Working Hard or Hardly Working? Gender, Humor, and the Performance of Domestic Chores in Television Commercials

Erica Scharrer, D. Daniel Kim, Ke-Ming Lin, and Zixu Liu

Department of Communication
University of Massachusetts Amherst

This content analysis updates the literature regarding gender and the depiction of housework in television commercials by exploring not just the distribution of chores but also the success or failure of chore performance. A sample of 477 commercials featuring domestic chores that aired in a week of primetime television programming on all of the broadcast networks was analyzed. Among the key findings: Male characters’ performance of chores was often humorously inept as measured by negative responses from others, lack of success, and unsatisfactory outcomes. These depictions have important implications for the learning of gender roles from television exposure.

The division of labor within the home between men and women is one of the primary ways to study gender roles. Determining who does what in terms of keeping up the house and yard and taking care of children reveals how gender roles are negotiated and enacted within a space shared by males and females. Television is one source of socialization into gender role attitudes and behavior. Through observation of characters in programs and commercials, individuals can learn norms and expectations regarding “appropriate” and “inappropriate” roles within the home for men and women.

Television commercials provide frequent models of the performance of housework and other tasks and responsibilities in and around the home. Arguably, the traditional depiction of domestic chores in commercials features a woman...
who is plagued by a cleaning, cooking, or childcare problem that is solved to the satisfaction of all by the use of the advertised product. Does this stereotypical depiction that shows household chores to be the domain of women persist in the 21st century? Or are male characters in television commercials shown “working hard” within the home, as well?

If and when they do take on domestic chores, are male characters as successful as female characters in the performance of those chores? Or, conversely, are they shown to be so inept at performing such chores that their attempts are the subject of humor rather than satisfaction or admiration? If male characters are shown attempting domestic chores, but being unsuccessful, perhaps even to the point of drawing deprecating laughter, then perhaps they are more accurately characterized as “hardly working” at the chore. Such portrayals of failure and humor have the potential to reinforce traditional gender roles, rather than liberate them, by sending the message that men are somehow “naturally” ill suited for certain types of work, and therefore those chores are best left to women.

This content analysis seeks to extend the literature regarding gender and the depiction of housework in television commercials in three ways. First, we place male gender roles at the center of the analysis rather than female roles, in an attempt to illuminate how masculinity is presented in commercials. Second, by studying not just what chores men and women engage in, but also how well they perform those chores, we can test for the presence of more subtle gender stereotypes. Third, we add the element of humor to the study of advertising content. If humor is used to underscore the inability of men to cook, clean, or take care of children or of women to take out the trash or make a repair, such depictions could send the message that males and females should confine themselves to a more narrow set of traditionally defined activities. Thus, our study of the depiction of gender and domestic chores has many important implications for how individuals learn gender roles, including the sorts of activities that individuals are presumed to excel at and the sorts of activities at which they seem doomed to fail.

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Social Statistics Regarding Gender Roles

In contemporary society, women have been expanding their roles to include working outside the home as well as within. Statistics in the United States show a linear increase over time in the participation of women in the work force, from 51.2% in 1980 to 59% in 1985 and 59.8% in 2000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001). Women’s inflation-adjusted earnings have increased nearly 14% since 1979, whereas men’s have decreased by about 7% (Bowler, 1999). The levels of education attained by women have increased, as well. As of 1997, 29% of women
aged 25 to 29 had earned at least a bachelor’s degree, compared to 26% of men (Bowler, 1999).

Gains in working outside the home have not been accompanied by substantially alleviated responsibilities within the home. Rather, women continue to be responsible for the majority of housework and child care (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; Demo & Acock, 1993; Parke & Stearns, 1993; Robinson & Godbey, 1997). Although men’s involvement in domestic responsibilities has increased, women do an estimated four fifths of the cooking, laundry, and shopping; and two thirds of the child care, cleaning, and dishwashing (Goldscheider & Waite, 1991). Working mothers spend about 20 hours a week on housework (a decrease from 30 hours 20 years earlier) whereas their husbands spend 10 hours (an increase from five hours; Bianchi & Spain, 1996).

There are a number of explanations for the division of labor within the home, including the tendency for women to be secondary wage earners and the gender role ideologies held by household occupants (Parkman, 2004). The latter directly relates to our topic. Indeed, certain tasks within and around the home continue to be perceived in a traditional, “gendered” manner. “Women’s work” is typically thought to include preparing meals, doing the dishes, cleaning the house, and doing laundry, whereas “men’s work” includes taking out the trash, fixing things with tools, and taking care of the vehicles (Parkman, 2004). Espousing traditional gender role ideologies is associated with a tendency to divide household labor in gendered ways (Ferree, 1990; Greenstein, 1996, 2000). In other words, those with more traditional views of gender roles tend to assign chores within their homes according to “women’s work” and “men’s work.”

Gender Roles in Television Commercials

In television commercials, gender inequalities continue to exist. For example, men still largely outnumber women in commercials appearing in various types of programming (Coltrane & Adams, 1997; Coltrane & Messineo, 2000; White & Kinnick, 2000). In one of the most recent analyses, Ganahl, Prinsen, and Netzley (2003) analyzed a sample of over 1,000 prime-time commercials from the three major networks and found that 46% of the primary characters appearing were female, and 54% were male. Indeed, when primary characters and secondary characters are examined separately, the primary character gender ratio estimated in the 1980s remained very much the same as it had been in the 1950s (Allan & Coltrane, 1996). More recently, Stern and Mastro (2004) found that among almost 3,000 commercials on the six broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, UPN, and WB), male characters outnumbered female characters by more than 3 to 2.

In addition to persisting inequalities in the number of female compared to male characters, gender stereotypical roles continue to exist in television commercials. In analyzing over 750 commercials from 5 days on ABC, CBS, NBC,
and Fox, and comparing the results to two previous studies using the same method, Bartsch, Burnett, Diller, and Rankin-Williams (2000) found that female characters were primarily featured in commercials selling domestic products (especially those that pertain to beauty and health), whereas men were much more likely to be featured in commercials for nondomestic products, such as automobiles and electronics. Male characters in commercials were also more likely than female characters to be depicted as having a professional occupation (Coltrane & Adams, 1997; Signorielli, 1997).

