valls-Fernández and José Manuel Martínez-Vicente, entitled "*Gender stereotypes in Spanish Television Commercials*". They also state the importance of analyzing media content – and advertising in particular, as they are "*a reflection of society and therefore, of prevailing cultural values*" (Valls-Fernandez, Martínez-Vicente, 2007: 691). They also quote the work of J.P Murray in sustaining that "*television and television advertising are confirmed to be one of the main agents of socialization [...] and are means by which children learn about "appropriate" gender behaviors and roles*" (Valls-Fernandez, Martínez-Vicente, 2007: 691). This concept also relates to archeologist Lambros

Malafouris' idea that children get engaged to culture through its artifacts (television being today definitely one of the main artifacts of culture dissemination), so that culture is created by us just as we are created by culture (Malafouris 2004).

By recognizing a social pressure in stereotyping gender roles, which unconsciously incites people to form their minds on specific tasks for men and women, studies carried out by Fernandez and Martínez reveal, therefore, a strong connection between these stereotypes and advertising, as TV and TV advertisements play a crucial role in forming the audience's mind. According to them, one of the main reasons why TV plays such a significant role in "teaching gender roles" is due to the large hours that one is exposed to this medium. According to the study entitled "*Mediascope*", applied by the European Interactive Advertising Association (EIAA 2010), an average Spaniard would watch TV for 11.7 hours a week. Besides, 32% of the Spanish population declared they feel "lost" without television.

Fernandez and Martínez also touch a crucial point, which is the core of this study, when describing results of research in gender stereotypes in the past few years, as "*these representations [gender stereotypes] have not changed much over the last 25 years, although a few attributes are presented in a more balanced fashion. The general opinion is that sexism or gender stereotyping in television advertising continues, although portrayals of women in advertising are becoming more realistic*" (Valls-Fernandez, Martínez-Vicente, 2007: 692).

Their analysis on men and women in Spanish advertising (from a basis of 400 commercials extracted from *Televisión Española 1*, *Antena 3*, and *Telecinco* in January 2005) is also quite eye-opening, as it reveals that there was an almost equal proportion of men and women portrayed in advertising (50.6% vs. 49.4%, respectively) but displayed in different environments and selling different products. While women were more connected with body products and placed in household settings, for instance, men were more related to automobiles and work environments. Besides, men were shown in professional tasks (20.3% vs. 10.4% for women), and women were more connected with childcare activities (23% vs. 11.5% for men). Finally, women were presented doing household chores in a double proportion to men (26.6% vs. 13.2%) (Valls-Fernandez, Martínez-Vicente 2007).

According to the study, these data confirm previous research results which showed women being more related to domestic products, and confirm a *“pattern of findings on television in other Western societies: a highly stereotyped portrayal of men and women, despite governmental and professional efforts to attain an egalitarian society”* (Valls-Fernandez, Martínez-Vicente, 2007: 697). The conclusion is that, *“At the present time, television in Spain continues to be a factor that favors the formation of stereotypes that serve to justify and increase unequal opportunity between genders”* (Valls-Fernandez, Martínez-Vicente, 2007: 697).

Another branch of studies in gender advertising comes from either private organizations aimed at a social objective or public organizations controlled by governments. An important institution exemplifying the first case is the Advertising Standards Authority - ASA, an independent association in the United Kingdom aimed at maintaining the high standards of advertising, thus benefiting consumers, advertisers and society. This association is funded by advertisers themselves and, despite not having a political character, it is responsible for regulating sales promotions and advertising contents. One of the studies developed by ASA was *“Public Perception of Advertising”*.

This analysis aimed to determine to which extent people believe in advertisements and how far they reflect their audience. They recruited 16 groups of people aged 16 to 65 for a qualitative research: some of the results revealed that people found advertising is part of *“everyday culture, as it is talked about in day-to-day conversations and words and phrases become part of colloquial language. Not knowing about aspects of advertising would for many, particularly the younger respondents, mean “missing out”* (ASA, 2002: 7). Another finding was that *“It is felt to be cleverer, more reflective of real life, more entertaining and more tuned to different targets”* (ASA, 2002: 8).

Another important organ in advertising regulation in Europe is the European Advertising Standards Alliance - EASA, a self-regulating entity which promotes ethics in commercials while keeping in mind the differences between cultures and national legislations across Europe. One of the goals of the *“Portrayal of gender”* report (2008) was to analyze *“Gender stereotyping: the portrayal of men or (more usually) women in stereotypical roles”*. One quite interesting point raised in this report is that *“The primary purpose of commercial advertising is to promote goods and services, not to bring about*

*changes in society - which is often called 'social engineering'. Advertising, therefore, 'holds up a mirror to society', portraying it in ways which are sometimes idealized or simplified, but essentially a form which consumers can immediately recognize and with which they can readily identify [...] However, it also has to be balanced with the need to avoid stereotypical portrayals likely to be widely perceived as projecting an offensive or demeaning image of women, either as individuals or as members of society"* (EASA, 2008: 5).

An interesting point is that this idea of media and commercials not being responsible for communicating and stimulating changes in society was found, during the research for this study, only in this report. No other text in the bibliography referred to mentions the issue in such categorical terms.

The document also points out that differences in the culture of each society are no longer an "excuse" to portray women as "sex objects" or "mere adjuncts to the sale of goods". It also shows a quite radical point of view by saying that "*It is unrealistic to expect advertisements to avoid showing women in traditional roles, e.g. carrying out household tasks or caring for children*" (EASA, 2008: 5), even though this affirmation is followed by the idea that "*but care is needed to avoid any suggestion that such activity is 'women's work', or has little value, or that those who do it are unintelligent or interested only in domestic trivia*" (EASA, 2008: 5).

According to the report, there has been a great change in the way women are depicted in advertisements for the past twenty years, which supposedly reflects "*advertisers' alertness to changing public sensitivities and recognition that a positive image of women as individuals and members of society is likely to evoke a better response, as well as to avoid complaints*" (EASA, 2008: 5).

Another interesting aspect of the report features gender stereotyping against men, a theme which is actually not often approached in gender discussions: apparently, viewers have been increasingly complaining (still quite below complaints on how women are presented) about the fact that commercials are more and more often showing women as the dominant figure, while men appear as "*foolish, immature and inept*" (EASA, 2008:

5). The chart below provides an interesting overview of gender-related complaints registered by EASA in the past few years:

**Chart 1:**

	Number of complaints received by the SROs in the EASA Network							
	1998	1999	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Taste & decency TOTAL	12%	8%	8%	16%	27%	10%	5.77%	5.26%
<b>Portrayal of women</b>	<b>0.5%</b>	<b>0.8%</b>	<b>4.3%</b>	<b>7.4%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>1.41%</b>	<b>4.03%</b>	<b>3.99%</b>
<b>Portrayal of men</b>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	<b>0.33%</b>	<b>0.55%</b>	<b>0.53%</b>	<b>1.19%</b>

EASA Report on Advertising Self Regulation across Europe, 2008.

Regarding European legislation, the Parliamentary Assembly of the European Council also predicts gender stereotyping in publicity, as Resolution 1557 (2007) is precisely on Image of Women in Advertising. It is worth mentioning that the legislation also correlates the image of women in advertising with their role in society today, as the first statement of the resolution is that *“The Parliamentary Assembly notes that images of women which are totally at odds with their actual roles in our contemporary societies are still common in advertising today”* (European Council, 2007: Resolution 1557 item 1), and further admits that women are often presented in humiliating roles, being shown even as victims of violence and sex objects. It also states that *“The Assembly is aware that much work will be required to change attitudes and demolish stereotypes which do women a disservice in their fight for equality. Its fundamental aim is accordingly to ensure that women everywhere can at last see their real image faithfully reflected in the world in which they lead their daily lives”* (European Council, 2007: Resolution 1557 item 5).

The last statement shows the Parliament’s attempt to change something that, *a priori*, seems to be a reality today: the fact that women are many times shown in advertising in denigrating roles that do not reflect their actual reality. The resolution also points out that many countries still lack a strict legislation concerning publicity or simply ignore it, which enables such commercials to be aired. Besides punishments against commercials which display a negative image of women, the Parliament also believes in the education of future advertising professionals on the importance of portraying an equal role of men and women in commercials.

Going against the statement of EASA, which denied the responsibility of media in changing social stereotypes, and based on the resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, in the meeting of the Ministers' Deputies in 2008, stated that "*The Committee of Ministers shares the Parliamentary Assembly's approach, namely that 'the negative images and representations of women in advertising constitute a persistent problem that affects women's and girls' dignity and health'*" (Council of Europe, 2008: Recommendation, 1799, item 3). It considers that the media can perform a decisive role in bringing about changes in this field, particularly by raising the public's awareness and sense of responsibility. Furthermore, the Committee believes that advertising must keep in mind the idea of responsibility towards society. The EASA report also features the gender issue in each country, Spain being accounted for only 0.53% of all the complaints received by the Alliance.

Regarding gender-like behavior, Spain has its own national legislation. In 2004 the Spanish Parliament approved Law 1/2004, which prohibits violence against women. It refers back to Law 34/1998, which considers illegal any advertising using the image of women of a humiliating and discriminatory nature. It determines that "*the media will foment the protection of equality between men and women, avoiding all discrimination against them*" (Law 1/2004, Chapter II, Article 14).

However, as the EASA report correctly puts it, determining what is discriminatory can be quite arbitrary. This law, for instance, only specifies clear violent behavior against women and demands that women be shown in conditions according to basic human rights, such as freedom and dignity – concepts that are far more basic than gender stereotyping regarding equal roles in the household and the work field. The law also approves the existence of self-regulation as a support entity, which should establish "*advertising rules through effective prevention schemes and complaints-handling mechanisms*" (Law 1/2004, Chapter II, Article 13).

Within the national range, the most recent legislation on gender equality in Spain is the *Real Decreto* of 2007, which has suffered small changes in the past couple of years. However, it does relate to specific media regulation on the subject (work conditions and opportunities).

The organ responsible for advertising control in Spain, Autocontrol – *Asociación para la Autorregulación de la Comunicación Comercial* (Self-regulation of the Communication Community Association), applies a General Code of Advertising Practice but does not specify clear regulation regarding the gender issue, mentioning only that “*advertising shall not suggest circumstances of discrimination based upon race, nationality, religion, sex or sexual orientation, and shall not breach the protection of human dignity*” (Autocontrol, Resolution dated February 11, 2010, Item II, Article 10).

In terms of Spanish regions, there are four specific organs and decrees which regulate audiovisual content: *Consejo Audiovisual de Andalucía – CAA*; *Consejo Audiovisual de las Islas Baleares – CAIB*; *Consejo Audiovisual de Navarra – CoAN*; and *Consell de l’Audiovisual de Catalunya - CAC*. The focus of this study concerns the CAC, once the research was conducted in the region of Catalonia.

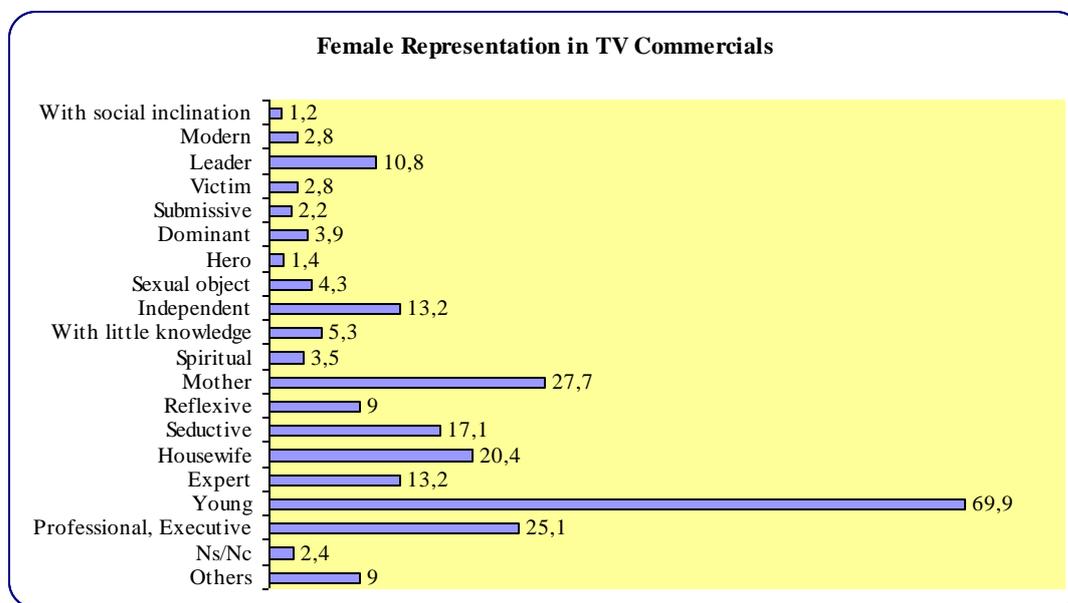
The CAC is an independent organism responsible for making sure that the media are following the regulation proposed to guarantee freedom of expression and pluralism. The CAC also emits reports on audiovisual-related issues, one of them being “*La paritat de gènere a la ràdio y la televisió públiques*” (Gender equality in public radio and TV), dated 2008. In it, the Council recognizes these media as an “*important axis of quantitative reference for the population. They imply criteria, create values, generate language and moral codes and determine rules of conduct and even influences*” (CAC, 2008: 2).

The CAC views media not only as sources of information, but as “*expressions of reality, recreating it, that is, they create a different, mediatic, reality which retro-feeds the real one – thus it is urgent that, as a public service, television and radio maintain contents and formats which are theoretically directly related to our social reality*” (CAC, 2008: 2). According to the study, however, “*women are under-represented, or occupy places of less responsibility, in a way that they have an inferior presence in media than in society*” (CAC, 2008: 2).

This study also analyzed TV and radio content in the region (through a 96-hour analysis of TV3 and Canal33) in 2008. Within the focus of this dissertation, only TV results

were analyzed. They show that women are portrayed mainly as “young” (69.9%), “mother” (27.7%), “professional/worker” (25.1%) and “housewife” (20.4%). (See chart 2).

