Creativity and Change:

How experience, environment and approach to creating advertisements have

evolved for copywriters.

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A Thesis

presented to

the Faculty of the Graduate School

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Master of Arts

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By CELIA MURRAY

Dr. Margaret Duffy, Thesis Supervisor

DECEMBER 2016

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have

examined the thesis entitled:


# Creativity and Change:
## How experience, environment and approach to creating advertisements have evolved for Copywriters.


Presented by Celia Murray, a candidate for the degree of Master of the Arts

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy̧ ̧̧̧̧̧̧̧̧̧̧̧̧̧̧̧̧


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Professor Margaret Duffy


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Professor Mitchell McKinney


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Professor Mark Swanson


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Professor Brad Best

**DEDICATION**

It can't be easy watching your child continuously exit the country, Skype you at all hours of the day mentioning grades, activities of fellow tenants (I'm looking at you meth dealers from the flat below), relationships, tattoos, health scares, and obviously, asking for financial and emotional help. Seeing as the above happened more than once during my time in Columbia, I think my parents copped this on the chin pretty well. I'd like to thank them, sincerely, for bearing with me during this part of my life, for always picking up the phone, and for talking me down.

To my brother, thank you for offering a helping hand with endless supplies of margaritas and martinis.

To the Strategic Communication Faculty, namely those supervising Mojo, and especially Margaret Duffy, thank you. I believe that your guidance and advice has made me a better person, and helped me find a profession I could be happy in. Thank you from the bottom of my heart to the kindest teachers I've ever had. Your students should count themselves lucky to take your classes.

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Celia Murray

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ABSTRACT

Examines how those tasked with creativity in advertising perceive their work and role over a period of considerable economic and technological change. This qualitative study adds insights and expands previous empirical research by practitioners such as Reid, King & DeLorme (1998).  Through ten semi-structured interviews with a range of advertising professionals who are involved in copywriting, from Senior Copywriters to Chief Creative Officers of national advertising agencies, the author compares past and present states of creativity in advertising. The study found that recent economic and technological influences had dramatically changed the way in which copywriters work, and the work that they produce professionally. However, there was no unanimous agreement regarding any failure or decrease of creativity in its entirety — rather a call for adaptation and evolution of approaches to implementation of copy. This study provides practical and theoretical value as it contributes to role-based models of advertising, and informs current copywriters of the opinions of their peers.

**INTRODUCTION**

In this thesis I sought to investigate and understand creativity in advertising. Previous research focused on advertising has explored the outcomes of different studies, experiments, literature and discussions from audience reactions to ethics and morals within strategic campaigns. This study concentrates on creativity in advertising, specifically relating to the work of creative copywriters. This involves a description and definition of creativity.

In *Effective Advertising: Harnessing the Power of Creativity* Gareau attempts to summarize why creativity in advertising is worthy of research and acknowledgement: "Creativity helps deliver stopping power, fuels the memory, generates interest, and frames the brand experience – all of which are important for advertising to work well" (Gareau, 2013, p.23).

Bill Bernbach, co-founder of Doyle Dane Bernbach (DDB Worldwide Communications Group Inc.) a global advertising agency and recipient of numerous awards, describes the importance of creativity as: "An idea (that) can turn to dust or magic, depending on the talent that rubs against it" (Bernbach, 2003, p.347).

For the purpose of this research, the definition of creativity used is provided by Reid, King, & DeLorme, (1998), and their study which forms part of the theoretical framework for this thesis. Their definition of creativity is: "original

and imaginative thought designed to produce goal-directed and problem-solving advertisements and commercials" (Reid, King, & DeLorme, 1998, p.3).

In this study I have sought to focus on the craftspeople of creative advertising, those currently working at the pinnacle of their careers, and those who have seen innovation and change occur not only in their agencies – but also across the entire advertising landscape.

Scholars have broadly agreed on five distinct categories of research in creative advertising: creative decision process studies, studies of creative's individual characteristics, studies on organizational influences, advertising education studies, and studies on trends in the industry. In this thesis, creative copywriters are described, in shorthand, as "creatives."

This study focuses on professional advertising and thus examines the literature in each of the areas mentioned above. This includes process studies, regarding the decisions and development of creative work (Kover, 1995; Johar, Holbrook, & Stern, 2001); person studies, the comparison of creative individuals with more strategic-minded coworkers (Auer, 1976; West, 1993; Young, 2000; Hackley & Kover, 2007); place studies, how surroundings and structure impact creativity (Kilgour & Koslow, 2009; Reid & Karambayya, 2009; Oliver & Ashley, 2012; Sasser & Koslow, 2012); and studies on trends in the industry, with regard to the changes and development of ideas and practices in creativity (Reid, King & DeLorme, 1998; Sasser & Koslow, 2008; Sasser & Koslow, 2012).   These four categories are analyzed within the two

empirical studies particularly applicable to this thesis:  the "3P Model of Creativity" (Sassler & Koslow, 2008), as well as the trend-monitoring research of Reid, King & DeLorme (1998).