The setting of the commercial tends to differ according to the gender of the character featured, as well. Male characters are more likely to be portrayed outside the home (Bretl & Cantor, 1988; Furnham & Mak, 1999; Stern & Mastro, 2004), whereas women are more likely to be pictured in domestic settings like kitchens and bathrooms (Furnham & Bitar, 1993; Furnham & Mak, 1999; Stern & Mastro, 2004). In those domestic settings, female characters are often more involved in housework and child care compared to male characters. Allan and Coltrane (1996) compared 41 classic advertisements from the 1950s and early 1960s with 576 award-winning commercials aired between 1982 and 1989. They found that women shown involved in parenting and doing housework dropped significantly, whereas working women portrayals increased. As for men, however, little change was registered. Parenting men increased only slightly from 7.1% to 9.9%, whereas the portrayal of men at work decreased from 45.2% to 37.5% and the percentage of men performing housework decreased from 7.0% to 2.0%. The Stern and Mastro (2004) data find that substantially more female than male characters in three different age categories were shown to be engaged in domestic activity.

In the closest parallel to the study at hand, Kaufman (1999) coded 944 adult characters in 1,061 national commercials from daytime, prime time, and the Sunday football time slot on ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox, and examined the degree to which men were involved with housework as fathers and husbands, and how their activities varied when they were pictured with either spouse or children. Kaufman found that 72% of the cooking was done by women, whereas the husband, usually accompanied by children, was often portrayed as waiting to be served. When men were shown performing household tasks, they were often depicted as incompetent and needing guidance from their wives. Women were more often shown performing such chores as cooking, cleaning, dishwashing, and shopping, whereas men were often present but passive when these tasks were performed. Men were more likely to be shown away from rather than in the home. Kaufman concluded that neither the behavior nor the overall image of men within a domestic setting has changed much in advertising over time.

The importance of these content analyses is underscored by the considerable evidence that gender role portrayals in advertising can influence the attitudes and behavior of audience members. Bandura’s (1994) social cognitive theory suggests
that television enculturates audience members by modeling attitudes and behaviors that are considered normative. Individuals young and old look to the television screen to help determine which gender-related roles are likely to be met with social approval, and which may incur social penalties. When television content, including advertising, confines men and women to traditionally defined roles, individual audience members may learn gender-stereotyped attitudes and behavior and apply them to their own lives.

Exposure to television commercials has been associated with upholding traditional gender role attitudes (Blakeney, Barnes, & McKeough, 1983) and reporting behavioral intentions in line with gender stereotypes (O’Bryant & Corder-Bolz, 1978). One recent study showed that children who had seen a commercial featuring either only boys or only girls playing with a toy were more likely to declare that toy as appropriate for only one gender after exposure (Pike & Jennings, 2005). Although most effects studies focus on the influence of stereotypical depictions of women in commercials, a recent study by Garst and Bodenhausen (1997) determined that exposure to magazine ads helped shaped male audience members’ conceptions of masculinity.

Linking Humor and Gender Role Activity in Commercial Content

In addition to examining the distribution of domestic chores by gender in television commercials, this study sets out to discover when those portrayals are meant to be a source of humorous appeal for the commercial. Humor is one of the most commonly employed communication strategies in advertising. In a content analysis of humor across various media, Weinberger, Spotts, Campbell, and Parsons (1995) examined 450 television advertisements and found 24% used humorous appeals. Humor was employed most frequently for low-risk, low-expense products and least often with high-end products. Driving the use of humor in advertising is the belief that it creates a favorable response toward an advertised product (Freedman, Sears, & Carlsmith, 1978), and, in line with persuasion theory, people in a good mood (as the result of a humorous ad) are less likely to disagree with a persuasive message (Bless & Schwarz, 1999).

But, what makes a depiction humorous? Given the complex nature of humor, it is not surprising that no single general theory of humor has emerged. However, two dominant humor theories—incongruity theory and superiority theory—can be applied to this context, the depiction of success and failure at domestic chores in television commercials according to gender. Incongruity theory, exemplified in the writings of Kant and Schopenhauer, is a cognition-based theory that suggests that we laugh at something surprising that violates our expectations (Berger, 1993). Laughter is triggered by an unexpected connection of two or more concepts that seem absurd or incongruous.
An application of the theory to the topic at hand suggests that a humorous depiction in a commercial may play on the incongruity involved in having male characters perform traditionally feminine household tasks such as cleaning and cooking. When expectations about the gender distribution of domestic chores are reversed in television commercials (like by showing a man fussily picking out produce in the grocery store), this may be a source of humor. We argue that when humor is used in this manner, it has the potential to reinforce traditional gender roles by making a character’s venture into counterstereotypical roles seem absurd or ridiculous.

Superiority theory (also known as derision theory), informed by Plato, Aristotle, and Hobbes, is about affective responses occurring within a social context (MacHovec, 1988). It posits that laughter is the result of feeling superior to another who is targeted as the butt of the joke (Meyer, 2000). At the core of this theory is the negotiation of power; that is, witnessing someone being ridiculed, especially if the person has higher status than oneself, results in the temporary inflation of one’s own status or power.

An application of this humor theory to the topic at hand suggests that depictions of domestic chores in commercials may be a source of humor when a character is shown failing at that chore because the audience can feel superior to the character who is failing. According to the theory, this may be particularly likely to occur if the unsuccessful character is male (e.g., a father is shown burning the dinner) because males typically occupy a more powerful position in society than females. Thus, the status of the female audience member and/or female characters in the ad is elevated as the male character performing the task unsuccessfully is derided. Once again, however, we suggest that there are potentially constraining messages being sent about gender in humor of this type. As we have argued earlier, poking fun at men for failing at domestic chores may make it seem as though they are inevitably incapable of taking on those roles, which can confine men’s and women’s roles to those more traditional in nature.