**Chart 2:**



**Source:** CAC Report: “*Gender equality in public Radio and TV*”

**Base:** Advertising with female presence (520)

Other interesting results show that advertising in TV displays a superior representation of men over women of 7.4 vs. 0.8, respectively: in 97.7% of the advertisements, women have a submissive role as compared to that of men. TV programs show 87.8% of female submission. Male submission in TV advertisements, on the contrary, is of 1.7% (4.3% in TV programs). The conclusion of the study is the need for urgent measures to guarantee gender parity.

The CAC shares the European Parliament idea of education as a long-term form of avoiding sexist representations in commercials. In 2005, it released a publication aimed at primary and secondary students of public schools entitled “*Como veure la TV?*” (“How to watch TV?”), in which debates on the content of certain advertisements, especially gender-oriented ones, were to be promoted by the teachers in class.

#### **4. Relevance of the study**

Several studies have been conducted in the gender issue in advertising, mostly in the United States, which proves the importance of this sociological theme in both the academic and the practical spheres today.

What led us into approaching this theme was, first of all, the position of outsiders observing the role that commercials play in Spanish society. This circumstance offered us an unbiased perspective concerning the image those women have of well-known brands or of paradigms inherent to their environment. It also comes more natural to us, and seems justifiable, to resource from studies from various countries, as most Spanish academics in this field turn to national bibliography when developing their papers.

Besides, there are some points in the issue of gender commercials which, to our knowledge, have not been profoundly analyzed, such as some misperceptions of the audience regarding a deeper, veiled message contained in them. As settings and sceneries in commercials have translated this message in more subtle ways, we have the hypothesis that stereotyped messages not only are being transmitted (which is, alone, a preoccupying matter) but, most of all, are not being perceived as stereotypical, being rather absorbed as reality. Though such specific observation may seem a small detail, it can be in the core of gender stereotype perpetuation through media and advertising – as such messages are not only being created, but also possibly received and accepted by “modern, urban, career-focused” women today.

Moreover, as it takes some period of time to actually observe sociological changes, and given the recent occurrence of an economic and political evolution in women’s role in society, we understand that there is a need for new studies in the subject to be conducted on a regular basis in the next few years, in order to better observe and document the development of this issue.

The study also provides an interesting and new intersection between the historical context in Spain (regarding political, economic and social changes in the country during the dictatorship and at present) and its effect on the construction of advertising content in correlation with psycho-social effects of mass media advertising and consumption.

While other analyses have been previously conducted in these areas independently, this is a pioneer study which connects the areas in order to generate a more elaborate conclusion on the construction and effects of advertising in the societies where it is inserted.

The relevance of the study is, in conclusion, that it provides a fresh view (in the sense of being based on a broad source of data beyond national frontiers) on the subject of gender stereotypes in commercials in Spain, both continuing previous studies and providing a new approach to the theme.

## 5. Objectives

The main objective of this research is to analyze the content - and its perception by the viewers - of the messages contained in advertising in Spain in the 1960's and today, in order to verify the powerful influence of commercials in constructing social values and perpetuating paradigms.

The idea is, by establishing a concrete contextual framework of the female role in Spanish society, to juxtapose it with the female imagery presented in commercials, in order to see the co-relation between structural (economic) changes and super-structural (media and advertising) evolution and their effects on the construction of an ideological and sociological view, both individually and collectively, by a specific fragment of society.

To do so, the following objectives were established:

- i) To provide an economic, political and social background of Spain in the 1960's and today, in order to verify the evolution of the female role in society in these two periods;
- ii) To develop an analysis of chosen commercials, pointing out the elements which convey a message directed to a specific target, and possible interpretations of the use of these elements as containers of archetypes or other pre-conceived models;
- iii) To exhibit the chosen commercials to the target audience, in order to understand whether the messages analyzed before are being perceived and how the target audience receives these messages, so as to verify whether commercials do converse with social values.

## 6. Hypotheses

Some hypotheses were formulated before the beginning of the research, based on: i) previous readings on the theme (articles and papers by sociologists, philosophers and anthropologists), which detected a trend in human behavior in the media/society relation; ii) commercials previously seen with academic purposes; iii) a personal analysis of day-to-day behavior regarding gender approach and female reactions to household products commercials.

Generally speaking, the expectation was to have quite different reactions to the 60's advertising from the reactions to more recent commercials. What follows are the formulated hypotheses:

- i) The messages from the 60's and 21<sup>st</sup>-century commercials are essentially the same, as both present woman as the main family member in charge of the household and the main user of domestic appliances;
- ii) Women will feel that the women in the 60's commercials represent females from that period, but will not feel identified with them. They will not feel related to these women's activities in the house;
- iii) Commercials from the 60's will be accepted by the interviewed women as a confirmation that society was in fact like that fifty years ago. That is, they will credit advertising for showing them the reality of that period;
- iv) Women will feel at least relatively related to the women in the "modern" commercials and to their activities in the house;
- v) Women will not feel that the 60's commercials represent male/female relationships of today, but that the "modern" commercials do represent reality concerning relationships and household care today;
- vi) Women will not co-relate gender roles in the commercials of the 60's with those in "modern" commercials.

## **7. Methodology**

The following methodology was developed in order to have the clearest possible results for some pre-established hypotheses regarding gender in advertising and how this matter is perceived by the female audience.

The first step was to determine how the difference between women's role in society, politics and economy vs. the image presented in commercials could be made clear. In order to do so, a comparison was made between women's participation in these public spheres fifty years ago and now, followed by an analysis of commercials from that period and from today.

The reason why the 60's was the decade chosen to be compared with the present time is that there was a specially remarkable female oppression in that period, which was translated both as legislation and timid female participation in the public space, besides extreme sexist concepts in commercials. The fact that Spain was under a dictatorship at the time was another factor which made female submission even more obvious, as society was openly patriarchal and government favored traditional family structures. Besides this political component, as the research had to be conducted physically in Spain, more precisely, in Barcelona, State of Catalonia, the universe of study was further reduced to this geographical area.

To better define the above-mentioned aspects of both social/political participation and media representation of women, a political, social and economic overview of women in an international setting is presented, followed by a deeper analysis of women's role in these sectors in Spain in the 60's and in the past decade. The idea of presenting first an international view is not only to contextualize the issue, but also to allow a comparison of female image treatment in the country vs. abroad.

Both quantitative and qualitative data on women's (active and passive) presence in politics and in economy (their presence in the work space, the number of housebound women, etc.) are displayed, as well as a qualitative approach to women's rights regarding legislation and an analysis of their role in social life. This information was

collected both from other works on the theme and from public data sources, such as public reports.

The next step was the choice of publicity material to be used in the research. A number of commercials were selected based on their reflection of the issue in question: women and their relation to the household and the family. These commercials do not always show a woman using a household appliance or product (which is the case of *Ala* detergent, for instance), but are necessarily related to house appliances or products and the family. The criteria to select the commercials aimed at creating a set of different situations and settings, in order to enable a wider range of discussion between the groups. The group of commercials should, in the end, contain: female/male interaction with household care; sole female participation in house care; women's presence as something evoked rather than physical; settings inside and outside the house.

As the commercials would be presented to women in the form of focus groups, 6 advertisements from the 60's and 6 advertisements from the past decade were considered adequate to provide a sufficient amount of material for discussion while, at the same time, keeping women engaged and interested. It was important to have a small number of advertisements, as showing the commercials could not take too long, for repeated images and concepts could influence the women's perception and thus distort the result of the research. As they all concerned the same theme, that number would be sufficient.

After that, a semiotic, anthropological and sociological approach is made in order to analyze the discourse and sometimes intentional messages in these advertisements. In this analysis, elements regarding gender treatment are pointed out (most of them much clearer in the 60's advertisements) in order to enlighten the reader as to some almost unperceived elements in images or discourse. Needless to say, the idea is, by no means, to influence or direct the reader into a feminist or extremist direction, but rather to call the attention to some elements connected with stereotypes or archetypes which sometimes are not so rationally internalized.

The importance of such an interpretation is reinforced by Judith Williamson in "*Decoding Advertising*", where she defines advertisements as an assemblage of signs

that convey a specific meaning, designed to sell products and create a consumerism ideology (Williamson 1978). Nevertheless, advertising signs should not be seen only with a “meaning in themselves” as, “*a sign consists of two elements, the signifier (the material object, word, or picture) and the signified (the meaning ascribed to the material object, word or picture). Hence the structuralist slogan: a sign is always thing-plus-meaning*” (Ball, Smith, 1992: 48).

Some hypotheses risen as a result of the analysis of the advertising material and the social, political and economic approach comparing women’s role regarding household in the 60’s and today are developed in the following part of this study. When considering these hypotheses, the need to conduct a qualitative research in order to obtain the desired type of data and achieve the objective of this project became clear. More specifically, the dissertation was driven towards a constructive or naturalistic investigation, which sought to “*understand the constructions of reality created by the people being studied and by the researcher through a circle of inquiry*” (Morgan, 1993: 139).

Focus groups seemed an appropriate technique to conduct such a research because they provide not only “*qualitative data to answer research questions*” (Morgan, 1993: 11), but also “*insights into the formation of views which cannot be so readily achieved via individual interviews*” (Somekh, Lewin, 2005: 42). Moreover, a specific nuance of this type of inquiry is that results can be enriched by observing not only how women relate to their own identity regarding gender roles, but also how they perceive their identity among peers. Thus, focus groups “*often give facilitators the chance to observe how individuals within groups react to the views of others and seek to defend their own views*” (Somekh, Lewin, 2005: 42).

The fact that being in a group could inhibit some personal comments or prevent people from telling intimate stories was considered, but discarded after benefits from this technique proved to be more relevant. In fact, this issue has actually come to seem, to some extent, a myth, as authors today tend to believe that “*in actual experience, people readily talk about a wide range of personal and emotional topics*” (Morgan, 1993: 6).

The results of the questionnaire are presented according to the theme proposed by each set of questions:

- i) Identification with the protagonist and the situation in the advertisements;
- ii) Perspective of the men/women relation;
- iii) Identification of gender-oriented signs.

The hypotheses formulated lead towards a reflection concerning the economic and political data which give an account of female changes in the social sphere from fifty years ago until today, as well as the women's view on the commercials presented. New insights generated in the course of the research and fresh perspectives not foreseen in the initial hypotheses helped forming a broader view expressed in the conclusion.

### **7.1 Conducting the interviews**

The interviews were conducted with 5 groups of women, each composed by 3 to 5 women, in a total of 18 women. They were aged between 28 and 40; middle class; single or in a stable relationship; all of them living in urban areas (and currently living in Barcelona, State of Catalonia); and having used similar products to those advertised.

In order to guarantee a resemblance in their lifestyle regarding career-focused vs. housewife, the filter of this research was whether they had worked or were currently working out of home in the past two years.

A guide with questions was formulated in order to guarantee that the answers would provide the desired data content according to the hypotheses raised, but also in order to leave some space for insights and to enable unexpected information and reflections to arise. The questionnaire can be found in "Annexes".

First, the group received some simple orientation on how the work would be conducted. They were informed that some household appliances advertisements would be shown and they would have to answer a few questions. At no point was the final purpose of the enquiry mentioned, so as to avoid influencing the discussion.

The women would watch the first range of advertisements, the “modern” ones, and answer questions related to them. The chronological order of the advertisements was inverted, this choice being determined by the fact that the 60’s commercials had more obvious signs of sexism, which could affect their perception of the modern ones. The order of the questions after each set of advertisements was also chosen in such a way that they would not influence the direction of the discussion, aiming at providing realistic answers as far as possible.

Next, they were presented the 60’s set of advertisements and other questions were asked. The first set of questions was more relevant to the core of this project, but the second set was necessary to confirm some presumably more obvious hypotheses. In all the groups, interviewees seemed interested in the theme and discussions soon arose, especially regarding comparisons such as “*In my family it is not like this*”.

Some considerations were taken into account during the interviews, based both on bibliography related to techniques on focus groups and on interviewing and analyzing female discourse.

The main characteristic of a focus group is precisely that it enables a personal and close interaction between interviewer and interviewee (Ferrando, Ibañez, Alvira 2002). It was, therefore necessary to create a comfortable atmosphere when applying the questionnaire, in order to make this interaction smooth and allow women to express themselves in a natural way. Even if this was considered a “controlled condition”, the idea was both to create a natural conversation environment and to maintain the discussion on track in relation to the type of data needed. Such relaxed environment, in this case, allowed the interviewees to communicate freely, recalling spontaneously their personal interests, beliefs, values and desires – both conscious and unconscious (Ferrando, Ibañez, Alvira 2002).

As the results of this type of enquiry are, by definition, non-quantitative data, many of them were generated as part of spontaneous speech, which must be seen by the interviewer as a watch out, given that they can be misinterpreted out of context and their complexity can incite distorted signifying relations. (Ferrando, Ibañez, Alvira 2002). In order to avoid such noise in the result of the enquiry, some precautions were taken when

both collecting and analyzing data. First of all, in larger groups the discussions were recorded, and in smaller groups, notes were taken quoting the interviewees' exact words.

The questionnaire was developed especially to avoid this type of misleading information related to spontaneous speech. It allowed the enquiry to take an informal approach, enabling a situation where the interviewees reformulated the questions themselves, according to personal background and beliefs. This form of dialogue was needed to reach realistic and palpable insights, as it allowed a more reciprocal structure, which enables personal and projective dialog (Ferrando, Ibañez, Alvira 2002). In other words, the result was both a rational, realistic discourse based on a personal view and experience, and a more subjective, abstract discourse, based on unconscious beliefs and collective patterns of behavior.

Considering that the groups interviewed were composed only by women, some female discourse analysis was carried out before starting the research, in order to get the best from the interviews. One important source of data on female discourse characteristics was the work of anthropologist John Gumperz. According to him, "*in friendly talk, women are negotiating and expressing a relationship, one that should be in the form of support and closeness, but which may also involve criticism and distance*" (Gumperz, 1982: 209).