I wanted to understand how each of the 3Ps – person, place and process ultimately influence the fourth topic – trends and changes. The bulk of my research was based on the fourth topic and focused on copywriting.

# 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework for this research is primarily based on Sasser &
Koslow's 3Ps study of creativity (1998). The scholars identified that many of
their peers and creative professionals within advertising often isolate or
discuss creativity in three different areas. According to their work, creativity
can be evaluated or understood via three different perspectives: people,
places and processes, defined as:

> "….the *people* who do creative advertising, the *process* they follow in
> developing creative ideas, and structure may also be applied to the
> people who respond to advertising, the *places* such as media,
> contexts, or situations where they do so, and the thinking processes by
> which they understand and make sense of advertising" (Sasser &
> Koslow, 1998, p.6).

Another study, Reid, King & DeLorme's *Top Level Agency Creatives Look at
Advertising Creativity Then and Now* (1998) was also an important resource
for this thesis. According to the scholars there are four main areas of research
in creativity:

(1) Studies of creative decision processes – examining the process of
developing advertisements by creative professionals;

(2) Studies of individual characteristics and creative solving-abilities –
focusing on the personalities behind the creation of advertisements;

(3) Studies of organizational influences and ad creation – exploring how
environmental and structural factors influence creativity; and

(4) Studies of advertising education and creativity – examining how
education develops advertising creativity.

These authors also pioneered a completely different area of research: "the monitoring of changes and trends in industry-based perceptions of advertising creativity" (Reid, King & DeLorme, 1998, p.2).

> "It represents a first step in determining whether and how specific elements of advertising creativity have changed, providing a foundation on which other monitoring studies of advertising creativity can build" (Reid, King & DeLorme, 1998, p.2).

As Reid, King & DeLorme used the 3P model to track creativity trends, I have also used both empirical studies to frame my research and update their analysis.

Advertising agencies have a number of job categories, some of which overlap for deliverables to clients, however it should be noted that agencies are primarily divided between two distinct spheres — creative professionals and account professionals. The term "creatives" will be used to describe professionals in the following positions: Copywriter, Art Director, Graphic Designer and/or Creative Director. The term "account professionals" refers to people with positions in "management, media [and] strategy" (Sasser & Koslow, 2003).

The following discussion expands upon the types of advertising creativity studies identified previously.

***Person Studies – the personality and individual characteristics used to develop creativity***

Research regarding creativity in advertising agencies under the category "person" includes all creative and account professional roles. Sasser and Koslow (1998) describe analyses in this category as seeking to discover "…how people think and behave in different ways to prompt higher levels of creativity" (Sasser and Koslow, 1998, p.6). To help define this category many contemporary scholars, including Sasser & Koslow and Reid, King and DeLorme, use the study by Auer (1976) that compares the empathy of creative students to that of their peers.

In a survey of 500 students from three different universities, Auer (1976) found key differences in behavior between creative and non-creative individuals. For this study non-creatives were defined as "generalized others", a social sciences term pioneered by George Herbert Mead (1962). This term includes persons from the general public that are not the focus of the personality study.  Auer found that creative students were more empathetic than their agency counterparts towards the public (generalized others), but less empathetic to interpersonal relations towards their colleagues. Auer suggested that this could lead to conflicts between creative and noncreative professionals in agencies, with regard to interpersonal skills about perceptions of appropriate content and methods for advertising. While Auer's research discussed the differences in emotional characteristics among students, other researchers evaluated this approach on a larger, professional scale.

West (1993) tested interactions as they relate to creativity internationally. He used participants from agencies in the United States of America, England and

Canada to examine characteristics and interactions within professional settings. More important, West wanted to determine whether nationality and cultural influences affected personal creativity. West opted for the survey method, as the scale of the study was very large: 900 creatives at 300 agencies responded. Arguably the most interesting findings concerned the construction of strategies developed during an advertising campaign. West found that most of the creatives in the study believed in retaining autonomy and control over final decisions and products. However, this was marginally a more significant belief amongst creatives from the United Kingdom, when compared with their United States counterparts.