These two humor theories are by no means the only explanations for what may strike advertising audiences as funny. In fact, in Buijzen and Valkenburg’s (2004) analysis of humor in a sample of commercials targeted to children, adolescents, and general audiences, a total of seven major categories of humor techniques emerged in a factor analysis: slapstick, surprise, irony, clownish humor, satire, misunderstanding, and parody. Yet, Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004) note that each of these types relates to at least one of the grand theories of humor that we have identified here (as well as to a third theory less relevant to the topic at hand, relief theory). They argue, for instance, that clownish humor, surprise, and misunderstanding are types of incongruity. Satire and irony, because they “involve outwitting others and laughing at the less fortunate” (pp. 162–163), correspond to superiority theory. Thus, Buijzen and Valkenburg support the
centrality of incongruity and superiority theories in an analysis of humor in television commercials.

Hypotheses

Previous studies of gender roles in television commercials have shown that men are typically presented as primary characters, appearing authoritative and professional, and located in settings outside the home (Allan & Coltrane, 1996; Bretl & Cantor, 1988; Furnham & Bitar, 1993; Furnham & Mak, 1999; Stern & Mastro, 2004). Thus, the expertise of male characters in commercials appears to be in an occupational setting rather than a domestic one. When they are portrayed in a domestic environment, there is some indication that they are infrequently depicted taking on tasks commonly perceived as women’s work (like cleaning, cooking), and are sometimes shown as incompetent in performing domestic chores (Kaufman, 1999). Using the sociological literature that suggests that many tasks within the home are widely perceived as more appropriate for either men or women to perform (Ferree, 1990; Greenstein, 1996, 2000; Parkman, 2004), we explore the distribution of chores in television commercials between male and female characters as well as their degree of expertise at performing those chores, testing the following hypotheses:

H1: Male characters will perform more stereotypically masculine domestic chores than stereotypically feminine domestic chores.

H2: Male characters will perform fewer domestic chores than female characters.

H3: Male characters will be less successful at domestic chores than female characters.

In addition to posing these hypotheses, which seek to replicate and extend the findings of Kaufman (1999), this study adds an additional dimension in examining whether portrayals of domestic tasks may actually be the source of humor in television commercials. Because that aspect of the depictions of housework has not been frequently studied in the past, we begin with an overarching research question to explore:

RQ1: How is humor presented (verbally or visually, at the expense of and initiated by which characters) in the context of commercials featuring domestic chores?

Superiority theory of humor would lead us to believe that poor performance of a chore can be the subject of ridicule or disparagement, which, in turn, can produce a humorous response among those witnessing such performance, temporarily enlivened by a sense of superiority (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; MacHovec,
1988; Meyer, 2000). It also stands to reason that the foibles that can be exhibited when a character fails are more suited for comedy than simply depicting a chore well done. Thus, we hypothesize:

H4: Depictions of a lack of success at domestic chores will be more humorous than depictions of success at domestic chores.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that male characters may be shown mismanaging domestic chores in a manner that is meant to be seen as humorous. Such a depiction would be in line with an incongruity theory of humor in that it seeks a humorous response from a juxtaposition of unexpected scenes (Berger, 1993; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004). Because there is a strong tendency for females to perform the majority of household chores in contemporary society (Bianchi & Spain, 1996; Bianchi et al., 2000; Demo & Acock, 1993; Goldscheider & Waite, 1991; Parke & Stearns, 1993; Robinson & Godbey, 1997), the mere placement of male characters in these roles in commercials may be seen as incongruous and therefore humorous. Coupled with the lack of success predicted in H4 and observed in a cursory look at commercials featuring domestic chores, we predict:

H5: Unsuccessful performance of domestic chores by male characters will be the subject of humor more often than unsuccessful performance of domestic chores by female characters.

METHOD

Sampling decisions

This study is a quantitative content analysis of prime-time television commercials featuring household or domestic chores and tasks. For the purpose of this study, a week of prime-time television commercials was recorded on each of the major broadcast networks, ABC, NBC, CBS, Fox, WB, and UPN. Network television was chosen because it dominates the viewing time of audiences during prime time (Elasmar, Hasegawa, & Brain, 1999; Glascock, 2001). From Monday, January 19th to Sunday, January 26th, 2004, these six networks were recorded from 8 p.m. until 11 p.m. This week was chosen because it was not atypical in any way, such as airing during a holiday season or sweeps.

Within the commercials airing during prime time in this week, only those commercials featuring domestic chores taking place in a house, yard, grocery store, or laundromat were coded to examine the depictions of tasks that occur largely within the household setting or that directly pertain to the maintenance or upkeep of the home. Commercials set in either the grocery store or the laundromat were coded, as these chores directly relate to household maintenance. Caring for
children within the home was included, as it is a primary domestic responsibility. No other types of shopping, errand running, driving children, etc., that may also be thought of as chores but occur outside of the home were coded. We chose to focus on housework done in and around the home because in a two-parent family, the home is a space shared by both spouses, and therefore, its upkeep may be perceived as the responsibility of both. We also followed the lead of Kaufman (1999) in confining our analysis to housework and child care.

To increase generalizability, only nationwide advertisements were coded. Political advertisements, movie trailers and promotions for other television programs, and public service announcements were excluded from this study, as it is our intent to examine the ways in which humor and gender role portrayals are used as techniques in traditional commercials to sell products and services. Duplicate commercials were coded each time they appeared to arrive on the actual set of messages regarding domestic chores that would be received by audience members.

A different coding sheet was used for each character appearing in the commercial performing a domestic chore. Thus, character was the primary unit of analysis in this study. The sampling process yielded a total of 477 characters involved in domestic chores. The sample size, therefore, is 477 characters.

Definitions and Operationalizations

To begin the coding process, a number of background variables were coded. The network, day of the week, and length of the commercial in which the character performing the domestic chore appeared was recorded, as well as the name of the program in which the commercial was embedded, and its genre.

**Coding characters.** Each character in the commercial who was shown performing chores or domestic tasks was coded one by one and classified by gender as male human, female human, male nonhuman (e.g., animated), female nonhuman, not applicable (a speaking animated character who is neither male nor female), or unable to determine. Using visual cues, the apparent race or ethnicity of each character (White/European American, Black/African American, Latino/Hispanic, Asian/Asian American, Native American, other, or not applicable, e.g., for an animated character) was recorded.