Some peculiarities of the relation between female interviewee and moderator were taken into account. According to Gumperz, "*Women orient themselves to the person they are talking to and expect such orientation in return. As interaction, conversation requires participation from those involved and back and forth movement between participants. Getting the floor is not seen as particularly problematic; that should come about automatically. What is problematic is getting people engaged and keeping them engaged – maintaining the conversation and the interaction*" (Gumperz, 1982: 209).

He also remarks that "*Women tend to use personal and inclusive pronouns, such as you and me, [...] give off and look for signs of engagement such as nods and minimal response [...], and give more extended signs of interest and attention, such as*

*interjecting comments or questions during a speaker's discourse*" (Gumperz, 1982: 210).

An important point to be considered is the fact that women seem to be more influenced by others in this type of enquiry than men, as they "*explicitly acknowledge and respond to what has been said by others and [...] attempt to link their utterance to the one preceding it by building on the previous utterance or talking about something parallel or related to it*" (Gumperz, 1982: 210).

Another concern when working with women's groups was to achieve a balance between allowing each one of them to express her own opinion – even if based on others' ideas, to elaborate thinking on their own – while avoiding "*elements of criticism, competition and conflict [that] do occur in it*" (Gumperz, 1982: 210), which could generate a predisposition to remain quiet and avoid speaking her own mind.

Finally, there was the challenge of trying to translate what they meant by sometimes quite abstract remarks without misinterpretation. Still according to Gumperz, "*women are more indirect and metaphoric in their phrasing and less prolonged than [...] men*" (Gumperz, 1982: 210).

## **8. Economic and social settings: the 1960's and today**

The 60's represented, to most of the western world, the beginning of a social and cultural liberation announced in the previous decade: the "American Dream" was losing its strength as the perfect life pattern, and a more rebel and activist behavior was starting to rise. Revolutions such as feminism and movements in favor of homosexuals started to pop up especially in the United States, where hippies denied the traditional values of family and church and replaced them by a free lifestyle through a counterculture movement, which would reach its peak in the following decade.

One could say that it was a period of transition between a conservative and a more liberal lifestyle, and thus some intrinsic values of traditional society did not vanish in the course of a few years, but gradually dissolved into a more flexible model. This dissolution, however, was harder and longer in countries under a dictatorship, which was the case of Spain. The country had been under a totalitarian government system for almost forty years (1939-1975), under Dictator Francisco Franco (1892-1975). During that period, traditional and Catholic values were preached and appreciated, rebellion of any kind was harshly punished and family structure still followed the model of the previous decades.

Needless to say, women had a limited and defined role in society then. An important organ responsible for divulging the State's patriarchal ideology was "*La Sección Femenina de la Falange Española*" (Female Section of Spanish Falanx), which acted as a political instrument to organize women and transmit the thinking and values of the new state: "[...] *More specifically its role is remembered as one of exhorting [...] women to reduce themselves to the home and to the church*". (Mohammad, 2005: 252).

### **8.1 Women and work**

In 1974, women represented 20% of the active population in Spain, most of them being young and single. The *Fuero del Trabajo*, a document emitted in 1938 by Francisco Franco regulating labor in the country during his dictatorship, reveals a clear difference in the treatment of men and women (even discriminating specifically married women) regarding work, when it "[...] *in particular prohibits night work for women and*

*children, regulates home work and releases married women from the workshop and the factory*” (Fuero del Trabajo, 1938: II, 1). Even though, in 1967, Spain adhered to the Agreement of Parity of Salaries proposed by the International Labor Organization in 1951, the *Fuero del Trabajo* was considered a fundamental law and applied the concept of *Family Income* (Sanchez, Martín 2007), which basically predicted a salary difference between genders (Sanchez, Martín, 2007: 147). The Contract Law of 1944 also reinforced the idea of salary discrimination between genders and made female insertion into the labor market even harder, with conditions such as making women ask for a previous authorization from their husbands in order to sign a work contract.

This obligation was kept even after the Stabilization Plan of 1961, which predicted formal liberations to women, and considered illegal gender discrimination regarding salaries. However, the “*patriarchal family model was kept as the Plan had the purpose of harmonizing woman’s work with her family duties, especially as a wife and mother*” (Sanchez, Martín, 2007: 148).

Sexism is evident in other areas of social life during the dictatorship, as marriage was seen as a sort of exchange of part of men’s salary for women’s work in the house, and boys were educated towards a career while girls were taught how to do domestic chores. The regime also influenced women to leave their careers when they got married and to reproduce, offering those who worked in the public sector a “dote” to do so. At the end of the regime, the slice of active female population was one of the lowest in Europe, about 28% (Sanchez, Martín 2007).

Martin and Sanchez’s analysis of the distribution of female work force between 1963 and 1975 shows that women were mainly concentrated (over 80%) in manufacturing shoes, fabric and food. Some of the main conclusions of this analysis reflect the facts that: i) “*female participation was lower than male*”; and ii) “*lower group salaries were found in activities where there was the predominance of women*” (Sanchez, Martín, 2007: 158).

A study conducted in 1990 by the *Instituto de la Mujer* shows that women in the 90’s still had low expectations regarding their career, as they wanted power in the workplace but still saw themselves as bound to a dependent role – they were afraid of success. The

Institute also reveals that women in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (married and with children under 10) are still focused on the house work, which interferes with their career. While men can make career decisions immediately, women still feel the need to think about how to organize the house and the family, as household pressure is still present.

Not only political, but also economic changes in Spain in the past decades have made it necessary for women to enter the labor market, as there has been a transformation in the traditional family model, for nowadays two salaries are needed to support a family (*Instituto de la Mujer* 2001).

With the end of the dictatorship and an economic and technological boost after the Cold War, the need for labor force met the desire of the equal rights women had fought for in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Those changes fitted the non-traditional family model proposed by feminists of that period and the insertion of women in the work place grew remarkably.

In Spain, the Constitution approved by popular referendum in the 70's recognized equal opportunities for all Spanish citizens, with no discrimination. This is one of the starting points of the changes women achieved in the country, which, together with reflections of the economic and social turnover of the following decades, generated a remarkable transformation in women's position in society.

Female participation in the labor force started to grow at a faster pace since the 80's. In 1986 they represented 28.8%, rising to 37.8% in 1996 (INE 1996). In the European Union (EU) as a whole, a study published in 1998 shows that there is "*an increasing activity rate for women and decreasing activity rate for men, [...] with the emergence of a dual bread-winner model whereby both women and men take responsibility for supporting the family*" (Drew, Emerek, Mahon, 1998: 90). Further data reveal an increase in the activity rate among working-age women by nearly 10% in numerous countries between 1983 and 1995 (Eurostat 1995). At the same time, most countries have experienced a similar growth in the commonest form of "atypical" work: part-time employment.

In 1995, Spain was one of the few countries in the EU, along with Greece, Italy, Luxembourg and Ireland, where women's activity rate was growing, yet was still below 50% (Eurostat 1995). However, the same study reflects the actual evolution of female participation in the work force, as it states that, "*at European level, though, atypical employment has not been accompanied by any decrease in gender-based segregation. Gender segregation of the labor market has been maintained, even recreated, in new forms and the highest increase in women's activity rates has been found in countries which have experienced the highest expansion in sectors which already employ a high proportion of women: in service jobs already marked by low-paid, part-time, irregular contracts*" (Eurostat 1995).

Fomenting the female work force was a priority of economic policies in the EU the past decade, and the European Employment Strategy set a target of 60% for female participation in the work force in all member states by 2010. Since the 90's, EU policies have aimed not only at an equal male/female work rate, but also at sharing family responsibilities (Lewis 2009). A tangible proof was the recommendation issued by the European Council in 1992 "*that member states develop and/or encourage childcare initiatives to enable women and men to reconcile their occupational, family and child-raising responsibilities*". Measures were oriented towards childcare services, leave for employed parents, family-friendly policies at the workplace and promotion of the increase of male participation in children's care and upbringing.

In Spain, the insertion of the female work force has increased at a very high pace in the past decades, generating a great impact on the economic flow of the country, which, according to M. Gamundí, can be justified as "*a spectacular increase in the female population education level in the second half of this century and a change in middle-class and upper-class values, along with the effective reduction of the time dedicated to household tasks and the expansion of subsectors where the female force is more demanded*" (Gamundí, 1997: 110).

The National Institute of Statistics in Spain, in its yearly employment survey, shows that the evolution of female vs. male workers increased from 20% in 1960 to 40% in 2000 (INE 2000). The increase in female participation in the labor market accompanies an

increasing insertion of male activities in household and childcare (*Instituto de la Mujer* 2001).

There has also been an increase in the number of married active women (even though single women still have a higher work rate). An interesting observation made by Gamundí regards the identification of a behavioral change in the generation born between 1957 and 1961, as women born after this period do not withdraw from the labor market in the years of family formation as the previous generations had done.

On the other hand, a decrease in male activity can be observed in the country in the past decades, from 91% to 75% between 1977 and 1997, though not all of this reduction has been absorbed by female labor. It is also crucial to point out that women in Spain earned 22% less than men in 1997.

In 2008, 55.7% of women in the country worked out of the house. According to the *Informe sobre mujeres y trabajo*, emitted by the Spanish Ministry of Work in 2008, women have “reached a level of qualification that equals them to men regarding active citizens with higher education”. In the past twelve years, women have taken over half of all the job offers in the country, and those aged between 25 and 29 are as much present in the work place as men.

More recent data on female participation in the work force in Spain was published by The National Institute of Statistics of Spain (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística - INE*), together with the *Instituto de la Mujer*, in a study entitled “*Men and women in Spain, 2010*”. The premise of this document is the idea that “the important legal measures that have been adopted in the past few years to advance towards the goal of equity must be accompanied by the effective integration of the gender perspective in statistics and studies as established in article 20 of the *Ley Organica 3/2007 for the effective parity between men and women*” (INE, *Instituto de la Mujer* 2010).

Regarding work force, the study shows that female activity grew, between 2002 and 2009, at a faster pace than male activity: while the former experienced an increase of 32.8% (among the population over 16 years of age), the latter increased only 12.5%.

Unemployment also affected more the male population, which, in the same period, grew 145.7%, while the female rate grew 56.2%.

In comparison with other countries in the EU, Spain has also improved its level of active participation in the labor market: while in 2002 the female employment rate was 10 points below the average in the EU, in 2008 the number was reduced to only 4.2 points. Overall, the study concludes that “Numbers indicate a significant incorporation of women in economic activity in the past few years”, and “Women have achieved important advances in their incorporation in different work situations in the labor market in the past few years (2002-2009)” (INE, *Instituto de la Mujer* 2010).

**Chart 3:**

**Population in relation to economic activity**

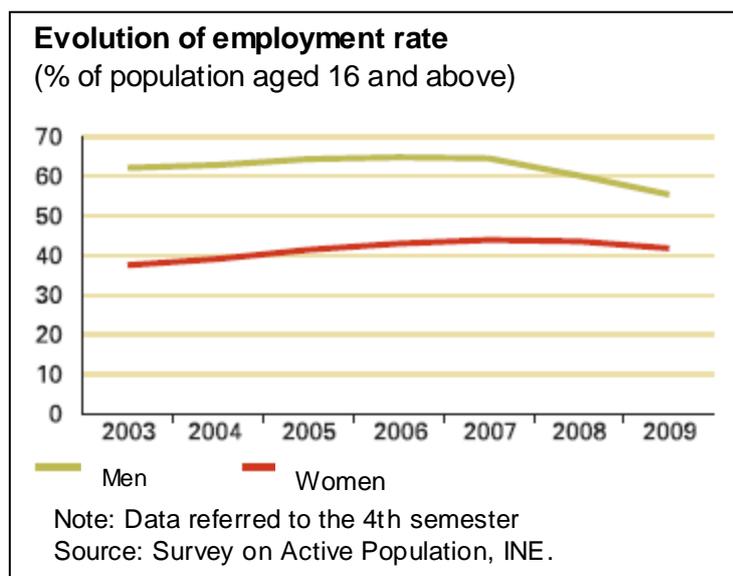
	2002		2008		2009	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
16 to 64 years	14.062,7	13.912,6	15.636,2	15.265,2	15.591,2	15.281,9
16 years and above	16.983,3	17.862,7	18.825,3	19.531,2	18.833,1	19.610,0
Active (16 years and above)	11.405,8	7.631,4	13.029,5	10.035,2	12.833,2	10.139,3
Working	10.431,9	6.393,5	11.340,6	8.516,2	10.440,6	8.205,3
Not Working	973,9	1.237,9	1.688,8	1.519,0	2.392,5	1.934,0
Inactive (16 years and above)	5.577,6	10.231,3	5.795,8	9.496,0	6.000,0	9.470,7
Activity rate (16 years and above)	67,2	42,7	69,2	51,4	68,1	51,7
Unemployment rate (16 years and above)	8,5	16,2	12,9	15,1	18,6	19,1
Employment rate (16 years and above)	61,4	35,8	60,2	43,6	55,4	41,8
Activity rate (16 to 64 years)	80,6	54,6	82,7	65,3	81,6	65,9
Unemployment rate (16 to 64 years)	8,6	16,3	13,0	15,2	18,7	19,2
Employment rate (16 to 64 years)	73,7	45,7	71,9	55,4	66,3	53,3

Notes: The absolute values are thousands of people and the rates are percentages. Dates referring to the 4th trimester

Source: Survey on Active Population, INE.

The employment rate in the population aged between 16 and 64 (considered labor age) was of 66.3 among men and 55.3 among women in the last quarter of 2009. Out of the total number of employed people in Spain in the same period, 44% were women (INE 2010). Women still represent the majority of the work force in the educational sphere, composing 63.4% of the teaching staff in Spain. The female presence in the so called “economic decision organs” in Spain is still shy, and, according to the INE, “shows that full incorporation of women in this sphere has yet not been fully accomplished”. According to the Survey on Active Population, in the third quarter of 2009 only 32.2% of managers and directors in companies were women.