Young's (2000) study centers on differences in creative roles in agencies, and compares copywriters and art directors. Young sought to evaluate opinions and practices regarding television advertising – and ultimately, the partnership between the two professionals that are employed as creative-minded practitioners at agencies, and those that are expected to collaborate. Young examined these creative differences while crafting television commercials. Using 100 phone interviews, from a randomly selected pool of agencies, he found that two thirds of participants agreed that creative differences exist between copywriters and art directors.

Research regarding professional relationships was further advanced by the work of Hackley and Kover (2007), who sought to clarify how creatives viewed their work and positions within agencies across the United States. According to their results, creative professionals found their workplace to be stressful,

and at times environments that generated conflict, caused by perceived ideological differences between creative and accounts co-workers. Clarifying this further: accounts positions primarily incorporate the strategy, research and planning side of advertising – as opposed to the creatives, which fixated on the creative execution of a campaign message or idea.

Hackley and Kover (2007) found that creatives considered their work to be the most important part of the ad-creating process and one that should be original and artistic, as opposed to the account professional's focus on an ad's strategy, reach and revenue. The researchers also found that because creatives sought to establish themselves and their identity through their work, this was often a primary motivation, instead of the goals and objectives stated by clients. However, this study also suggested that these professional differences are a driving factor for creatives to produce their best work – and one that creative professionals acknowledge as a creative catalyst.

Advances in technology have prompted some business leaders to question the changing role of copywriters. Tom Doctoroff, CEO of JWT Asia Pacific (J. Walter Thompson Agency), the fourth largest agency network in the world, wrote about his expectations for role changes in agencies (Doctoroff, 2014). Calling collaboration between copywriters and art directors "old-fashioned," Doctoroff wrote, "…today's marketing needs a similarly cohesive partnership between creatives and experts on today's broader range of media platforms" (Doctoroff, 2014). He describes copywriters as "dinosaurs" and predicts that there will be greater need for professionals of the following descriptions:

"conceptual distillers" and "systematic designers", possessing many of the digital and technological skills he believes are more valuable than writing copy. He explains their roles as: "the former ensures a brand's thematic focus. The latter enables a brand to blossom in the full range of three-dimensional experience" (Doctoroff, 2014).

When summarizing the research into *Person* studies, the following trends became apparent: creative's emotional and positive approach to their work compared with their mistrust of account-sided professionals (Auer, 1976), and persistent professional autonomy (West, 1993), and their perception of difference between themselves and account-sided co-workers (Young, 2000) — often leading to a belief in conflicts of interest (Hackley and Kover, 2007). Perceptions of professional conflict and tensions in agencies were also explored in Place studies.

*Place*

The impact of the professional environment on creative advertising has yet to be extensively researched, and it remains the least researched of the four topics covered in this review of literature. Two studies are the most relevant to this literature overview. The first is Reid and Karambayya (2000) and examines how creatives respond to authority and management. Using eight case studies in Canadian agencies with dual-leadership where conflict was known to have occurred, they examined how this atmosphere would impact creativity in the workplace. They determined that in dual leadership environments, tensions would overshadow working relationships and

productivity in the agencies, thus hampering the creativity needed to produce work (Reid & Karambayya, 2000).

The second is a study by Kover (1995) who examined control dynamics between copywriters and account executives in agencies. He specifically investigated the use of control games and activities to determine whether these impacted working relationships. Kover defines control games as struggles in the professional sphere between different positions to retain control or jurisdiction over their work and roles. Using twenty semi-structured interviews, ranging in length from 45-180+ minutes, with subjects from around the United States, Kover found that these games might be used as a result of professional tensions between creative and account executive co-workers (Kover, 1995).

Research into Place studies produced similarities with those from *Person* studies, namely a perception of challenges between creative and account executive coworkers (Kover, 1995), and the how agencies that have experienced professional conflict struggled with maintaining and producing creativity (Reid & Karambayya, 2000).

***Process***

Research regarding *Process*, from the 3P creative model, examines "the process [practitioners] follow in developing creative ideas" (Sasser & Koslow, 2008, p.6). Kover's study, mentioned above within the topic of *Place*, also assessed the role of *Process*. He found that copywriters have a set of internal

and implicit theories they believe to be effective and functional for their view of creativity, and that sets the tone for their work (Kover, 1995). The copywriters interviewed preferred to utilize what they believed was "common sense" above formal theories when constructing ads. This put them at odds with account professional co-workers who preferred theoretical and research approaches when developing advertising (Kover, 1995).