Based on explicit visual and verbal cues from the commercial (e.g., appearing in business clothing, talking about work), coders recorded whether each character appeared to be employed outside the home. If work outside the home was not made explicit in the commercial, coders selected “unknown.” Also based on the commercial’s depiction, the apparent role of each character within a family unit was noted, to illuminate whether familial roles were associated with housework performance, as they tend to be in real life (Bianchi & Spain, 1996; Bianchi et al., 2000). The categories for this variable were: women shown as married but
not depicted with children, women portrayed as mothers (shown with children),
men shown as married but not depicted with children, men portrayed as fathers
(shown with children), daughters, sons, grandmothers, grandfathers, and characters
without familial or spousal association.

Once a character was coded, the number of chores that character was shown to
be engaged in was also recorded. To count as more than one chore, a new, differ-
ent type of chore must be performed, rather than a single chore broken up by
other information in the commercial (e.g., cooking dinner, then doing the dishes).
At the end of each commercial, coders also made two coding decisions that per-
tained to the manner in which the character was portrayed in general in the com-
mercial, regarding the performance of all chores performed by that character.
First, the overall level of success of each character’s performance of chores was
judged on a scale of 1 (very unsuccessful) to 5 (very successful). Success was
determined by observing the degree to which the character tended to perform
chores effectively, efficiently, conscientiously with a concerted effort, or skillfully
in all of the chores featured in the commercial. Second, coders noted the overall
degree of approval registered to each character or chore performer by others appear-
ing in the commercial, also on a scale of 1 to 5. Approval or strong approval was
noted when other characters praised or admired the character in question regarding
the character’s general performance of chores or state of affairs after perform-
ing chores (e.g., “Your house always looks so beautiful!”). Disapproval or strong
disapproval was noted when disappointment, disbelief, or dissatisfaction was
expressed by others regarding the character’s general performance of chores (e.g.,
“I could use a little help around the house. You don’t always do your share.”). The
familial role of each responder was also noted (with space to record multiple
responders, if necessary) to capture data regarding interactions between family
members. With these two variables, the overall impression in the commercial of
each character as a chore performer is judged, rather than the specific qualities
and circumstances pertaining to each chore.

The next series of coding decisions, on the other hand, was used to measure
the success of each individual chore performed by each character, one by one.
The unit of analysis shifts in this section of the coding scheme to the chore itself,
allowing for the coding of characteristics of each of the chores performed by each
character. Thus, chore is the secondary unit of analysis in the study to isolate the
qualities of each chore, with specific coding decisions made for up to three chores
performed by each character in the commercial. The testing of the coding scheme
determined that this number was sufficient, because no commercial featured more
than three chores performed by the same character. (In fact, as we will show in the
Results section, only 1% of the commercials in the sample had three chores. The
vast majority had one chore and a small number had two.)

**Coding chores.** The type of each chore performed was categorized and
recorded. We used the following values for this variable: cleaning inside the
house, caring for children (including changing diapers, feeding, and nursing sick children), cooking or preparing to cook (including setting the table), ordering food to provide for family (not including ordering food for self or for friends), sewing/mending, creating a grocery list or grocery shopping, doing the laundry (either at home or at a laundromat), caring for pets (feeding, brushing, etc.), making repairs around the house or fixing things (repairing broken sinks, toilets, etc.), home improvement/renovations with tools (painting, using tools to install home furnishings), home decorating/design without tools (hanging curtains, arranging furniture), trash emptying and removal, lawn care/grounds keeping (includes mowing the lawn, raking, leaf removal, shoveling snow), gardening, car repair or cleaning the car, and other. The setting where each chore took place was also noted, using the following options: kitchen, bathroom, living room, dining room, bedroom, study/library/office, other inside setting, yard or garden, porch or deck, driveway or garage, and other outside setting.

For each chore, coders also noted whether the chore is traditionally or stereotypically performed according to gender in real life, or whether the task is considered gender neutral. The data from sociological studies regarding whether males or females are typically responsible for particular household chores were used to make this judgment. Because those studies (e.g., Goldscheider & Waite, 1991; Parke & Stearns, 1993; Robinson & Godbey, 1997) determined that women still do the vast majority of cooking, child care, and cleaning, these tasks were coded as “stereotypically female” tasks. Because there is also evidence that men tend to make most repairs around the home, fix and maintain cars, and take out the garbage (Ferree, 1990; Greenstein, 1996, 2000; Kaufman, 1999), these chores were coded as “stereotypically male.” This variable was important to include in our study because we were interested in what happened when characters crossed over traditional boundaries to perform nonstereotypical chores. Were they successful, therefore sending the message that one need not be female to clean the floors or male to take out the trash? Or did they fail, perhaps even to the point of being mocked humorously, thereby sending the message that such crossovers are ill-advised?

The study coded for the quality or success of each chore performed in a number of ways. First, for each chore, coders noted whether or not the chore appeared to be completed. An example of a completed chore depiction would be a commercial in which a character is shown waxing the floor and then a visual image of the entire, gleaming floor is shown, suggesting the task was completed. An example of an uncompleted chore would be a commercial in which the character shown waxing the floor receives a phone call to get together with a friend, and he or she leaves with the waxing not finished.

Coders also coded, based on the visuals of the chore shown and/or the meaning created by the commercial, whether the character appeared to put forth a satisfactory effort in the actual enactment of the chore. This was rated on a scale ranging from 1 (very unsatisfactory) to 5 (very satisfactory). Satisfactory effort was defined as performing the chore skillfully, thoroughly, and with a concerted effort.
to have the task be as effective as possible, whereas unsatisfactory effort was defined as not giving the chore performance one’s best effort such as by rushing through the chore, providing a “quick fix” or temporary solution (such as “cleaning” a room by haphazardly stacking objects in a closet), or not concentrating on the task at hand (such as absent-mindedly dusting a piece of furniture while looking attentively at the television).