Chart 4:



## 8.2 Women and politics

Few data were found on the female participation in politics in the 60's, but a comparison between data from 1977 and 2004 can give an idea of the evolution in this sphere. In 1977, the number of women in the Chamber of the Deputies was 22 (representing 6% of the total Deputies), while in 2004 the 126 women in the Chamber stood for 36% of the total number of Deputies (*Instituto de la Mujer* 2004). In the Senate, women represented 2% of the total number of Senators in 1997, while in 2004 the rate was 24% (*Instituto de la Mujer* 2004)

While there was a shy female political representation during the dictatorial regime, a feminist political movement took place between the 60's and the 70's, as an opposition to totalitarianism, according to Valiente's observation that "*The fact that the state did not provide women with some services that they needed, such as sexual information, contraceptives and legal advice, has made Spanish feminists willing to invest considerable energy in service provision since the 1970's*" (Valiente, 2002: 775).

The Law of Equity (which does not allow parties to present more than 60% of candidates from the same sex) also helped numbers grow dramatically: in 2007, almost 40% of the Councilors in Spain were women – considering that the number of women candidates presented by parties in 1980 reached 13.2%.

More recent data show that total female affiliation to political parties represents 34.4%, 31% working in executive organs. This number indicates an increase of 6.6% in 2008 as compared to the previous year. In some cases, such as the Federative Executive Commission and the National Executive Commission, women stand for 50% of the positions at present.

**Chart 5:**

<b>Affiliation with political parties with five or more participants</b>				
	Women	Men	% Women	Period
<b>Total</b>	<b>475.261</b>	<b>904.679</b>	<b>34,4</b>	
PP	270.416	495.389	35,3	Dec '08
PSOE	191.700	383.385	33,3	Apr '08
PNV	10.574	18.380	36,5	Mar '09
ERC	2.571	7.525	25,5	Oct '09
CDC	..	..	..	Dec '09

Source: Instituto de la Mujer with data provided by the political parties.

In 2008 neither the Congress nor the Senate had an equal presence of women and men in their chairs. However, the number of Congress women was only 3.7 points below that established by the Law of Equity. In the Senate, this number was 11.8 points below the objective proposed by legislation (*Instituto de la Mujer*, INE 2008).

In the European Parliament, the female presence increased 4% in 2009 in relation to the previous elections, and women's participation reached 35.1%, a number very close to the recommended 40% participation. In other European countries, such as Finland, Sweden and Estonia, women stand for 61.5%, 55.6% and 50% of the European Parliament, respectively. With 36% of female presence, however, Spain is above the EU average (*Instituto de la Mujer* 2009).

Regarding high political positions, the number of female Ministers is already larger than that of male Ministers in the country: 52.9%. Women have also reached representative numbers in the General Administration of the State, where the female presence in the General Direction, General Secretary and State Secretary are, respectively 34.6%, 33.3% and 29% (*Instituto de la Mujer* 2009).

### 8.3 Women and social/family life

*“Both the family model and the composition of households have suffered important changes in the past years. Often family and home are no longer equivalent, once some houses are composed by people in which there is no family relation. There are families which do not live at the same house and there have been alternative family models”* (INE 2010).

These changes probably reflect an even more traditional family model in Spain until 1975. Actually, non-religious marriages appear in statistics only after 1975 (religious marriages were basically mandatory during the dictatorship), and divorces, only after 1980. (*Instituto de la Mujer*, INE 2009).

Franco’s regime was based on traditional, Christian values which were, *a priori*, against female liberation and parity with men in social life: “[...] *the Franquista regime is constructed as a “return to the past”; sending women [...] back home, pushing women back from modernity to “tradition”, given that the ideology of the regime with respect to women was based on the exaltation of their traditional roles of wife and mother confined to their homes”* (Mohammad, 2005: 252). Traditional family values were not only a way to determine gender roles compliant with economic and political ideology, but also *“the vehicle for a conservative national regeneration”*. As Mohammad discusses the matter, she recalls the preamble to the Labor Charter, emitted in 1938, where the family is described as *“the primary natural and basic unit of society and, at the same time, a moral institution”* (Mohammad, 2005: 252).

Mohammad also expresses an interesting view of women’s family role during the dictatorship in Spain: *“Marriage not only naturalized the home as the place of married women through their roles as housewives and mothers, but it also prepared the ground to contain women, not yet married, within the home space and reinforce the worlds beyond it as essentially masculine”* (Mohammad, 2005: 252). Private and public spaces were based on gender discourse during Franco’s government, literally defined as “the house or the street”. Such gap between the public and private spheres brought about numerous gender variations, such as the fact that difference between men and women

concerning the literate population was of 97% for men and 86% for women in 1960 (Nuñez, 2005: 230).

The main political structure used to reinforce family values during the regime was the Feminine Phalanx mentioned above. The office, led by Pilar Primo de Rivera (sister of José Antonio, founder of the Spanish Phalanx) defined the qualities of a perfect feminine and national figure, issuing documents which helped orienting women of that period in the proper direction. Among the “rules” of behavior were lessons such as: “*If your husband asks for unusual sexual practices, be obedient and do not complain*”; “*Every day we should be thankful to God for having deprived most women of the gift of speech, because if we had it, who knows whether we would follow into the vanity of exposing it in public squares*”; and “*The life of every woman, despite how much she wants to believe it is the other way round, is nothing more than an eternal desire to find someone to submit to*” (Tereixa, El País 10/5/2009).

An interesting study was conducted by the British Social Attitudes in 2002, regarding both women’s and men’s view and on gender role in the family construction in the past decades. As can be seen in Chart 6 and Chart 7, while there is still a sexist perspective regarding these roles, there have also been dramatic changes in the perception of male and female participation in bread-winning and family care.

These charts actually show how “*men tend to hold more ‘conventional’ gender role attitudes than women; that is, both men and women have become more gender-‘liberal’, but the attitudinal difference between the sexes persists*” (Crompton, 2006: 44). The greater increase in perception between 1989 and 1994 than between 1994 and 2002 can be justified, according to the survey, to the great employment increase in the 80’s, compared to stable levels in the 90’s: “*This suggests that rates of attitudinal change have in fact followed quite closely on actual changes in women’s employment behavior*” (Crompton, 2006: 44).

The BSA report shows changes not only in gender perception, but also in male/female behavior regarding house and family care. In 1989 62% of the mothers interviewed stayed at home while their children were under school age, whereas in 2002 the number declined to 48% (BSA 2002).

**Chart 6:**

**“Men’s job is to earn money, women’s job is to look after the home and family”.**

<i>% who agree</i>	<i>1989</i>	<i>Base</i>	<i>1994</i>	<i>Base</i>	<i>2002</i>	<b>Base</b>
Men	32	587	26	448	20	852
Women	26	720	21	536	15	1108
<b>All</b>	28	1307	24	984	17	1960

Source: BSA surveys, 1989-2002. Extracted from Employment and Family, Crompton, Rosemary, 2006.

**Chart 7:**

**“Women should stay at home when there is a child under school age”.**

<i>% who agree</i>	<i>1989</i>	<i>Base</i>	<i>1994</i>	<i>Base</i>	<i>2002</i>	<b>Base</b>
Men	67	587	60	448	51	852
Women	61	720	51	536	46	1108
<b>All</b>	64	1307	55	984	48	1960

Source: BSA surveys, 1989-2002. Extracted from Employment and Family, Crompton, Rosemary, 2006.

According to the study published by M. Gamundí on changes in the Spanish family structure in 1997, “*Unlike what has been registered in other countries from the north and center of Europe, in Spain, and in general in countries around it (Italy, Portugal and Greece), there has not been a major transformation in traditional family formats in the sense of families formed by a couple and kids*” (Gamundí, 1997: 57). She also points out that Spain was, in 1997, the European country with the lowest percentage of one-parent houses (26.7% approximately). One-parent families increased from 5.6% to 8.2% from 1981 to 1991, most of them being composed by women with children. About 60% of the single mothers with children were inactive and around 16% were considered “unqualified workers”.

Studies show that married women have a smaller inclination to work and tend to abandon their activities (after being unemployed) if there is another member in the house with a job (Gamundí 1997). What these studies also indicate is that women with higher education tend to have a fairly stable career and “*relative independence from the husband*” (Gamundí, 1997: 96), while less qualified women tend to look for a job more sporadically, mostly motivated by the irregularity of the husband’s income.

Moreover, “as predictable, families in the phase of children education are the ones which represent a higher proportion of exclusively male (the husband’s) work: 64.9%; wives over 40 usually belong to a generation in which there is a larger abandonment of work with the arrival of children” (Gamundí, 1997: 127).

According to the INE, in a report published in 2010, childcare is still largely done by women. The study concludes that 79.7% of the people who work part time to take care of a dependent person are women, and 53.5% of them claim not to have enough funding to leave their children in daycare. Also, contrary to what happens to men, the number of children reduces the female employment rate.

Regarding education, female graduate level is superior to men (75.9% vs. 62.6, respectively), while women also have a higher level of approval in exams to enter universities (82.8% and 81.2%, respectively). However, there seems to be a difference in the choice of degree: while 15 men in a thousand graduate in sciences, mathematics and technology, only 7 women in a thousand choose those degrees (INE 2010).

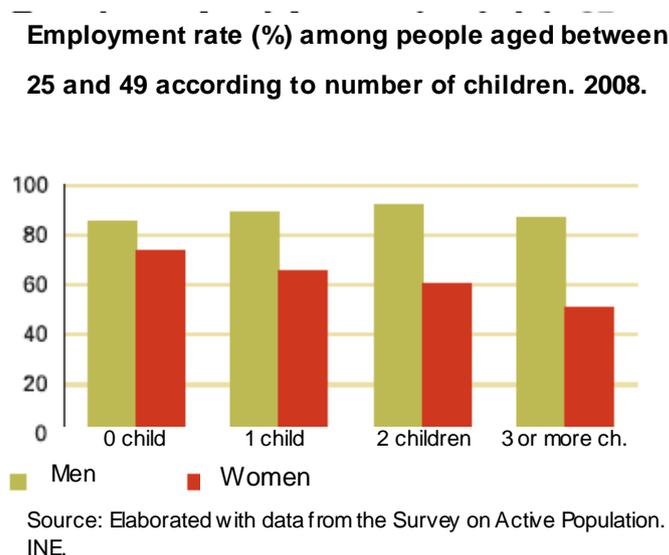
Some interesting data provide an insight into the evolution of women with a university degree: in 2005 the percentage of women aged from 25 to 34 who had attended university was of 37%, while the percentage of those aged between 45 and 54 was of 10% (INE 2010).

A document of the *Instituto de la Mujer* issued in 1999 points out a huge difference between men and women in their actual behavior concerning the house: while the number of men between 30 and 49 years of age who had housework as their sole function represented 0.2%, the number of women was 35.1%. Men who worked and took care of the house reached 8.2%, while women stood for 32.9%, and men who only worked out of the house represented 77.5%, while women did not go beyond 14.8% (*Instituto de la Mujer* 1999).

The gap between men and women regarding the use of computers and the Internet diminished from 2004 to 2009, going down from 9.9 points to 6.8. While there is a slight difference between men and women in the hours spent watching television (around 158.6 minutes a day for men and 166.2 for women), it is interesting to notice

that 41% of the women watch TV while doing house chores, while the percentage of men in the same situation is of only 5.6% (*Ministerio de la Cultura 2007*).

**Chart 8:**



In the sports field, only 20.1% of the federated sportspeople are female. It is a small number, and so is the female participation in the board of sport federations. In fact, the number of women in those boards is relatively low in comparison to the number of federated sportswomen (INE 2010).

The INE also points out the timid presence of women regarding awards, honors and distinctions: “*In 2009, only 6.5% of the academic chairs in the Royal Academy of Spain were occupied by women*”. Other small numbers indicate this gap in female recognition at high academic level: out of 97 people honored with the title of *Doctor Honoris Causa* in Spain in 2008, only 10 were women. In 2009, out of 95 people who were awarded a prize in literature and other academic fields, only 18.9% were women (INE 2009).

However, even with a lower percentage of women in the field of science and technology, 43.1% of the prizes for research, science and technique were awarded to women in 2009 (INE 2009).

## **9. Analysis of the advertising material**

The commercials shown to the focus groups are presented below, with an explanation of the content and the succession of scenes, followed by the research results. Besides the objective content, a semiotic and contextualized vision is proposed, highlighting aspects relevant to this study and thus clarifying the choice of this sample of advertisements. The presentation is divided into commercials from the 60's and commercials from the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Contemporary advertisements are presented before those of the 60's, to follow the same order displayed during the research, so as to evoke the same impression on the readers.

### **9.1 Commercials of today**

When looking for household appliances advertising, it was not difficult to select a sample that matched the objectives of this research. There were actually almost no commercials which escaped the model of “woman taking care of the house while the male figure is either absent or appears in the background”. What it is clear is that there are new settings to this otherwise traditional model. While commercials in the 60's depict a much clearer view of the family structure, today's advertisements show much more subtle signs, often unnoticed by the audience.

The following analysis intends to point out some of these veiled signs, which may not generate the astonishment provoked by the 60's advertisements, but are actually quite similar to them. All of them have in common the woman as the house leader, even though it is not clear whether she also works outside or not.

The advertisements also point out (specially the Ala commercial) how women are the main figure in the children's life, and depict them in that way as something completely natural. Another characteristic in common is that most of them use humor to convey the message, especially when displaying the male/female relationship.

### a) Skip detergent

This commercial presents a young woman arranging a blind date on the phone, describing her outfit so that her date can recognize her. She is in a modern setting (the background shows a modern computer and the house decoration is “clean”, displaying only some women’s magazines on a table), but her attitude has a touch of romanticism. The background music is a mixture of romanticism (the rhythm) and modernity (the lyrics), as a woman’s voice sings: *“I see the world is moving on”*. As the protagonist walks down the streets towards the accorded place for the date, almost all the male figures in the setting can be seen wearing suits, while women are presented in more casual wear.

In the following sequence, she gets her clothes stained when a car passes by, sees a laundromat and goes in. A voice in off says: *“Some things are impossible to achieve. But Skip has made it possible”*. All the characters inside the laundromat are women. There, she takes off her clothes and waits for them to be washed, as *“Skip washes clothes with maximum efficiency even in the ‘short program’ in the washing machine”*. She leaves the laundromat very pleased and finds her date waiting on the other side of the street. As the commercial ends, he also gets wet by a passing car as the camera moves to a pack shot and the Skip slogan.