Johar *et al.* (2001) took this "common sense" theory a little further. These scholars assessed how myths and traditions would appear in advertising. They created an experiment designed to target art director-copywriter pairs to work either together or individually to creatively solve a problem. The purpose was to examine the roles that four distinct myths play in the creative process: comedy, romance, tragedy and irony. A panel of experts judged the most effective approaches identified as being the most creative, and concluded that the collaborative, multi-myth approach had the greatest impact (Johar *et al.,* 2001). According to this research, advertisements that were a result of collaboration and used multi-layered messages were the most creative. The three judges comprised: a creative person, an advertising research person and an account planner.

Johar's convergent-divergent experiment of testing collaboration in creativity was explored further in Kilgour & Koslow (2009). They examined this aspect and its impact on two main contributions to creativity – through creative learning or through enhancing social aspects. They found that creatives prefer to work alone and they cite originality as the most important technique

employed to solve problems. While those in account roles seek collaboration to strategically plan advertisements and campaigns (Kilgour & Koslow, 2009).

An ambitious study by Oliver and Ashley (2012) sought to discover methods to promote and develop agencies' creative processes. They analyzed the Creative Leader Series of *The Wall Street Journal* over a 30-year period using a grounded theory approach. Their goal was to examine how these thought leaders created supportive management systems to oversee creative processes. They found that creatives desired a more open and less rigorous management system with little structure. On the topic of professional advancement and promotion, creatives perceived that these should be based on and rewarded according to talent, and open to a variety of people, as opposed to the more traditional kinds of mobility in the workplace (Oliver and Ashley 2012). The *Process* category is one of the most explored avenues of research, probably because it is one area that could greatly affect agencies as a whole, primarily with regard to their productivity and collaboration.

***Trend Monitoring Studies – how has the role of creativity in agencies changed*?**

The most ambitious of the studies dealing with changes belongs to Reid, King and DeLorme (1998). In order to test the theories of their peers, Fox (1985), Jones (1992) and Weilbacher (1993) who claimed that advertising creativity was in decline during the 1990s, Reid King and DeLorme pioneered a new area of research. Weilbacher (1993) listed seven factors that were

responsible for the supposed decline in advertising creativity, varying from audience to environmental influences.  Reid, King and DeLorme's subsequent study sought to address three central research questions and directly tackle Weilbacher's conclusions:

1) Do top-level agency creatives believe that advertising is less creative now than it was when they first entered the business?

2) Do top-level agency creatives agree that factors identified by Weilbacher as associated with advertising creativity have changed significantly since they first entered the business.

3) How are the factors identified by Weilbacher perceived by individuals holding different opinions about advertising creativity then and now? (Reid, King and DeLorme, 1998, p.3).

After receiving 83 responses to questionnaires sent to leading creative figures, Reid, King and DeLorme found that contrary to the work of Fox (1985), Jones (1992) and Weilbacher (1993), creativity was perceived to have increased, not declined:  "Especially revealing is the view of those who were working in advertising during the 1960s, the years of the creative revolution. Like their younger, more contemporary counterparts, they see improvement, not decline in today's creativity" (Reid, King and DeLorme, 1998, p.11).

Their research into progress and change within creativity was also significant because it focused on working professionals (1998). Other studies of this topic were less ambitious not only in their reach, but also because they only focused on students and educational perceptions of creativity. However, this

significant study dates from the 1990s and thus it will be useful to see if changes have occurred since then.

In 2012 Sanam Petri, a professional copywriter based in the United Kingdom, wrote an article for *The Guardian* regarding the changes between established copywriters and younger emerging employees:

> "It's common to hear pundits in the industry wax lyrical on how the nature of advertising is changing; how the fourth, fifth and sixth screens are revolutionising the way we communicate. But no one talks about how that change in ad consumption is altering the way we train ourselves to make ads (Petri, 2012).

Petri was in charge of recruiting new copywriters and creatives for her award-winning agency.  She wrote that while she was impressed with the young creatives' knowledge of technology, she was disappointed when it came to originality, emotion and tension in their writing. She suggested this was a new trend in young advertising creatives, one of increasing technological knowledge but one with limited creative vision (Petri, 2012).

According to Reid, King and DeLorme's study, creativity within advertising was not seen to have declined, placing their research at odds with other peers (1998). However, as the study was completed almost 20 years ago, observations by creative professionals could in fact be more accurate in the current industry. When considering the above with Reid, King and DeLorme's research questions (1998) the following two research questions were constructed for this thesis, to determine levels of creativity within the current advertising industry:

RQ1: Do copywriters perceive a(n) decrease/increase in advertising creativity?

RQ2: What factors are perceived as reasons for such changes?