Based on the appearance after the chore was finished, coders indicated whether the chore depiction had a satisfactory outcome, coding how satisfactorily the chore was completed from 1 (very messy, sloppy, done poorly, looks bad) to 5 (very clean, neat, done well, looks good). Coders also noted whether the performance of the chore resulted in a negative consequence such as a new problem surfacing or something new that would need to be cleaned or taken care of due to the manner in which the previous chore was undertaken. An example would be breaking or spilling something in the process of completing a chore, fixing a leak in one bathroom pipe only to have another pipe leak later, feeding a baby a meal but not cleaning up the baby’s face or all the food that gathers on the floor, etc. Negative responses from other characters to the chore or its performer were not included here, as they constituted their own category.

Indeed, any response to the chore or the performer of the chore from others that was shown in the commercial was also coded for each individual chore, based on how positive or negative the reaction was on a scale from 1 (strong disapproval) to 5 (strong approval). An example of approval, again, would be praise or a compliment from one character directed toward the chore or the chore performer regarding a specific chore (e.g., “Your bathroom floor looks so clean! What do you use on it?”), whereas disapproval would include expressions of displeasure regarding the state of a specific chore, its performance, or the performer himself or herself (e.g., “You let the kids have cake for dinner?!”). The familial role of the responder was also noted, once again allowing for multiple characters responding to the performance of a specific chore.

Coding humor. For every character, coders noted whether the character was the butt of a joke or humor in the commercial regarding the performance of a chore(s). If either another character or the general situation portrayed made fun of this character in association with the chore or pointed out a humorous situation related to the performance of the chore, coders circled “yes” on their code sheets. Examples include the commercial in which a husband sets up a dummy (a pair of stuffed pants) under the sink to make it look like he is making a repair, when he is really out doing something more fun, or the commercial in which the husband is shown to be so incapable of preparing a meal while the wife works late that she has to leave food in color-coded containers for him to use and he is shown humorously mismanaging even these preprepared items.

The type of humor for each joke or humorous situation was also recorded with three different options: verbal, visual, or both. Coders circled 1 if the humor was
conveyed verbally, in the form of a joke or an exchange between characters meant to be humorous (e.g., sarcastic joke about a poorly performed chore). Coders circled 2 if the humor was conveyed visually, in the form of an image meant to be funny (e.g., chore performer is shown burning fingers on toast and hopping around comically). Coders circled 3 if humor was conveyed through verbal exchanges between characters and visuals meant to produce a humorous response. For all verbal exchanges or jokes with this character as the butt or the recipient of the humor, the teller or initiator was also recorded, using the same familial role options from other variables.

**Intercoder reliability.** Before coding the actual sample, two graduate students (one man, one woman) who were blind to the hypotheses of this research coded a parallel set of data—four additional nights of primetime commercials that were not part of the sample, \( N = 45 \) characters performing domestic chores—and their judgments were compared with those of three additional graduate student coders (two men and one woman) who were not blind to the hypotheses. Using Holstı’s coefficient of reliability, the overall level of agreement averaged across all variables and all pairs of coder comparisons was .85.\(^1\) The Holstı’s intercoder agreement

![Intercoder agreement matrix using Holstı’s coefficient, featuring all coding pair comparisons averaged across all variables.\(^3\)](image)

\(^1\)Intercoder agreement matrix using Holstı’s coefficient, featuring all coding pair comparisons averaged across all variables.\(^3\)

\(^3\)The intercoder agreement results for the individual variables, averaged across all nine coder pair comparisons, are as follows: Codes pertaining to commercial: length of commercial = .86, genre of program = .98, humorous intent of commercial? = .90, who was butt/recipient of humor? = .95, who was initiator of humor? = .90, type of humor theory evident in commercial = .84; Codes pertaining to character: gender of chore performer = 1.0, race of chore performer = .99, age of chore performer = .98, was chore performer employed outside the home? = .87, familial role of chore performer = .85, number of chores performed by character = .96, overall success of chore performer throughout commercial = .77, general response to chore performer throughout commercial = .85; Codes pertaining to chores (calculated by averaging coding results for the first two chores appearing in each commercial): type = .87, setting = .79, was the chore gender stereotyped? = .85, was the chore completed? = .81, were there negative consequences associated with chore performance? = .97, response from others = .85, process satisfactory? = .85, outcome satisfactory? = .86, who was the responder? = .85.

\(^b\)Blind to the hypotheses, coded only the data used to calculate agreement, whereas Coders 1–3 were not blind to the hypotheses, and, after establishing an acceptable rate of agreement with Coders 4 and 5 using the reliability data, coded the sample in its entirety.

\(^c\)The two external coders, who were blind to the hypotheses, did not code the same material as each other, therefore no comparison is possible.
scores for each individual variable, averaged across the nine pairs of coders, can also be found in the footnote. Having established an acceptable rate of intercoder agreement in these data, the three graduate students not blind to the hypotheses coded the sample using the same procedure shown to be reliable.

The requirements for data used to test for reliability are that they be representative of the sample used in the study and diverse, allowing for an application of the full range of coding decisions (Krippendorff, 2004). The commercials used for such purposes in this study met each criterion, reflecting a nonspecialized set of prime-time commercial content that parallels the actual sample (and, in fact, was gathered in the week that immediately followed) and encompassing sufficient variation in relevant features of content to apply a wide range of observations.

Although Holsti’s formula does not account for chance agreement, it has been called a viable, if somewhat liberal, alternative by some content analysis experts (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002; Neuendorf, 2002) and was considered acceptable here due to the large number of coder pairs whose coding decisions were compared (nine pairs) as well as the fact that the vast majority of the variables had more than two values. Multiple coding pairs and multiple values for variables make chance agreement less likely (Krippendorff, 2004; Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998).

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

The vast majority, 82%, of the 477 characters performing domestic chores that comprised the sample appeared in commercials that were 30 seconds long (n = 391), whereas 16.4% appeared in commercials that were 15 seconds long (n = 78). About one third (33.5%, n = 160) of the characters performing domestic chores were located in commercials embedded in a drama and one fifth were located in either a noncomedic reality-based program (20.3%, n = 97) or a sitcom (21.6%, n = 103). About two thirds (63.9%, n = 305) of the characters performing domestic chores were female humans, whereas 33.3% (n = 159) were male humans. Only 1.9% (n = 9) of the characters were female nonhumans and 0.2% (n = 1) were male nonhumans. Thus, animated characters in commercials featuring domestic chores were rare. A full 80.5% (n = 384) of chore performers in the commercials were White, compared to 16.6% (n = 79) who were Black. Just 1.5% (n = 7) were Latino, and less than 1% (0.6%, n = 3) were Asian.