### b) Kalia Vanish Oxi Action Multi

This advertisement has a “TV-breaking-news” aesthetics, with the camera in hand and visible technical apparatus (microphone, cameraman, etc). It begins in an outdoor sequence, in an environment of “urgency” where three women wearing a Kalia Vanish pink outfit approach the camera, also resembling TV reporters. These women seem quite young (under 30), are very beautiful and look clean and groomed. The whole

atmosphere suggests that something out of the ordinary has just happened or something revolutionary has been discovered. In this background, one of the Kalia-dressed women says: *“We are here to prove that Kalia Vanish has the ultimate solution”*. The crew approaches a house and conducts an interview on stain removal with an “ordinary woman”.

The surrounding scene seems quite spontaneous, once again giving a sense of a news broadcast rather than the usual advertising format. While the interviewee gives her statement, her kids are running and jumping out of the house. She says: *“In this house, with three children, everything is “stains”. [...] I put the clothes in the washing machine with hot water, but even so they don’t look nice”*. The woman is dressed with simplicity (jeans and a blouse) and is wearing a necklace. She looks clean and tidy, even though her hair seems a bit messy. She is not as young as the “Kalia women”, and a bit overweight.

In the following sequence, one of the “Kalia women” calls a big group of people to follow her to a square nearby to make the stain test. The setting (apart from the mob following the “Kalia women”) is peaceful and composed mostly of houses or small buildings. The mob consists exclusively of women holding a piece of cloth (the only men in the advertisement are the cameraman and the children), and they watch the pink-dressed women perform a demonstration of the product with great curiosity.

There follows a very clear display of the application of the product, in front of a bright pink Vanish scenario, as a female voice says: *“It is effective for different types of stain, in different fabrics, for different colors and in different temperatures”*. In the background, there are images of women holding these different fabrics and colors. The demonstration seems somewhat artificial, for, when the demonstrator mentions *“cold water”*, she drops some ice cubes in the water bucket and gently sinks the fabric into the water to remove the stain (showing no sign of physical work while doing the job).

The “Kalia reporter” comes back to the interviewed woman and asks: *“Laura, are you at peace now?”*, to which the woman replies: *“Perfect, the fabric seems new”*. As the voice over says: *“Kalia Vanish. Trust the pink, and goodbye, stains!”*, the Vanish setting where the demonstration took place is crowded with women of all ages and

small children looking amazed and commenting on the effectiveness of the product. The variety of these women's ages and styles (some are more well-dressed than others) and the news atmosphere give a sense of "real story" to the commercial. In fact, there is little resemblance between these "real life" women and the perfect-looking young "Kalia women".



### c) Fairy cleansing and care

This dishwasher advertisement shows a sequence of detailed images of female hands (apparently two women, as there is a detail of a sleeve that indicates two different outfits) performing daily tasks such as buying groceries, hanging clothes to dry, cleaning a rough surface and unpeeling a potato. A female voice over goes: *"Think about what your hands have to go through throughout the day. New Fairy cleansing and care aloe-vera and cucumber gives you the strength of a Fairy and helps you keep your hands soft and moisturized"*. There follows an image of a female hand carefully washing a very dirty plate while a soothing music plays in the background (in contrast with the rough noises in the first part). Then, the hand appears in front of a white panel holding some leaves and a slice of cucumber, and the commercial closes with the slogan: *"Fairy cleansing and care: a new cleaning sensation"*.

This idea of softness and freshness has already been broadly used in advertising, as a research carried out on TV commercials in the United Kingdom in 1986 showed that 24 years ago women already thought that cleansing products advertisements would *"exaggerate the importance of household chores or suggest that housewives are only (or specially) concerned with getting things cleaner, whiter, softer or fresher"* (ASA 2002).

We believe it is important to emphasize that all women's activities in the analyzed commercials are home-oriented: washing clothes, cooking and buying groceries. They

were also the center of women's life in the 1960's advertisements presented ("Aspes Kitchen" in the first two cases, and "Fiseat", regarding groceries, below).

As commented in the "Bimbolos" advertising below, there is no sign of a ring in the woman's fingers, showing no indication of her being a wife. Again, regarding the 1960's commercials, there is still an idea of taking care of the house and remaining beautiful. In this case, the product is shown almost as a moisturizer, rather than a detergent – it persuades women that they will be using a good product in the house and taking care of themselves at the same time.



#### d) Fairy cold water dishwasher

The setting of this advertisement is a modern, light kitchen, where a young, slim and beautiful woman is washing dishes. She is wearing a comfortable outfit and seems at ease and calm. In the background, the voice of a man can be heard singing in a shower, followed by a scream as the woman turns the tap to cold water. She gives a faint smile as she hears the scream. A male voice over goes: *"Everybody is affected by turning from hot to cold water: everybody but Fairy, because it has twice as much anti-grease strength as any traditional detergent"*. The man comes out of the shower covered in foam with a funny face and turns the tap back to cold water. The woman finds it funny and goes back to washing the dishes as the man goes back to the shower. She is shown gladly washing a greasy pan and opening the hot water again – when the man screams again. The slogan comes in the end: *"An anti-grease miracle, even in cold water"*.



An interesting perspective is to see how the woman is cleaning – *taking care of* – the house while the man is cleaning – *looking after* – himself. Besides, the woman looks silent and obedient while doing her chore, while the man seems to be having fun in the shower, as he is singing loudly. Another point is that they do not say anything to each other: instead, the man just turns the tap back to cold water without questioning his action. There seems to be no concern – either from the man or from the woman – whether she prefers to wash the dishes in hot instead of in cold water, while he makes a clear statement of his own preference.

### e) **Bold easy ironing**

The advertising takes place in an all-white modern kitchen, where a woman is taking her clothes out of the washing machine. She is wearing a simple, but tidy outfit (jeans and a blouse, quite similar to the “real woman’s” clothes in the Vanish commercial). She calmly takes out a few shirts (all men’s shirts) and, as she puts them on the table, they naturally fold perfectly, as if they had already been ironed.

A man passes by, grabs a towel and says: “*I’m going to take a shower*”, while the woman seems not to notice him and continues her job. A male voice over says: “*New Bold Matic: new formula, easy ironing*”. There is a subtle noise of birds and foliage in the background, which helps creating the idea that the woman is having a really easy time when doing this otherwise hard chore.

It is worth drawing a parallel between this and the previous advertisement, of Fairy cold water, as both show the women cleaning the house while the men are “cleaning themselves”. Water as a cleansing element and part of a sacred ritual has permeated the Catholic tradition, the act of bathing being known for its purifying character. If we look at the commercial through this symbology, the man treats his body as something sacred, while the woman treats her house that way (Tonnac 1996).



## f) Ala detergent

This advertisement has the original perspective of not showing the use of the product – Ala detergent – and not even displaying a pack shot (just the product logo in the end). Its approach is completely towards the emotional benefit, and the product builds its practical cleansing benefit around allowing kids to get their clothes dirty while they are learning moral values and building their character. The tool used by the advertisement is to present a number of little children saying “*I’m sorry*” about having stained their clothes playing outdoors or with toys. There is a suggestion of synecdoche in these kids’ figure, as they represent – as a part standing for the whole – the children of the audience, who feels touched by their statement.

With an emotional background soundtrack, one after the other the children start saying “*Perdón, mamá!*” (*I’m sorry, mummy!*), “*I got dirty. What did I have in mind? ... I was absent-minded saving animals’ lives, learning how to have my own ideas and not be selfish*”, etc.

Two things call one’s attention in this commercial: first of all, the kids address their mothers directly – not “*I’m sorry, mummy!*”, then “*I’m sorry, daddy!*”, or even “*I’m sorry, mummy and daddy!*” It implies that the woman is first of all the only person responsible for these children’s clothes, again putting forward the notion of woman being the one in charge of cleaning the house, as well as the one who would be “*mad at them*” if the children came back home with dirty clothes – which means the one responsible for their education. This reflects the idea of the mother as the primary parent to a child as a “*usual presumption*”.

This paradigm of motherhood is extended in a scene where a girl is playing with a doll – feeding and taking care of her, or, as she puts it: “*I was taking care of my daughter, your granddaughter; mummy*”. In this case, the extension of the “*mother-like*” care goes up to the grandmother. As Jung observes, “*the transition from mother to grandmother means that the archetype is elevated to a higher rank*” (Jung, 1953: 40). At the end of all the children’s statements, one of them says: “*I’m sorry. But I promise I will do it again*”, followed by the words: “*The stain goes away, the knowledge stays: to get clothes dirty is healthy*”.



## 9.2 Commercials from the 60's

Generally speaking, Spanish commercials of that decade – and actually of the early 70's, considering the period of dictatorship in the country – depicted the idea of a post-industrial revolution family scenario, as marriage was “*a full occupation for middle class women*” (Seifert, 1980: 1). Household chores were, in a way, glorified, crucial to holding the family structure together – thus reinforcing Christian values – and even to endowing women's marriage with a higher meaning. It was precisely a perpetuation of 19<sup>th</sup>-century values, reinforced by the dictatorship, considering women “*the epicenter of the home and chief minister charged with the sacred task of maintaining domestic order*” (Seifert, 1980: 5).

On the other hand, it was not comparable to work done outside the house – which brought money and was seen as more stressful and complex, creating an unbalanced environment and establishing a male hierarchy in the families. All the advertisements selected reflect those values, as they display women who seem pleased and useful as house-wives, while projecting their position of being subjected to their husbands. The first, however, appears almost as an educational lesson of resignation rather than an inspiration to rebellion. All these commercials are women-oriented, as they show female characters and talk about their daily life.

A final point common to these advertisements is the fact that both commercials present a male figure wearing a suit and tie, implying work outside the house and emphasizing the idea of family provider.

### a) Cognac Soberano

The advertisement of “*Cognac Soberano de Gonzales Byass*” features a woman who goes to a crystal-ball consultant to ask for help with a “terrible problem”: her husband's

dissatisfaction is causing him to act badly towards her, making her life a living hell. As the consultant “analyzes” her problem, images of the woman’s daily life appear in the crystal ball: they show her husband tossing dishes on the ground, yelling at her and even, in a brief, almost “subliminal” scene, hitting her. As a matter of fact, if this advertisement were to be shown now it would most certainly be prohibited before going on air, according to national law 29/2005, dated December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2005, which regards Advertising and Institutional Communication in Spain, and determines that “*To promote or hire institutional advertising campaigns which incite, direct or indirectly, violence or behavior against the juridical order is not allowed*” (Law 29/2005 Article 4, Item 1-d).



Then, the advertisement shows the man leaving home abruptly while the woman seems sad and does not know what to do. The difference in character between the man and the woman is definitely remarkable. While the man is austere, harsh and decisive, the woman is shown as completely fragile, scared and confused, precisely a victim in a “romantic” way, holding a handkerchief when in despair. Coming from patriarchal ideology, handkerchiefs, from the beginning of their usage in Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, have related women to “leaky vessels” (Fisher, 2000: 199) and represented negatively the idea of fragility and lack of control.

From the authority with which the man refers to his wife, there is no doubt about a clear hierarchy of power in the house – the woman is totally submitted to this man’s rules. It is also made clear that the man works outside, as he is wearing a suit and tie, while it seems the woman does not (as the crystal-ball consultant explains to her the difficulties of working long hours). The husband also seems to reject the work the woman does at home, throwing the dish with his meal on the floor as a sign of being displeased. There is also an indication that the couple does not discuss openly their issues – probably due to a lack of balance in the relationship generated by the man’s authority – as she comments that “*he spends days without talking to me*”. This hierarchy is also noticeable

in the way the woman bends her head in a sign of respect and submission, both when they are eating and when he yells at her.

The rules of female behavior imposed by the Female Phalanx during the Spanish dictatorship gave women the following pieces of advice: “*Worrying about his [the husband’s] comfort will give you [the wife] an immense personal satisfaction*”; (directed to the wife): “*Have a cold or warm beverage ready for him when coming back from work*”; or: “*Try to understand his [the husband’s] world of tension and stress*” (Tereixa, El País 10/05/2009). Those rules are basically translated into the crystal-ball consultant’s words: “*Have you thought about the fact that your husband works many hours a day and has the right to come home to a pleasant environment?*” Such values, as described by Josephine Donovan, are actually part of the western literature tradition, which depicts the stereotype of the “good woman”: the patient wife, the mother, the martyr and the lady, always serving men’s interests (Donovan 1984).

There is no discussion between the woman in despair and the consultant about the effort of the work she does at home, and in no moment does she consider the man’s behavior purely outrageous: it is only a consequence of her own mistake. On the contrary, she seems once again submitted (nodding her head in sign of acceptance) to the pieces of advice provided by the consultant, who justifies the husband’s reaction and asks for the wife’s complicity towards and concern for him.

The final sequence shows the first sign of respect and appreciation from the husband, as the woman gives him a glass of “Cognac Soberano”. At this moment, he is sitting on a couch reading a newspaper as she approaches him with the glass. This representation of the woman standing up, doing all the tasks in the house while the man is sitting down and being served by her was seen by professor Maria Elósegui as a pattern in the advertising of that period. As she comments it, they never featured a man cooking for his wife or serving her.

In this scene one can perceive yet another sign of an obvious division of gender roles, as he is wearing a suit and reading the newspaper, that is, focused on the world outside, while she is the one in charge of keeping a “pleasant environment” at home, bringing

him a glass of Cognac Soberano, almost as if the man could not have done this himself, as if it were clear to him that this was not part of his daily tasks.

#### **b) Financer Fiseat:**

This advertisement shows two women leaving the supermarket when one of them asks the other: *“You finally got your husband to buy you a car, eh?”*. The other answers: *“Yes, but only thanks to Fiseat”*. The idea of the husband as the financial provider is evident here. This concept seems normal to both women, and reflects a common behavior at the time. A more subtle idea is in the fact that man is not only the provider of money, but also the one who decides what to do with it, how to invest it. Again, there is no indication of a balanced relationship in a married couple, which shows, once more, a hierarchy in favor of men.