In his book *Confessions of An Ad Man* (1963) advertising patriarch David Ogilvy summarized the role of agencies and communication: "an advertisement is like a radar sweep, constantly hunting new prospects as they come into the market. Get a good radar, and keep it sweeping" (Ogilvy, 1963, p.99). Practitioners of advertising are fulfilling Ogilvy's criteria. They are constantly sweeping, developing, trialing and marketing to new audiences in new ways, which involves a significant input from the creative process as practitioners constantly adjust to new circumstances.

However, scholarly research regarding creative advertising is not nearly as detailed or as numerous as it is with regard to other mass communication studies. It is important that more attention be paid to the role of creativity – to keep pace with the sweep of advertising and creativity. There have been drastic developments in technology since Reid, King & DeLorme (1998) completed their research. As I have previously noted, two leading practitioners in the advertising world, Doctoroff (2014) and Petri (2012), both acknowledged a recent shift or change in the structural and conceptual roles of copywriters.  In the face of such change, some scholars are debating the role of creativity in today's agencies.

Gareau (2013) believes that creativity in advertising is becoming more important than ever as brands seek to differentiate themselves from one another:

> "As advertising costs increase, as competition becomes fiercer, and as brands look to globalize their marketing campaigns, many of the worlds advertisers are placing greater importance on creativity to help their advertising be more disruptive, generate buzz, and transcend cultural and geographic boundaries" (Gareau, 2013, p.24).

Another example of dramatic change is discussed in Peter Keane's 2013 article for *Ad Age*, where he detailed five ways that technology had changed advertising. One of these directly relates to copywriting – that content is the most important driving factor in advertising and conceptualizing ads:

> "These publishers and brands have come together to create quality content. The combination of quality content, integrated placements and social sharing has not only bolstered brands' content marketing efforts, but demonstrated to consumers that ads can add value to their lives" (Keane, 2013).

Here Keane is referring to the rise of online and digital media, of branded websites and cohesion between all facets of a fully integrated campaign.

So dramatic was the rise of digital and online technology and the impact on traditional advertising, that several scholars and practitioners projected grim outcomes for the industry. One such study by Rust and Oliver (1994) ominously titled 'The Death of Advertising' explains the precarious position advertisers found themselves in the early 1990s:

> "The reason for advertising's impending demise is the advent of new technologies that have resulted in the fragmentation of media and markets, and the empowerment of consumers. In the place of traditional mass media advertising, a new communications environment is developing around an evolving network of new media, which is high capacity, interactive and multimedia." (Rust and Oliver, 1994, p.1)

Given we have reviewed research conducted after 1994, it is clear that advertising didn't meet its demise due to the proliferation of online technology. However, Rust and Oliver's study certainly does help us understand just how monumental the introduction and development of digital and online technology was for advertising.

To put the influence of digital technology into perspective, *The Economist* ran an article describing online advertising in 2013, as making up "about a quarter of the $US500 billion global advertising business," with the expectation it would dramatically increase (2014).

A study about creativity that does not investigate the influence of technology would be incomplete.  Therefore, a third research question has been added to this study:

RQ3: How do copywriters perceive advances in technology as affecting advertising creativity?

Considering that Reid, King & DeLorme's trend-monitoring study regarding creativity took place during the1990s, it is due for an update. In order to home in on updating this area of research, the next section details the methods I will use to study copywriting in this thesis. It is hoped that my research can build on prior scholarship about creativity in advertising, and help to inform professionals about how thought-leaders in the industry are experiencing and producing it. My work will hopefully also serve as an educational resource for

students looking to work in the creative agency world, informing them about what to expect and what skills to develop and to describe when applying for positions and when working in the field.

# 2: RESEARCH METHOD

As advertising and its characteristics are ever changing (Reid, King, DeLorme, 1998), an analysis of personal approaches regarding creativity suggests utilizing a qualitative approach to research. In this thesis I used trend-monitoring studies that allowed my research to examine changes over time, and structured questions and summaries based around Sasser & Koslow's 3P criteria (1998).  Given this approach, I chose to use an intrapersonal method of inquiry in line with the original study's rationale as explained by Reid, King, & DeLorme (1998):

> "We took the intrapersonal approach because it is the only one by which we could study questions of advertising creativity then and now – we could not interview the same individuals in different time periods nor could we find longitudinal perceptual data collected from the same individuals or cross-sectional cohorts" (Reid, King, & DeLorme, 1998, p.2).

As I in turn could not interview participants in different time periods, the intrapersonal approach allowed me to ask questions about their past. I argue that the intrapersonal approach is useful as it enables investigation of intra-individual perceptual differences at various points in the subjects' lives and experiences. Reid, King and DeLorme (1998) also insist on the need for qualitative, focused interviews with smaller subsets of creative departments. In this study I expanded upon previous research across a more defined population. My goal was to provide research to not only benefit an understanding of the creative process from a theoretical standpoint, but also to provide industry and practical analysis for copywriters and advertisers who may be curious about the state or development of creativity in advertising.