For 89.1% (n = 425) of all characters performing domestic chores, coders could not determine whether they appeared to be employed outside the home.
However, a small proportion, 5.5% \((n = 26)\) of the characters were portrayed as employed outside the home (e.g., depicted arriving at home with a briefcase), and an even smaller number, 2.5% \((n = 12)\) of the characters, were not. Mothers were the most common performers of domestic chores, comprising 36.5% \((n = 174)\) of the characters in the sample. Fathers followed, making up 13.0% \((n = 62)\) of the characters, then women appearing without children \(5.2\% , n = 25\) and men appearing without children \(10.7\% , n = 51\).

Almost two thirds \(64.4\% , n = 307\) of the characters completed their first chore, whereas \(33.1\% , n = 158\) did not. The vast majority of characters, 86.6% \((n = 413)\) caused no negative consequence or damage by their performance of the first chore. However, 11.9% \((n = 57)\) of the characters did incur such damage in the first chore performed. A second chore was performed by 8.8% of the characters in the commercials in the sample, \(n = 42\). Of those 42 characters who performed a second chore, 95.2% \((n = 40)\) incurred no negative consequence or damage. Just 1.3% \((n = 6)\) of the characters in the sample performed a third chore. Thus, all data regarding the third chore were excluded from subsequent analyses, and results from the first two chores were averaged.

A total of 522 chores were taken on by the 477 characters performing chores, and the chores inspired a total of 635 instances in which a character commented on the performance of the chore. Interestingly, the most common depiction was for the son to comment on the performance of the chore. This was the case for 27.4% of the 635 responses \((n = 174)\). This scenario was followed in frequency by the performer of the chore herself or himself commenting about the chore \(24.6\% \) of all responses, \(n = 156\), and then by daughters making such comments \(19.5\% \) of all responses, \(n = 124\). Wives commented on husbands’ performance of chores in 7.6% of all responses to chores \((n = 48)\), and husbands commented on wives’ performance in 4.6% \((n = 29)\). Thus, there are many interactions between family members regarding how well a chore is performed.

The most frequently occurring domestic chores in the sample had to do with childcare \(43.7\% \) of the 522 chores depicted, \(n = 228\). Cooking \(19.9\% \) of all chores, \(n = 104\) and cleaning the house \(11.7\% \) of all chores, \(n = 61\) were also common. Other domestic chores depicted included grocery shopping \(6.5\% \) of all chores, \(n = 34\), lawn care and gardening \(3.4\% \) of all chores, \(n = 18\), caring for pets \(3.3\% , n = 17\), and home improvement projects \(3.1\% , n = 16\). Over one quarter of the chores coded \(26.8\% , n = 140\) took place outside of the home, such as in grocery stores. Domestic chores also took place rather often in kitchens \(19.0\% \) of all chores, \(n = 99\), living rooms \(14.8\% \) of all chores, \(n = 77\), yards \(11.9\% , n = 62\), and bedrooms \(10.2\% , n = 53\).

The research question asked how humor is presented in the context of commercials featuring domestic chores. Results show that there were 108 characters, 22.6% of the 477 total characters coded, whose performance of domestic
chores was depicted humorously. Among these 108 characters, 24.5% were poked fun at verbally, 56.4% visually, and 19.1% were the subject of visual and verbal humor. When a verbal element of humor occurred, the performer of the chore himself or herself was the most frequent initiator of the joke, comprising 40.4% of the 47 characters who made a humorous comment about a chore, \( n = 19 \).

**Hypothesis Tests**

H1, predicting that male characters would perform more stereotypically masculine domestic chores than stereotypically feminine domestic chores, was not supported. Male and female characters were shown most often performing domestic chores associated stereotypically with women rather than with men (see Table 1). This is likely due to the fact that more domestic chores are traditionally assigned to women than to men, and therefore, “feminine” chores were inevitably likely to outnumber “masculine” chores in this study. Indeed, only 12.9% of all domestic chores coded in the study were “masculine” chores, \( n = 55 \). However, despite the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender of Chore Performer</th>
<th>Male % ((n = 150))</th>
<th>Female % ((n = 277))</th>
<th>(\chi^2)</th>
<th>(\phi)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender stereotype of chore performed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypically masculine ((n = 55))</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>70.16**</td>
<td>.41**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypically feminine ((n = 372))</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>97.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative consequence incurred by character in chore performance?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes ((n = 57))</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>46.46**</td>
<td>.32**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No ((n = 403))</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>95.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character poked fun at verbally regarding chore performance?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes ((n = 29))</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>8.08*</td>
<td>.13*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No ((n = 434))</td>
<td>89.3</td>
<td>96.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character butt of any type of joke about chore performance?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes ((n = 108))</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>99.03**</td>
<td>.46**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No ((n = 356))</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>90.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*\(p < .01\). **\(p < .001\).
lack of support for H1, there is evidence in the data that domestic chores are often performed stereotypically according to gender in commercials. For example, within the 55 “masculine” domestic chores, male characters performed 47 and female characters only 8. Thus, male characters were more likely than female characters to be shown involved in “masculine” chores, $\chi^2(1, N = 427) = 70.16$, $p < .001$, $\phi = .41$, $p < .001$, but those chores were not the most commonly depicted in the sample (again, see Table 1).

H2, predicting that male characters would perform fewer domestic chores than female characters, was supported. Of the 522 total chores coded in the study, male characters performed 177 (34%) and female characters performed 345 (66%). A chi-square goodness of fit test comparing the expected to the observed distribution of the gender of the chore performer variable showed a significant tendency to overrepresent women as domestic chore performers, $\chi^2(3, N = 474) = 525.06$, $p < .001$. The same analysis performed with human characters only reveals a similar gender disparity, $\chi^2(1, 437) = 244.7, p < .001$. Since there were so few nonhuman characters, all subsequent analyses included human characters only.