According to Professor Maria Elósegui’s analysis, a behavioral pattern in Spain during the dictatorship was for woman to depend completely on her husband in economic terms (which was made clear by advertisements such as this one): *“[...] she [the wife] does not bring money to the house. This is the husband’s task. He gives her the money she needs for household appliances, he buys her the oven, the washing machine [...] and the car”* (Elósegui, 1998: extracted from video content).

The fact that it is so clear that these women are going to a supermarket also states that investing in a car does not aim at building a female identity, giving her personal pleasure, but concerns rather the well-being of the house and family. It underlines the fact that a wife’s goal and activities in that period should revolve round taking care of her house, rather than round herself (such as having a professional career or cultivating a personal hobby). As J. Donovan puts it, women in traditional western literature are seen only as an instrument to serve men’s goals, and it is only to be expected that men are the protagonists (Donovan 1984).

One should notice that both women in the commercial seem happy and appreciative of their respective husbands’ generosity. As it appears, to get the husband to buy a car for them to drive to the supermarket is a big deal in their lives, something that permeates their most genuine wishes. They also seem quite comfortable with the role of house-

wives, which is the main topic of their conversation: not only are they in charge of taking care of the home, but, up to a point, this responsibility also defines their identity in the public and social spheres.



A detail featuring in all the selected advertisements of the 60's is the women's impeccable appearance, no matter the activity they are performing. In this case, they are nicely dressed, with a perfect hairstyle and make up, while going to the supermarket.

### c) Bimollo Bread

The advertisement takes place in a classroom, where a child tries to sneak out a Bimollo sandwich without letting the teacher – a woman – notice it. Contextualizing the role of women in education in Spain during the dictatorship, all elementary school teachers should belong to the Falanx Organization, while in high school a special subject was created to teach women basic home-oriented tasks. The few female students who got to a university were required to study the subject “Formation of the National Spirit”.

According to Professor Elósegui, advertising rarely displayed women at work – as they were actually not inserted in the labor market. There are only a few exceptions of some activities which, as she comments, are “*women's jobs, as they are related to the chores assigned to women, that is, education, nursery and secretariat*” (Elósegui, 1998: extracted from video content).



As the child makes some noises in the silent classroom, the teacher, who is writing on the blackboard, turns round to see who is disturbing the class, but eventually the boy gets to eat his *Bimbollo* without being noticed. Then, a voice announces that his mother always chooses *Bimbollo* for lunch, followed by a brief description of the product and the image of a woman packing a sandwich.

What is interesting about this commercial, and can be related to the Ala advertisement described above, is that, with a subtle reference to motherhood in the words “*his mother always chooses Bimbollo for lunch*”, it implies a natural conception of the mother as the one who takes care of the family, prepares snacks for the children, and, presumably, does the grocery, where she can choose the best products for the household. Another subtle reference to the traditional conception of the family is the fact that the woman packing the sandwiches at the end of the commercial – of whom one can see only the body, not the face – is wearing a ring. It is a crucial detail which reinforces the importance of this traditional family structure during that period – the basis of social life, according to article V of the Law of Principles of the National Movement, dated 1958. The detail translates the obvious conception of the traditional family structure in this country during the dictatorship.

#### **d) Aspes Appliances**

The Aspes commercial features a housewife showing her different kitchen appliances while briefly describing their basic qualities. First, she approaches a washing machine and states: “*This is my washing machine. Beautiful, modern, it never gets tired*”. As she opens the machine, a parrot comes out saying the name of the brand. Then she approaches the oven and says: “*This is my Aspes oven, who speaks for me*”. A parrot comes out of a pan and makes a joke once again, stating the name of the brand. A voice over then says: “*Aspes works in your house*”, as a shot of all Aspes items are shown in a neutral background.

It should be noticed how the woman describes her kitchen items as personal objects, as if they belonged to her, rather than to the house (this idea of blending the woman’s identity with the house is further considered in the next advertisement). The first sentence can definitely be interpreted as her own perception of herself, or of how an

Aspes user should aim to be: beautiful, modern and tireless. It is the basic idea of women in that period, as previously mentioned: they should always keep a perfect physical appearance and, at the same time, perform all the house chores, take care of the children and look after the husband. It is a structure indispensable for men to focus completely on the work outside. Notice that the woman in the commercial, who seems very young and at ease, is impeccable as usual.

The second sentence also allows further interpretation, as she refers to the oven as something that “*speaks for her*”. In a way, at that period house service was one of the few, not to say the only, means for women to express themselves. In the words of 60’s author Simone de Beauvoir, “*Cooking is revelation and creation*” (Beauvoir in Seifert, 1980: 5). As advised by the female section of the Phalanx, a woman should never “bother” man with her problems or anxieties, as the husband’s issues would always be more relevant. Taking good care of the house is, therefore, the means left for woman to be a part of society, even if limited to the private sphere.



#### e) Ruton Polisher and Vacuum Cleaner

This 15-second advertisement for Ruton Polisher and Vacuum Cleaner is quite simple, featuring a woman cleaning a scenario living-room with her Ruton appliance. As in the previous commercials, she looks gorgeous, even while doing her chores at home. As the products are displayed, the woman sings: “*My vacuum cleaner/ my polisher/ make the house clean and shining/ Saved by Ruton/ in 1 minute/ Saved by Ruton*”. In the last few seconds, a chorus of female voices repeats the jingle and another woman, equally well-presented, appears, holding a Ruton appliance.

One of the things to be noticed in this commercial, as in the previous one, is how the woman refers to her domestic appliance as “*mine*”. It shows, once again, how she is the only one responsible for household chores: she considers her house her territory of

influence, thus, the appliances are “her tools”. Beverly Gordon, in her paper “*Woman’s domestic body*”, relates this proximity between women’s identity and household objects to the concept expressed in “*The complete home*”, by American novelist Julia McNair Wright (1840 – 1903). In this book, Wright narrates a story of a woman who is not feeling well and is suggested to clean and fix things in the house. After doing this job she sits down with satisfaction, saying, “*Don’t I look nice? Why, I feel almost well*”. As Wright puts it, “[*this character*] identified completely with the room she had worked on – she literally became one with it. By fixing her house, she fixed herself” (Wright in Gordon, 1996: 281).

A relevant point to be taken into account is the idea, as mentioned in the previous advertisement, of how women are expected to be efficient when cleaning up – as they are the only ones responsible for taking care of the house and family, and are supposed to keep a perfect appearance. This idea of female exclusivity in household care is even reinforced by the female chorus and the other woman in the end of the commercial. In this case, the brand helps them perform this task in only one minute. The importance of taking good care of the house is translated into “*saved by Ruton*”: this expression emphasizes how big a deal the task represented for women at that time.



#### f) Corcho Kitchen

The commercial starts with a woman coming out of the kitchen as someone who comes out of a backstage – it can be seen as a symbol of the place destined to women, as men occupy the leading role on center “stage”. The woman is a mere co-star, appearing from the backstage to support the main character. Her apron indicates a “day’s work” in the kitchen, but she shows no sign of tiredness nor has a flunky figure, as she must be concerned about her impeccable image as much as about the house chores. Once again, there is the image of the man sitting down and being served, as the woman is standing up taking care of the house.

In this case, she appears from the kitchen with a dish of cooked meat – which can be interpreted as a reference to man’s ancestor role as hunter and thus provider of meat and survival to the group: it is a reminder that man is the head of the family. The woman then serves her husband, who is wearing a tie and suit, which implies he has just arrived from work. The tie, as psychological theories discuss, symbolizes the phallus: “*In the dreams of men, one often finds the necktie as a symbol for the penis*” (Freud, 1991: 231), a “*symbolic representation of power*”.

While she is serving her husband, the woman is thinking of how she hopes he appreciates the food, while his thought concerns “*how thrilling it is to think about all the trouble she went to prepare this food*”.



Only when the man expresses his approval “¡*Que bueno te ha salido!*” does the woman help herself and sit down to eat, in a sign of respect approaching subjection. She then thinks how nice it was to have chosen a Corcho kitchen and wonders how many “*good moments like this she would enjoy thanks to her kitchen*”. It seems as if the kitchen were an important source of happiness in her life, which implies not many reasons for personal fulfillment outside home.

One of the man’s thoughts include: “*She must have been cooking all morning*”, which reveals that she does not have a job (or a fixed daily routine outside) and her priority is taking care of her house. It should also be noticed that there is no dialogue in the commercial, no talk between the couple during the meal besides the husband’s brief comment, which again could be seen as a sign of a non-egalitarian relationship. According to the Female Section of the Phalanx, a woman should never “bother” a man with her problems (as his problems are far more relevant). In the end, the line “*Corcho, mi cocina*” (“Corcho, my kitchen”) shows once more the idea of women as owners of household appliances and their identification with the role assigned to them.

## **10. Research results**

The results of the survey applied to the eighteen women are presented below according to themes, followed by excerpts of comments, perceptions from the moderator and discourse analysis.

Generally speaking, women from the same group tended to agree with each other at least in part, even if providing information which was not completely in tune with the opinion of the rest of the group. They would say: *“Yes, maybe it could be like that in some cases”*, rather than: *“No, in fact, I absolutely disagree”*. All the answers and the dynamics of the groups were quite similar to each other, with a few exceptions, which concerned details rather than a general view.

An adjective to sum up the opinions expressed in the discussions would be “contradictory”. Very often, women confused real life situations or perceptions with their personal ideology – which sometimes was expressed as if it were “the ideology to follow”. All of them wanted to express how they do not feel like housewives as they used words such as *“ridiculous”* or *“I do not relate at all”*, only to tell later on how they did most of the house tasks themselves or how it was exactly the same at their homes.

### **10.1 Identification with the protagonist/situation in the advertisements**

Most women did recognize the situations of today’s advertisements (cleaning dishes, washing clothes) as something related to their daily lives, but thought that the way these activities were represented was exaggerated, thus, it did not provide a perfect reflection of their everyday lives. There was no one who disagreed entirely that the situations somehow represented part of their routine. There was no complete rejection towards the first advertisements presented regarding identification, nor an immediate reaction such as laughter or signs of feeling offended. The reaction was quite the opposite in relation to the second group of advertisements. Women seemed shocked or would laugh thinking they were too absurd.

There was a difference between some of the groups regarding their position towards the “identification” questions: a few of them interpreted the questions more literally and started talking about gender issues only in the middle of the discussion, while others answered with a defensive, “feminist” approach since the beginning. In relation to this matter, some of the answers were “*Yes, every day I have to wash dishes and I do care that my hands do not get damaged*”; or: “*Yes, there is no way out, we have to clean*”.

Others replied, “*Well, not really [I do not identify myself with the situation]. I’m not a housewife, I do not really care about cleaning products*”; or “*Yes [I do identify myself with the situation], and this is very sexist. Cleaning is actually a concern of our [female] daily life*”.

Even women who felt somehow related to the products (and to household chores) pointed out that the commercials seemed actually “*a bit ridiculous, [due to] the importance they give to these tasks. These are daily situations but they are not such a big deal. I do not really care about stains*”.

Another interesting comment was: “*But, I don’t know, the concept that I have of washing dishes is quite different from these women’s ideas. I don’t think they are related to my mother’s time, let alone to my own. I do not imagine my mother washing dishes as my father simply passes by and grabs a towel. So I do identify with cleaning, but not with the context*”. The same interviewee, later on in the discussion, gave an account of how her father finishes dinner, simply leaves his dish on the table, and goes to watch television (which, to her, is “*ridiculous, washing dishes is an individual task, it should not be divided between men or women*”). These sorts of statements relate to the contradiction mentioned above, in the same person’s or the same group’s answers: ideology vs. behavior was something quite relevant in all the groups.

Generally, there was a pattern of stages in which women displayed this ideology compared to what happened in real life, as can be seen in Model 1. First, they showed a really clear viewpoint that they do not want to be seen as “housewives”, as this is “not acceptable”, seen as a negative characteristic. “*Yes, cleaning is a necessity, but I see it as something to be shared, not an exclusive female responsibility*”.

Then, they would talk about friends or relatives who did act in the way the commercials presented, still using negative adjectives or showing some kind of complacency towards these people as though trying to say “I know people who are like this, but not me!”: “I have a friend who does buy gloves to wash dishes, because she cares about her hands”; “My sister just got married and she thinks it’s the most incredible thing in the world to have a husband that helps in the house. But she leaves to work before him and gets home later, so for me it’s just normal that he should help her”, or: “To me it’s not like that (women staying at home while men leave to work). Some of my friends have this idea of being housewives, ‘I take care of the house while my husband works and supports me’. So, to many people it is like that, but not to me”. From this standpoint, they would then conclude: “Yes, I believe that, after all, the image of women at home, taking care of the clothes and the kids, is still quite related to real-life women”.

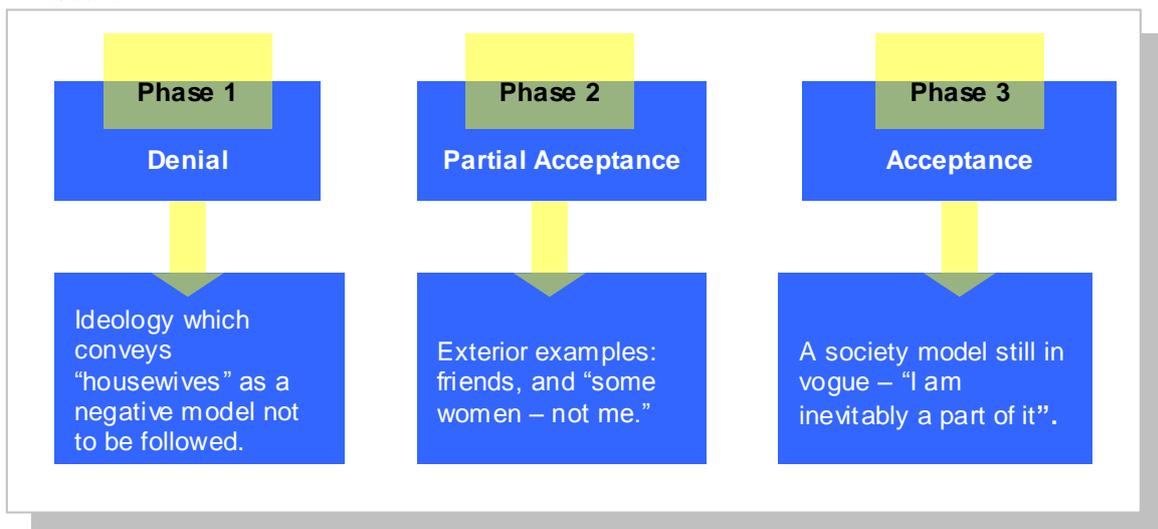
And finally, without seeming to notice it, they would talk about their personal experience and mention how it works at home with their partners, which was quite related to what was shown in the advertisements – and precisely to what they did not want to be related to: “I live with a [male] flat mate who never puts out the trash, so I have to do it” (from the same woman who mentioned that her friends want to be a housewife, but she “does not conceive of it”); “I think women try to change this [occupying themselves exclusively with the house], they try to share things more, I mean, talking about me and people I know, but I still see myself in this role, even though I don’t want to”. In between these lines, there were some contradictory statements, such as: “Society has evolved a lot. Before, women had an inferior position. Today, I do not see this difference so clear (there are not many economic, social, political differences, I mean, see Germany, for instance” (referring to Chief of State Angela Merkel).