I conducted semi-structured interviews as suggested by Berger (2007), who wrote: "Interviews are one of the most widely used and most fundamental research techniques…they enable researchers to obtain information that they cannot gain by observation alone" (Berger, 2007, p.111). Unless the researchers are given a long period of time for observational research, it is difficult to understand existing context (Berger, 2007, p.112), as well as comprehend unobservable influences, such as copywriter's thought processes and reactions at different stages in their careers. Because interviews allow researchers to examine past and present attitudes and motivations (Berger, 2007, p.113), this method is ideal for understanding shifting perceptions and attitudes over multiple periods of time, and has been replicated by numerous advertising researchers such as Hirschman (1989) and Kover (1995).

The interviewees were all senior level copywriters from top agencies across the United States, representing different regions, ages and genders. This thesis used a similar method of selecting participants as outlined by Reid, King and DeLorme (1998). Due to time limitations and the nature of qualitative interviews, a smaller sample than the previous research will be used. *The Advertising Age Annual Agency Report* was used to identify the top 200 agencies and cross references with company websites, copywriter portfolios and online databases such as LinkedIn were used to contact the interviewees. Apart from the fact that all participants currently work in the United States, the group is otherwise quite diverse. The number of years working as creative in

advertising varies between 17 years to 31 years, with an average of 20 years of experience. Levels of experience vary between Senior Copywriter through to Vice President and Chief Creative Office of a national agency.

I secured a sample that represents the perceptions of specific individuals. While random samples draw on large numbers of participants for data collection, this research is limited to investigation through a smaller number of interviews, which are clearly not representative of a general population (Marshall, 1996). However, as other scholars of advertising creativity including Hackley and Kover (2007) and Kover (1995) used research with 6-20 participants, respectively, I argue that a sample of this size is appropriate for my purpose as I am not seeking to demonstrate that my conclusions are representative of the general population of creatives.

I used semi-structured interviews (interviews with questions, and opportunity for conversation), that are used by many of the scholars cited in my literature review, including Kover (1995) and Hirchman (1989) because they are have numerous advantages. Given that my research seeks to understand creativity, it makes sense that having a flexible interview structure would benefit both subjects and researchers.

The analysis of the results has been summarized and structured according to the "3P Model of Creativity" of Sasser and Koslow (2008). The analysis has

been divided according to this theoretical framework, using Person, Place and Process as previously defined.

The Interviewees were asked the following questions. These are structured to not only seek information about the professional environments in agencies, but also to fulfill the theoretical research of Sasser & Koslow's 3P Model (2008) while guided by the trend-monitoring study pioneered by Reid, King & DeLorme (1989).

General information questions:

1.  Do you feel qualified to voice opinions about the past and present states of creativity in advertising?
2.  What is your age?
3.  How long have you been in the advertising profession?
4.  What was the last level of school you completed?

RQ1 Do copywriters perceive a(n) decrease/increase in advertising creativity?

1.  Since you first began working in advertising, how would you describe any changes in creativity?
2.  Is there a time period you believe to have the greatest amount of creativity in advertising?

RQ2 What factors are perceived as reasons for such a change?

1.  What sorts of people are attracted to the creative side of advertising? Then? Now?

2. Has originality in creative work changed? If so, how?

3. Have the responsibilities of the creative changed? If so, how?

4. Has there been change in regards to client involvement and creativity? If so, how?

5. What responsibilities do creatives have for their work?

6. Has the structure of agencies changed? If so, how?

7. Has collaboration on the creative process changed? If so, how?

8. Have professional relationships changed? If so, how?

RQ3 Have available technologies affected the creative process?

1. What mediums are most effective for conveying creative strategies?

   a) Producing enthusiasm among clients

   b) Producing enthusiasm among agency creative regarding their work

   c) Deliver ads with stopping power

2. Have emerging technologies affected the creative process? If so, how?

This approach to the topics and individuals is not only reasonable, but also advantageous. By removing names and particulars of interviewees (e.g. their current agency and employer), this allowed for honest and unformulated answers and opinions regarding the industry. In 'Anonymising Research Data' Andrew Clark outlines an important reasons identities are masked in research:

"…anonymisation aims to 'protect' or hide the identity of research participants. This is particularly important when sensitive, illegal, or confidential information may have been disclosed during the research process, or when information is disclosed which may cause the participant distress should other parties learn such information." (Clark, 2006, pg.4).