H3, predicting that male characters would be less successful at domestic chores than female characters, was investigated in a number of ways. First, a crosstabulation with chi-square was used to determine whether male characters’ performance of domestic chores was more likely to be met with negative consequences than female characters’ domestic chore performance (see Table 1). Results show that although such depictions were rare ($n = 57$ total characters whose chore performance incurred negative consequences), male characters were five times more likely to have performed chores with negative consequences than female characters, $\chi^2(1, N = 462) = 46.46, p < .001$, $\phi = .32$, $p < .001$.

Second, five variables—negative consequence of the chore, favorability of the response of others to the chore, satisfactory process in the performance of the chore, satisfactory outcome of the chore, and overall success of the character at performing chores—were standardized into z scores and combined into an additive index for the overall degree of success associated with chore performance (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .72$). Each of the variables chosen to comprise the additive index was an indicator of the success or expertise with which the chore was performed. The additive index was compared to gender of character using a $t$ test, as were each of the individual variables that had been measured on a 5-point scale that comprised the index (see Table 2). We report the results for the index and these individual variables to provide all relevant data. The $t$ test shows that male characters were more likely to perform domestic chores that were met with a disapproving response, $t(180) = -6.88, p < .001$; were less satisfactory in process, $t(225) = -7.01, p < .001$; and outcome, $t(171) = -4.42, p < .001$; and were generally less successful, $t(203) = -7.55, p < .001$; than female characters, thereby supporting H3. Thus, male characters tend to be portrayed as relatively inept at domestic chores compared to female characters.
H4, predicting that depictions of a lack of success at chores will be more humorous than depictions of success, was also supported (see Table 2). When characters performed chores in a humorous manner, they were less likely to receive a favorable response from others, $t(126) = -10.36, p < .001$; less likely to have performed the chore satisfactorily in both process, $t(154) = -10.61, p < .001$; and outcome, $t(130) = -5.69, p < .001$; and, overall, were less successful in chores, $t(142) = -10.04, p < .001$; than when characters performed chores not accompanied by humor. Therefore, we have support for our basic premise that lack of success in domestic chore performance and humor go hand in hand.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variables</th>
<th>Male (n = 159)</th>
<th>Female (n = 304)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response from others$^a$</td>
<td>3.50 1.72</td>
<td>4.63 1.02</td>
<td>-6.88</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the process satisfactory?$^b$</td>
<td>3.42 1.70</td>
<td>4.47 1.09</td>
<td>-7.01</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the outcome satisfactory?$^b$</td>
<td>3.96 1.56</td>
<td>4.63 0.92</td>
<td>-4.42</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall success$^c$</td>
<td>-0.55 1.29</td>
<td>0.27 0.67</td>
<td>-7.55</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender of Chore Performer</th>
<th>Male (n = 159)</th>
<th>Female (n = 304)</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Humorous</td>
<td>Humorous Nonhumorous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 127)</td>
<td>(n = 344)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response from others$^a$</td>
<td>2.98 1.75</td>
<td>4.78 0.76</td>
<td>-10.36</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the process satisfactory?$^b$</td>
<td>2.89 1.72</td>
<td>4.59 0.92</td>
<td>-10.61</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the outcome satisfactory?$^b$</td>
<td>3.75 1.70</td>
<td>4.70 0.77</td>
<td>-5.69</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall success$^c$</td>
<td>-0.90 1.34</td>
<td>0.33 0.55</td>
<td>-10.04</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender of Character Who Is the Butt of Chore-Related Humor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male (n = 80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response from others$^a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the process satisfactory?$^b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the outcome satisfactory?$^b$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall success$^c$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$1 (Very unfavorable/disapproving), 5 (very favorable/approving).
$^b$1 (Very unsatisfactory), 5 (very satisfactory).
$^c$Additive scale using z-scores for response from others, satisfactory process, satisfactory outcome, whether there was damage involved, and whether the chore was completed.
H5, predicting that unsuccessful performance of domestic chores by male characters would be the subject of humor more often than unsuccessful performance of domestic chores by female characters, was first tested by comparing the frequency with which male and female characters were poked fun at verbally by another character about the performance of a chore in the commercial (see Table 1). Results show that male characters were significantly more likely to be poked fun at verbally in the commercial regarding how they performed a chore, \( \chi^2(1, N = 463) = 8.08, p < .01, \phi = .13, p < .01 \); although such verbal humor instances were relatively rare \((n = 29)\). Next, an additional crosstab comparison found that male characters were overwhelmingly more likely to be the butt of any kind of a joke (visual or verbal) overall, in commercials featuring domestic chores compared to female characters (see Table 1), \( \chi^2(1, N = 464) = 99.03, p < .001, \phi = .46, p < .001 \).

Finally, the hypothesis was tested by a series of t tests using the subsample of characters that were poked fun at for their performance of domestic chores (see Table 2, \( n = 108 \)). Results found that when those characters were male, chore performance was less likely to meet with a favorable response from others, \( t(89) = -2.65, p < .01 \); was less likely to be satisfactory in process, \( t(42) = -2.60, p = .01 \); and, overall, was less successful, \( t(106) = -3.07, p < .01 \); compared to when those characters were female. The outcome of the chore was also less likely to be satisfactory when male characters performed such chores, although that difference approached, but did not meet traditional standards for statistical significance. These results, generally in support of H5, show that although male and female characters can be shown in humorous situations regarding chore performance, when men are in such situations, the degree of success of chore performance is significantly lower.