But the conclusion was always generalized in the words: “I believe society still sees women like this [a housewife]”. They almost never formalized the idea that they were a part of this society which still sees women like “housewives”. All of them showed an ideology of change, but considered society, and non-explicitly themselves, a product of a general image of women. The cause always seemed to be something far beyond their power limits.

One curious comment diverged from this pattern, as a woman mentioned: *“I spend my whole life trying not to be like this”*. However, she also sees it as something a bit out of her control, and she continues: *“But in the end, I guess that women have a role that is like that”*.

An important observation regarding the 60’s advertisements is that none of the women felt at any level identified with the images presented, and all of them defined those women with negative phrases such as: *“She’s almost an object”*, *“She’s his servant”*, *“She’s stupid, he hits her and it’s her fault?!?”*, *“I feel sorry for her. I want to say: wake up!”*. Some of them even laughed when asked if they could relate themselves to those women: *“No! Of course not!”*. Just one woman mentioned that she related herself to the *Bimollo* advertisement because her father never prepared her school lunch and she thought she would do it for her kids.

**Model 1:**



**Source:** Elaborated from data of this study

However, when the discussion was further encouraged after the second set of advertisements, women little by little began to recognize some resemblances between the women in the first and those in the second sets of commercials: *“Well, they [commercials today] still show the same hierarchy. It is an evolution of dependence.”*; *“Yes, there is more technology to help you, but it is still the woman who has to do it”*; *“It is the same thing, but it’s less obvious today”*; *“They still show a service*

*relationship*”; *“The one in which the man hits the woman does not relate, it’s too silly, but the others, yes [referring to today’s commercials]”*.

Another relevant insight concerns how advertising has helped women reflect on the female role today, but has also built the image of women from the 60’s. In a group, when asked if they thought that the women in the second set of advertisements reflected the image of women of that time in general, one of them answered: *“Well, you could say so, I mean, I didn’t live in that period, but from what people tell me it was like that. Besides, the advertising is like that because this is how it was”*. In the same group, other comments built on this woman’s statement: *“I think women [from the commercials] feel ok with this position. They don’t seem to question what they have to do, they feel good about it”*. Another assumption was: *“Well, I mean, women in the 60’s didn’t think the way we think today. They saw these commercials and felt identified with them”*.

In another group, this matter also took a different direction as some of the women mentioned: *“I think things were a bit like that, but it’s exaggerated. Commercials always exaggerate. But it’s funny, because if women look at these commercials [of today] a few years from now they will think we were like that!!”*

## **10.2 Perspective of the men/women relation**

Generally, all women thought that the men/women relation in the “modern” commercials represented (on different levels to different women) the real form of relationship between men and women regarding house care today. Not one seemed to be appalled by the images or consider them completely far from reality. At this point of the discussion, practically all the groups were already more involved in the gender topic, rather than took questions as a practical issue – ideology and sociological views dominated this stage of the discussion.

*“We are still living a sexist reminiscence. Advertising should sell what we want, parity. It would be taking the lead in the transition we’re leaving now, but it is still stuck in a concept of 40 years ago”*. This statement was quite an insight on how these women, even though they do not seem to feel much bothered or outraged at a first look, do feel

that advertising is part of our culture and should represent the evolution of sociological perspectives, as a great influence on collective imagery.

Almost all the women referred to previous generations – and the collective imagery of women and household care – at this point, either to compare them with the evolution of the female role today, or to state that current relations are actually quite similar to those of their parents’/grandparents’ generation: *“I don’t really relate [to male/female relation in the “modern” advertisements]. I think that in some parts of the world there are women like that, but the tendency is to decrease [the number of women who are like that]. These commercials relate to the old model”*. Others recognized an evolution in the female role: *“But there is a great generation gap between my parents and me. So, even if society does influence a lot, I don’t see such a strong discrimination today”*.

It was also mentioned that there is still a great influence of previous generations on the male behavior toward household chores, as they are used to following the model they had when growing up: *“Well, I think it is also related to education. My father is fifty years old and can’t wash his own clothes; my grandmother does it for him”*; *“It is always the mothers’ fault. Usually mothers ask for their daughters to help them do the chores, not the sons. I see boys who help, do grocery because their mothers taught them to, while others don’t care, they leave everything dirty because no one ever told them differently”*; *“I have a friend who was talking about this. In her husband’s house, where there are only boys, the mother always asked them for help, so now he is used to doing it in his own house”*.

Women talked about how there are still some big gender differences regarding household care, saying more often “some people think” than “I believe”: *“It’s not considered anything special for the woman to work at home while the man works out, whereas if the man does something in the house he provokes admiration, there are [magazine] articles that say: look how he’s fantastic, he lost his job and now he’s working in the house. But there are articles on this because it’s an exception”*; *“This [taking care of the house] is still a woman’s job, it’s a gift to have a man who does it”*.

Between ideology and practical life, the contradictory behavior mentioned above can be also translated into “confusion”, based on the idea that *“we are still living a sexist*

*reminiscence*". It seemed clear to all of them how things should work (they were all in favor of parity and sharing the house chores), but they were a bit confused by the image that "society" built on the matter: "*We are from a younger generation and we're all independent, we work, we've lived abroad. But we still think sometimes 'Ah, that's nice, he's cleaning', the idea is still inside us, we know that it is not meant to be like that but it's inevitable to think like that sometimes*", or: "*At least today we pretend we don't live like that [with gender differences]*".

Besides, a frequent idea regarded the existence of actual differences between men and women, which many times justified the image presented in the advertisements. First of all, some women mentioned economic disparity: "*Women still earn less money. So they can work for the same period of time, but, I don't know, there's still a tradition that women do it [house chores] and there's also the feeling of guilt that they put less money in the house*". They also mentioned taking care of the house and the family as a natural female characteristic: "*I think that women are naturally predisposed to do some things and men to do others, just for being born like that*"; "*I think that women naturally take care of the others*".

### **10.3 Identification of gender-oriented signs and women's reflection upon it**

With no exception, gender-oriented signs were more easily recognized in the commercials from the 60's. Immediately after the women watched them, comments related to sexism started to pop up, which did not happen after the display of the "modern" advertisements.

Some of the comments were: "*This is ridiculous; she only has a car because her husband bought it for her!*" (related to the Fiseat advertisement); "*It was the mother who prepared the snack for the child – when she's not the mother, she's the teacher; [The woman] is domestic. Her appliances define her status*".

However, after some minutes of discussion, women began to notice and comment on sexist elements in "modern" advertisements as well. A curious observation was: "*But we are only noticing this because this is a study. If we're watching this ad at our house on a Sunday afternoon it's going to pass by without being noticed*". They started to

discuss how there was only the female figure in the modern advertisements as “*Men don’t even appear, only to get a clean towel*”; “*Men are practically inexistent [in modern advertisements]. I don’t like his face expression in the Fairy ad. The woman can’t even argue with him. It’s silly*”; “*Women’s activities are always based on men’s activities [in modern advertisements]*”.

As the discussion developed, women started pointing out more specific elements in the modern advertisements which incited a gender orientation. As some of them began to discuss it, others felt stimulated to think and talk more about the subject. Actually one of them had an insight which everyone agreed with and admitted not having noticed: “*You know, when I think about it, in two advertisements women are washing the clothes and men are washing themselves. He’s concerned with his looks and she’s worried about the house, the kids*”. Another woman then replied: “*Yes, it’s true! And in the ad where she’s taking the clothes out of the washing machine, they are not even her clothes, it’s just men’s shirts.*”

Another related comment was: “*What about this ad, where the woman is washing the dishes and the man simply turns the water tap? He doesn’t even speak to her, it’s humiliating*”. Upon this, there was a quite illuminating comment, related to women’s image depicted in the 60’s advertisements, as they seemed to be comfortable in the housewife position: “*But, you know, they camouflage the scene. Because it’s not bad, everything is so natural, he enters with a nice face and the woman goes on cleaning, just happy*”.

When they were asked if they thought advertising was reflecting reality by orienting cleaning advertisements towards women, a few possibilities were raised and, even within the same group, it was one of the issues that seemed to cause higher disagreement. Two groups referred to the fact that maybe commercials were like that because they had been created by men: “*Maybe who created this was a man, with a wrong conception of today’s world. This man was raised in a really closed family*”. Another group also mentioned that: “*I think it’s a late reflection*”; “*I don’t know if I’m trying to be optimistic, but I think there’s a delay [in advertisements vs. reality] of commercials of today, maybe it’s the same with commercials from the 60’s*”, “*It’s like they followed an old plot*” (referring to today’s commercials).

In another group, a woman commented: *“I think advertising looks like information [reality] and we start to act like the advertisements, it justifies your actions. Like, it’s not something you immediately start imitating, but it’s so normal that it is transmitted as reality, it’s like if it was like that. It’s like [as if the advertisement were saying]: ‘I’m not being evil; this is how the world is’. It informs you and influences you”*.

Differences in discourse construction and in the security that women expressed when exposing their thoughts made it possible to realize this is a theme they are not very familiar with and do not seem to think about much ( men’s and women’s role at home and in society). One of them said: *“You never know what came first, the egg or the chicken. Advertisements act according to society: it’s how it works, it’s how life is, so you identify with the character and you buy it. But it also stimulates a behavior, so you never know who came first. It’s like a snow ball”*.

Regarding the idea that commercials should (or could) be different, there was not full agreement. Some women thought that *“There should be a change to break the pattern and make people question these things. It’s necessary. It could even be a strategy”*; *“But this has to change, with feminism and all that. I think it would be efficient to show men doing the cleaning”*. Others believed it would not be a very good marketing strategy and, thus, did not see so clearly the possibility of change: *“Imagine if men saw an ad of a man cleaning the house. They would feel offended. They present things like that just so you know what the product is about. Even if you’re not that type of woman, you understand the benefit of the product”*; *“It’s easier to sell it like this”*.

## **11. Conclusion and final considerations**

The conclusions reached after having conducted the study appear related to different aspects of this work, and therefore will be divided in topics to better structure their presentation.

### **11.1 Relevance of the study vs. State of the question**

We believe this project was developed in a way that lends a fresh perspective to a relevant and much studied theme. First of all, the above-mentioned exterior look towards Spanish society provides an unbiased point of view, which favors less “addicted” assumptions and a more neutral approach to results. Besides, the fact that the project was developed with basis on previous studies provided a narrow set of hypotheses and allowed a deeper and more precise line of understanding of the theme.

As it was based on qualitative rather than quantitative data (which is the source of analysis for most previous studies on the matter), relevant insights and new issues for discussion around the theme (for instance, blending feminist ideology and a gender behavioral reality) were brought to the surface.

Regarding the state of the question, there was a significant detail that could not be overlooked by this project: almost all the works written in the field have been conducted by women. After noticing this fact in the first articles we investigated, we found it almost ironic to check that every author of a new text we read was a female. Some of the few studies conducted by men (for example, Fernandez and Martínez) have offered a different point of view, characterized by more accurate technical procedures, rather than by the emotional/intuitive approach generally conducted by women.

We strongly believe this field can benefit a lot from alternative approaches through new perspectives and methodologies. We do agree that the “feminist approach” to the theme has a negative connotation in the academic field, which can definitely be one of the reasons for the relatively small number of male students of the subject.

We would also like to point out some conclusions after a deeper analysis of recent works on the theme, which we believe to be at some level misleading, and are intimately connected to one of the objectives and insights of this dissertation. Some of the authors read tended to be influenced by the increase of female economic power and often got blinded by the ideological and currently *in vogue* conception of gender parity, immediately translating it into everyday reality, assuming that economic changes would necessarily bring about social changes and rapidly transform previous stereotypes. For instance, in Beverly Gordon's work *Woman's domestic body: the conceptual conflation of women and interiors in the Industrial age*, one reads: "Women's roles have also changed greatly vis à vis their dwellings since they are for the most part no longer housebound or defined by the house as were their Victorian foremothers. Some of the new definitions of the household, or family, in fact, do not even require the presence of women. The house as an impersonation of woman and the woman as an embodiment of the house are no longer salient or believable concepts" (Gordon, 1996: 301).

In this case, she assumes a structural change – which seems not to have necessarily occurred – in female behavior in the house due to a change in woman's social position, as she is no more necessarily housebound. To believe that "old" concepts such as "woman as embodiment of the house" no longer prevail as there is not an economic structure to support them is – unfortunately – a pre-conception that can mislead one's analysis of women's representation in household appliances commercials.

## **11.2 Methodology**

In general, the methodology used to develop this dissertation was effective in reaching the desired results described in the hypotheses. First of all, the initial view of previous works conducted on the theme was crucial to eliminate some already answered questions and enlighten the research with new opportunities of analysis. It also provided an excellent background to approach the theme and put together the questionnaire, as the evolution of research fields depends on constant updates of the subject under investigation, which point out themes yet to be explored.