Given the nature of the questions regarding experience and professional relationships in this study, anonymising data proved to be a considerate, practical, and ethical decision.

Accessing their wealth of experience would not have been possible with any other methodology. Speaking to leaders in copywriting and media about their work and industry allowed for unguarded and open discussions and opinions – all of which are key to advancing the study of practicing copywriters, and those looking to advance their careers in such a fluid industry.

# 4: ANALYSIS

The most important finding based on participants' responses in this study is that the context of creativity in copywriting has fundamentally changed. Eight of the ten participants expressed the belief that demand for creativity in copywriting and advertising was constant, even increasing. Two felt that external factors such as client involvement had significantly hampered the creative process for copywriters. All interviewees believed that the approaches to, and the processes of, creative advertising were constantly changing and adapting to external factors, such as new technology, and the complications of client involvement.

This study is an analysis of, and investigation into, the realm of advertising creativity, as it affects, and is affected by the persons, places and processes that comprise the advertising industry, with specific focus on experienced copywriters and creative directors. All of my research was organized around Sasser and Koslow's "3P Model of Creativity" and its demonstrated efficacy in organizing and analyzing creative research (2008). This study categorized and included analyses according to this framework.

## *Person*

The focus of responses in this category is on those creatives as individuals perceived to be working in areas of change. All of the persons interviewed had significant experience in copywriting, and their current roles ranged from Senior Copywriter level to Chief Creative Officer at a national agency. There were two general explanations for the evolution of creative background and

visible changes in personal ownership felt by creatives.

For the most part, interviewees agreed that people with the same curiosity and approach to advertising as they had were continuing to enter and work in the industry as copywriters. However, only two stated that there had been a general change in newcomers' approach to work and in industry training. One Creative Director believed it had been removed altogether: "Even when I came in, it felt like the training was going away, uh, or the mentoring…" (Interview #5).

These two interviewees described their frustration with new copywriters, or with newcomers to agencies. One Senior Creative Director lamented their lack of attention to detail and the expertise that was previously perceived as necessary for copywriters and editors: "I feel like it used to be more people who were into the craft and the actual writing…" (Interview #5).

This participant elaborated on common problems and the limitations of new copywriters whose work they had overseen:

> "I can't fathom having handed in work with typos, or basic grammar problems when I was a junior, and a lot of the juniors today do. I mean, it doesn't even occur to them to know how to write" (Interview #5).

When pressed to answer why this may be the case, the participant cited technology pressures as a potential answer:

> "…all learnings moved to being on the computer, like all communications. Its just where people are, so those standards are in play instead of the old book and pen and paper standards of maybe my generation" (Interview #5).

A Chief Creative Officer — while pleased and intrigued by the new skills and interests of newcomers — had similar concerns regarding new copywriters. The participant suspected that those who would normally have been interested in copywriting had turned to alternative career options:

> "…it's a very different mix of skill sets, and it's much more diverse. I kind of love that aspect, and it's still so much fun having people around, you know, either constantly inspiring you with things that you never would have even found, or seen, or thought of…at the same time, I think we're losing a lot of these great minds to the industries that have come up that seem like they're funner, or cooler, maybe, or more satisfying, because it's, it, it ends up, you know, they end up having more complete control 'cause it's their own startup. The financial concerns are even the, being a real learning experience as well, sometimes, you know, where it's like, gotta get a paycheck too" (Interview # 3).

One Senior Copywriter took a more psychological view of the induction and interest of copywriting, that there was an inherent curiosity that attracted copywriters to advertising:

> "It's still people who ... want to communicate outside of the norm. Like, I always felt like I wanted to be able to touch people and move people, but not the way everybody else wanted to do, wanted to do it, so I feel like the people that I work with, any age, in any part of the creative fields of advertising still have that desire to deep, get deep down inside themselves and figure out a way to move someone in a refreshing way, in a new way, in an exciting way, in an interesting way" (Interview #1).

The prospect of attraction to advertising as a way of communicating and having an impact on people was also brought up in another interview with a President / Creative Director:

> "I think the same people come and ... I think the same people ... they've always been attracted to or you know, stumbled into advertising… if you'd done a poll in the 60's, and you'd done a poll in the 90's, and you did a poll today of you know, like who works in advertising, maybe ... there are a few more people today who actually studied advertising and got a degree in it, but you know, it's philosophy majors, psychology majors, people who've decided science wasn't a

career choice. You know, it's ... very much sort of ... curious people… who have an interest in effecting culture. " (Interview #10).