**DISCUSSION**

Our results point to potentially encouraging and discouraging elements in the portrayal of gender within the domestic sphere. On the positive side, we found that male characters in our sample of commercials performed more domestic chores traditionally assigned to women than domestic chores traditionally assigned to men. Thus, there is some evidence of male characters crossing boundaries that have long defined such chores as cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children as solely women’s work (Ferree, 1990; Greenstein, 1996, 2000; Parkman, 2004). However, as noted in the Results section, the larger proportion of “feminine” chores taken on by the male characters is likely to be explained in large part by our decision to confine our study to domestic chores. By doing so, we were inevitably more likely to find “feminine” rather than “masculine”
chores, as much more work pertaining to keeping up the house and yard and taking care of children tends to be traditionally seen as women’s work rather than men’s (Ferre, 1990; Greenstein, 1996, 2000; Parkman, 2004). Thus, in what can be considered a limitation to our study, the deck was stacked in favor of “feminine” chores. Nonetheless, our finding that male characters do, indeed, take on a substantial number of domestic chores traditionally assigned to females can still be interpreted as an encouraging finding, supporting the loosening of gender roles. Future research can address our limitation and expand this line of research by investigating a wider array of activities that tend to be gendered in the social world but that are not restricted to domestic chores (such as driving).

On the less positive side, our study found considerable evidence that many domestic chores continue to be performed stereotypically according to gender in television commercials. In the small set of depictions of stereotypically masculine domestic chores, men were more likely than women to perform those chores, as had been shown in the past (Bretl & Cantor, 1988; Furnham & Mak, 1999; Kaufman, 1999; Stern & Mastro, 2004). Likewise, female characters in our study were more often depicted performing housework and child care duties than male characters, as had been the case in past analyses (Furnham & Bitar, 1993; Furnham & Mak, 1999; Stern & Mastro, 2004). Thus, our data generally show that gender roles in the domestic arena continue to be traditional rather than counterstereotypical.

With the slight evidence of encouraging patterns in gender portrayals and the considerable evidence of discouraging patterns, we speculate that commercial content may parallel the social world, in which men have increased the amount of time they spend on domestic chores and child care, but nonetheless continue to devote much less time to such activities than women (Bianchi & Spain, 1996; Bianchi et al., 2000; Demo & Acock, 1993; Goldscheider & Waite, 1991; Parke & Stearns, 1993; Robinson & Godbey, 1997). Further research, particularly analyses examining changes in commercial content over time, would be needed to test that speculation.

Our findings also make it clear that simply determining how many men and women perform chores in and around the home in commercials does not necessarily reveal the complete message about gender roles. Rather, the success of the chore performance should be examined, as well as the presence of humor, to reveal the potential for gender stereotypes. For example, a male character shown wearing an apron and preparing a meal for his family is not necessarily a positive portrayal if that male has made a huge mess and has ruined the meal, and/or if the audience is meant to laugh as he hops around the kitchen because he has burned his hand. Such a character may be better characterized as “hardly working” at the chore than “working hard.”

Nearly one out of every four characters (22.6%) who performed domestic chores in our study carried out that chore in a humorous manner. Male chore
performers were five times more likely than female chore performers to be the target of humor about domestic chore performance. Such humor was strongly associated with lack of success at the domestic task. Thus, the message being sent in such commercials appears to be that men’s forays into domestic chores will be unsuccessful, even to the point of ridicule and absurdity. We believe depictions such as these constrain and burden women by suggesting that only they are able to perform domestic chores well, at the same time that the depictions underesti-mate and disparage the abilities of men by poking fun at their efforts.

Indeed, this study confirms the prevalence of humor as a device in television advertising (Weinberger et al., 1995), which presumably occurs due to the widespread belief in humor’s effectiveness in capturing attention, developing favorable feelings toward a product or an ad, and influencing memory (Bless & Schwarz, 1999; Freedman et al., 1978). We join Buijzen and Valkenburg (2004) in finding that traditional theories of humor can be applied to television commercial content. In our study, much of the humor was created around male characters’ apparent fail-ures at the performance of household chores. We believe this is an example of the superiority theory of humor, in which the negotiation of power has a central place (MacHovec, 1988; Meyer, 2000). Because males continue to enjoy more power than females in many arenas, including in the division of household labor, we would argue that it is no coincidence that humorous ads about household chores include the mockery of male characters. In line with superiority theory, such mockery allows the position of female characters and female audience members viewing at home to be temporarily elevated. Women feel superior, in other words, in light of men’s shortcomings as depicted through their failure at domestic chores.

In another limitation to the study, our sampling decisions precluded the analysis of other possible related depictions. For example, limiting our interest to those commercials that explicitly dealt with products and services related to the domestic sphere left out some commercial content, such as movie trailers, that depicted domestic life in the background. This decision makes sense within the logic of advertising and allowed us to focus on depictions that directly pertained to our topic. Yet, individuals in the audience would presumably be receiving information about gender and domesticity from additional sources on television, as well, which are unaddressed in our study.

Indeed, we have used this content analysis to speculate a great deal about how individual audience members may receive the messages sent about gender roles in these depictions. Previous research supports the potential for television advertising to help shape attitudes and behavior pertaining to feminine and masculine gender roles (Blakeney et al., 1983; Garst & Bodenhausen, 1997; O’Bryant & Corder-Bolz, 1978; Pike & Jennings, 2005). Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1994) suggests that the characters that appear on television function as models whose actions demonstrate a social response to particular behaviors. Some behaviors of television characters are rewarded (such as, in this context, through the expressed
satisfaction and admiration about a chore), whereas others are punished (such as through dissatisfaction or derisive humor). According to the theory, through exposure to such television content, the individual learns about gender role norms, and considers that information in behavioral decision making. Yet, despite the existence of effects studies on television advertising and gender role attitudes and behavior and the general support for social cognitive theory found in other contexts, the speculation posed in this study regarding potential influence remains conjecture. Effects research should be conducted to investigate whether audience members are, indeed, influenced by these portrayals.

We believe that more research should monitor positive and negative changes in the representation of gender roles in advertising, as well as determine how individuals receive these messages. Society continues to undergo important changes in gendered participation in the workplace and in the home. Unfortunately, the distribution of household labor has not shifted as dramatically. The humorous depiction of male characters’ failures in chore performance not only presents a stereotypical view of masculine gender roles but also may help to ensure that the domestic burden remains largely on the shoulders of females.

REFERENCES

Blakeney, M., Barnes, S., & McKeough, J. (1983). Gender advertising: The self-fulfilling prophecy?