The topic of providing an economic, political and sociological view of women's role in the context of each set of commercials was also an effective proof of the evolution of

female participation in society (more specifically in Spain), allowing a contrast with the supposed evolution of advertising. This chapter provides a framework to accommodate the content of both sets of commercials so as to enable the reader to judge, in the end, whether advertising does follow changes in society and how far it gets stuck within old paradigms.

A difficulty at this stage was not to have a greater and more precise amount of data on female participation in the 60's. As the INE in Spain does not contain many records of that time (being usually general data rather than male/female participation), many times other academic studies or analyses conducted by public or private entities were the only data sources. A broader source would certainly allow a more accurate view of the theme both in this project and in further studies.

The analysis of the advertising material in what concerns discourse and image elements (and their interrelationship, as they help constructing each other) through a semiotic approach was fundamental to provide readers with a better understanding of the audiovisual material exposed in the survey, as a form to point out gender-oriented elements. Our greatest watch-out was to develop this analysis without orienting the reader towards a feminist point of view, while simultaneously having to underline sexist elements. The analysis was close to reaching an optimum point of neutrality, but still, it is only to be expected that some readers might view it as a biased approach to the theme.

As stated before, that was by no means the aim of the analysis, for the research results, in comparison to the female social evolution described, speak for themselves in terms of gender-orientation in these commercials. The study conducted by male researchers would be less prejudiced in this point, as the content itself probably might seem to the reader even less biased and chosen from a less "feminist" angle, a more neutral perspective.

In our opinion, the interviews were a good method to check the hypotheses. As it was qualitative research, they also provided insights and a more profound view of female perception on the matter – which could not be drawn only from the reading of

quantitative data of previous studies, despite their relevance in providing another type of information, such as statistics of the evolution of female behavior.

“Focus groups” was a satisfactory analysis method. Being in groups encouraged women to speak, and some unpredicted topics were raised from time to time, providing quality material and a more realistic perception of female opinions. Some of the greatest insights came from the discussion between the women themselves rather than from interviewer-interviewee questions and answers. Women were often reminded of a personal experience after another member of the group mentioned her own opinion.

The negative side of this research methodology was that we felt it eventually prevented women from telling more private stories or showing a perspective which not always agreed with the rest of the group. We sometimes felt that someone had a strong idea in a topic but was less emphatic when expressing it, as she did not want to be the one to contradict the group. It was a “Spiral of Silence” phenomenon, as *“the fear of isolation seems to be the force that sets the spiral of silence in motion”* (Neumann-Noelle, 1984 6). The hypothesis that this group issue could prevent individual viewpoints from coming up was observed before conducting the interview, but the benefits of this technique, as explained above, proved enough to qualify it as a proper (though not the perfect) research method for this enquiry.

One point that could be modified was the way the commercials were presented. After watching a set of advertisements one after another, even with modern commercials, where some symbols are not so easy to recognize, women started noticing the direction of the study (some even remarked: *“But there are only women in these advertisements!”*), which may have influenced each group’s responses. Ideally, the commercials should have been presented within TV programs, or mixed in a set of advertisements not related to the study, which was evident only after the research was completed. This, however, would imply more time to apply the questionnaire and thus more difficulty to put together a sample to be interviewed, which was beyond the scope and resources available in the case of this particular study.

An important factor to have an impact on results was the selection of the sample regarding age. Most interviewed women were in their late 20’s with no children. This

made it harder for them to relate to some situations in the advertisements, even if they provided data from a very young generation (thus much more connected with female liberation), which was not the case of previous studies.

### **11.3 Research results vs. Hypotheses**

Regarding the hypotheses set prior to the beginning of the research, only some of the expectations were met:

i) *“The messages of the 60’s advertising and of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century commercials are essentially the same, as both sets present woman as the one in charge of the home and the main user of domestic appliances”.*

Analyzing both sets of commercials, it is clear that they stand for the same message: first of all, they are both specifically targeted at women. The explicit message, the surroundings and the characters are not at all identifiable by men, as they represent basically a romantic and particularly “feminine” image. Determining the target so strictly is by itself a means to perpetuate a role defined by gender. In the second place, the content is basically the same: women who use domestic products to please and attract men, thus putting themselves in a more limited and vulnerable position.

While in the set of “old” commercials this gender-oriented view is clearer and easily noticed by women of today, who qualified them as “*ridiculous*” and “*outrageous*” or even laughed immediately after they were shown, in the “modern” set women are still the ones responsible for the house and childcare, but they seem so practical and the settings are so modern that these elements are not so easily recognized, being commented by the interviewees only as the discussion started to evolve. In all the groups the conclusion by the end of the session was that “*Roles [in the 60’s] are more established, she went to the groceries, he went to work, but today it’s actually the same concept, only a bit evolved*”.

By analyzing the discourse construction of both sets of commercials, and based on the conclusions arrived at by the interviewees themselves, the gender-oriented message in these household appliances advertising still seems to exist. Nonetheless, there has

undeniably been a certain level of evolution – as the 60’s advertisements showed women exclusively as housewives and even a man hitting a woman, while commercials today, by comparison, render the situations showed in the 60’s more extreme. Yet, despite those differences, it is ultimately the same concept of roles determined by gender.

ii/ iii) *“Women [...] will feel the 60’s advertising represents women of that period, but will not feel identified with them; commercials from the 60’s will not only be accepted as a mirror of society of that period, but will actually be a confirmation [...] that society was in fact like that fifty years ago”.*

The research confirmed that the women from the 60’s represented their contemporaries and those interviewed did in fact refer to them with negative adjectives such as *“submitted”*, *“oppressed”* and *“inferior”*, or by saying: *“I want to wake her up!”*. In the vast majority of cases, they did not feel identified with those women at all, reacting to this question actually as if it were a *“ridiculous idea”*.

They could not make a connection with the activities these women performed at home, nor with the advertisement settings and discourse. Generally, it seemed something quite far from their own reality, many times described as: *“My grandma’s life I guess was like that”*.

The only relation to any of these advertisements was to *Bimollo* bread, as one of the women (as mentioned above), said that she believed she would do the same to her child. The proof of this hypothesis provides the basis for the idea that, even though the core message of advertisements remains the same, the new, modern, practical discourse has turned something otherwise considered *“ridiculous”* into something acceptable.

Another quite important insight concerns the fact that women from these advertisements represented their generation because they actually showed them like that: it is the idea that, if advertisements were like that, it means that they represented reality.

This seems to be crucial because it unveils another level of influence of advertising: not only can advertisements perpetuate a role from previous to present generations, but they

can also affect the way in which future generations build their image of – in this case – women of today. Advertising would be responsible, in that way, not only for stimulating a particular social behavior or transmitting a certain pattern in our culture, but for building a collective imagery of a past generation in members of future generations as well. What this means is that the effect of advertising perpetuating a paradigm can not only affect one generation, but also slow down the evolution process of pre-conceived ideas for many generations (as they will base the concept of the previous one on inaccurate images of reality). As TV, mass media and advertising have recently acquired more and more importance as builders of our culture and our way of perceiving society, this effect tends to become stronger in generations to come.

iv) *“Women will feel at least relatively related to the women in the ‘modern’ advertising and to their activities in the house”.*

As predicted, the interviewees did feel represented, at least up to a certain point, both personally and as a gender, by the women in modern advertisements. They felt that the activities performed by those women were everyday chores that everyone has to do, and were not at all surprised as to the way those women were presented, at least at a first look. Unlike what was previously expected, however, the way they judged them was not generally positive, but rather neutral, suggesting that household chores were seen as something practical and necessary, rather than as difficult or painful tasks for one to execute when taking care of the house (even while having a career).

The general reaction was actually annoyance with having to execute all these tasks, and some irritation as they realized that this was still related to women, even though they ideologically felt that the activities should be equally shared by men and women. As presented in Model 1, women did not seem to have a clear view on what makes gender-oriented behavior be sustained. They had it very clear that they did not see it like that, but eventually concluded that being the only ones responsible for doing “women’s tasks” was actually a part of their reality.

They also seemed to believe it was fantastic that women today were able to have a career as well as to do house chores, but generally agreed that, while women have migrated to the labor market, men have not yet become more attentive at home. By the

comments of some groups, we could perceive the admiration of the concept of a “super-woman”, a sort of blend of the roles of men and women of the 60’s. Nevertheless, this “super-woman” seemed to entail the expectation of a “super-man”, that is, women do not mind working outside and doing house tasks if they are shared with their flat mates or partners.

v) *“Women will not feel that the 60’s advertisements represent male/female relationships of today, but will feel that the ‘modern’ ones do represent reality in current relationships”.*

The commercials from the 60’s, both in what concerns the women’s image and the male-female relation, were by no means seen as a reality today (again, with the exception of the *Bimbollo* advertisement). When talking about the interaction between men and women in the 60’s advertising, they saw a clear hierarchy and did not feel that it represented today’s concept of relationships. Nonetheless, as they started to describe their actual relation with their partners, it became clear that this affirmation was based much more on ideology and a feminist liberation concept than on reality itself.

Surprisingly, they recognized this hierarchy in the modern advertisements as well, and presented the same critique regarding these images: *“The man just comes and turns off the tap! He doesn’t even talk”*. Again, they showed that they did not respect this type of interaction, but agreed that, initially, *“To many women it is like that”*, and eventually, *“I guess it is a bit like that at home”*.

There were some aspects in the modern advertisements, however, which did not seem to match these women’s relationships, as they mentioned talking more to their partners and sometimes making them participate more (by refusing to take the trash out themselves, for instance). Nevertheless, a lack of sensitivity from the male part was felt, as they thought those small chores should not be asked for, but simply done by men as naturally as they are done by women.

vi) *“Women will not co-relate gender roles of ‘modern’ commercials with those of the 60’s”.*

Considering the first view on both sets of advertisements, this hypothesis would be correct. While the old ones did generate laughter or “rage” in women immediately after they were presented, the modern set did not cause much impact initially.

Nevertheless, unlike what was expected, women began to notice some gender-oriented elements as discussions evolved. They would actually perceive them at first as something funny, or an acceptable pattern, and would then become more radical in their opinion, claiming that the advertisements were indeed presenting an idea from the past, which they did not agree with.

Even though the interviewees found these advertisements not representative of an accurate image of men’s and women’s roles in the house, the reactions varied a bit from group to group: while some became more irritated and believed that things should change, seeming more sensitive regarding the subject, others simply thought that things were like that and there was nothing to be done about it. They “blamed” society for being like that (that is, they did not see themselves as a part of this society), and believed that changes should happen in a more individualistic way (in each house, in each relationship), rather than collectively.

#### **11.4 Final considerations**

As we began this project, we had already formulated a hypothesis concerning the affirmation presented in the title. After the whole process developed to carry out the research, this hypothesis was, to a high level, confirmed.

We have no personal strong feminist convictions, the theme for this research having not been chosen for personal reasons, but rather because it seemed a clear way to prove a pattern of behavior previously presumed. So, this study is by no means an attempt to preach feminist beliefs or criticize male behavior in relation to household chores, as these were actually no more than a framework to sustain a sociological thesis – which we hope has proved to be correct. The study has led to the conclusion that commercials are a form of perpetuating stereotypes and maintaining paradigms inherent to some economic systems, forming the basis of this system’s own existence.

We agree with public authorities who believe that advertisers should be conscious of the social and cultural impact of their products when creating their discourse, but we do not think that, generally speaking, this is the case of commercials today, precisely because economic forces are much more influential than the awareness of social responsibility. Yes, maybe advertisements are being based on a still existent social belief that – within the scope of this dissertation – women are bound to be house-oriented, but listening to those women, who understand that society is still like that, this is not at all accepted as a correct social behavior, which leads to the conclusion that advertising should not perpetuate a negative, limited image.

However, we do not by any means believe that advertising has the whole responsibility for the perpetuation of such social models: it is, in fact, one of the tools or super-structures that help moving society towards a certain direction.

The way this situation can change is to have a more rigorous legislation on the subject. At least regarding the female/male issue, laws seem too abstract and open to interpretation, which allows many breaches in the process of diminishing stereotypes in the media. We honestly cannot perceive a natural swift in the direction of advertisements regarding social accountability. Therefore, it is up to governments to force the switch. We also believe that there is the need for a change in female perception as to the accountability for this type of content in mass media and in advertisements. They should feel entitled to complain and should realize their own responsibility within the social scope they themselves criticize, in order to provoke the desired changes.

Another issue that we believe to be crucial to the understanding of the significant role of advertisements today is the lack of other sources of values to learn by. Mass media is the main source of information today – received with increasing credibility - and its content is much more driven by the audience and the consumption it represents than by social accountability. This causes a biased look on some important issues of our society, the gender matter being just one in a thousand.

To conclude, advertising in fact helps (though not being the only agent) perpetuate paradigms in our society – and, as an increasingly powerful tool of social and cultural

construction, the image presented by advertisements tends to be more and more taken as reality. The airing of stereotyped contents should be more rigorously supervised, as the education of society can be carried out more effectively by means of the diffusion of multiple views on different social matters, such as gender roles.

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### 13. Annexes

#### Questionnaire:

1. Name
2. Age
3. Do you live alone or with someone? What's your relation with him (boyfriend, flat mate)?
4. Have you worked in the past 2 years?

#### ➤ **Presentation of the first set of commercials**

5. Do you believe these advertisements are related to your everyday problems, to your daily life?
6. Do you feel represented in these advertisements? How do you relate with these characters?
7. Do you believe women in these advertisements represent women today? In what way?
8. How would you define women today? And these women?
9. How would you define the relation between men and women in these advertisements? Do you believe they relate to reality?
10. Do you believe men and women share household tasks today?
11. Do you believe these commercials are oriented to a specific audience (or gender)? If so, why do you believe this happens?

#### ➤ **Presentation of the second set of commercials**

12. Do you believe these advertisements are related to real life in the 60's?
13. Do you feel any relation to the women in these commercials? If so, in what way?
14. How would you define these women?
15. How would you define men and women relation in these advertisements?
16. Do you believe these commercials are oriented to a specific audience (or gender)? If so, why do you believe this happens?