An Associate Creative Director believed that it was the lifestyle that attracted similar sorts of people to the industry:

"Typically, I think it's the majority of people who…who have their cake and eat it, as far as…creativity and commerce. They want to get paid…They have a mortgage or rent, and they wanna make that, and they wanna do okay financially. But they sill wanna be quote-unquote — creative…I think that that's probably the same. People are kinda going in with the same sort of vision. They don't want to be a starving artist…but they do wanna wear jeans to work and try to come up with a nifty headline." (Interview #8).

When summarizing the findings regarding the first of the 3P's criteria (1998), an overwhelming majority of respondents believed that the training and practical work of copywriters has changed during their employment in advertising, primarily due to the influence of, and reliance on, digital and online work. However, it also appears that the lifestyle and opportunities that creative advertising offers has attracted similar types of individuals across many years.

*Process*

Unlike the Person category, the findings for Process were more defined and varied when answering interview questions. Findings are categorized in five areas; collaboration in the workplace, client involvement, technology, media for creativity, and originality.

*Collaboration in the workplace*

All participants agreed that the relationship between copywriter and art director was still the foundation for collaboration, or, as one participant — a Vice President and Group Creative Director stated, "…the bedrock of the creative department" (Interview #4).

However, six participants cited drastic changes and limitations to this creative partnership. Some, like this Senior Copywriter believed that this was due to client pressure and expectations:

> "Unfortunately when it's so fast and furious, and depending on the client, most of the time they're just doing, you know, off shoots of a big campaign that you can change up and not do too much creative collaborating" (Interview #6).

Two of the respondents believed that new mediums and fast turn around for technology produced a barrier to collaboration, as mentioned by one Vice President and Group Creative Director:

> "Especially with social…you don't have the chance to really sit down and work together. Sometimes, you work a little siloed. So I think it's still really strong, but sometimes now, you have to work in silos" (Interview #7).

According to one Senior Copywriter, these pressures produced a different sort of creative process, one where collaboration and brainstorming were not as important as production.

> "…I don't spend as much time working…with an art director as I used to. Where we'd concept ideas together. Now its…20% budgeting of time is to concepting and the rest of the time is then having to produce...I think that's the biggest change that I've noticed. That you're almost producing work before its even been approved…by a client" (Interview #2).

*Client Involvement*

Of all questions posed during this research, the issue of client involvement during the creative process elicited a unified response. All respondents agreed that relationships with clients had changed vastly, citing budgets, marketing pressures, and an expectation of faster creative brainstorming as the chief factors of this change. One Vice President and Group Creative Director summarized client expectations:

> "The agency is always set up for the client and the client is always going to want things on their schedule" (Interview #4).

Nine copywriters expressed concern at the perceived loss of relationships and partnerships with brands, with one Senior Copywriter saying it has become "less personal" when compared to the 1990s, where there was "a lot more face time with clients" (Interview #6).

Three participants cited the increase in in-house marketing and advertising education as a catalyst for this change, as explained by one President and Creative Director:

> "For a very long time, marketing was…advertising was kind of this mumbo-jumbo of a mystery place in business. People sort of knew a little bit about it, but not everyone did and you kind of had to trust the people you were playing with and this made client relationships and agency relationships exceedingly important and very long lasting … However, over time this has changed, a lot of it has changed because the nature of the marketplace, because people have become much more educated about things…so a lot more people are inserting themselves in the process…You used to have a group of extremely finite decision makers, perhaps 1 or 2 people for even a large client – and those people understood the people who were leading the talk of the agency side and had relationships with those people for years. They understood each other, they liked each other, go along very well together, based their business off those relationships and trusted each other's instinct" (Interview #9).

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This respondent explained and elaborated on external factors and pressures

relating to brands as the primary reason for the change:

> "One of the reasons we don't have that is because of immobility of basically chief marketing officers. No longer do chief marketing officers have stable jobs…there's a joke about the average life expectancy of a chief marketing officer of a major international business… is usually around 18 months. Considering that that's the life expectancy of someone making enormous brand decisions, it's kind of crazy! Those people have a very limited time frame they can assert their creative will on a brand, and they usually do it by firing their old agency and hiring a new one. So the result is that agency relationships tend to be a lot shorter now than they ever used to be…you get a lot of people where they're not familiar with…determining what is a great creative idea or not. Or even valuing a good creative idea. All they will value is what the data tells them to value. This is an interesting and exceedingly frustrating thing to have to deal with on our side, but you know every once in a while you do run into clients who are truly brilliant, and who are far more creatively minded and far better abled to parse the different creative opportunities for a project…" (Interview #9).

Four respondents believed that these pressures faced by brands had severely

complicated what had traditionally been a collaborative process with

agencies, making brands seem "fickle" – according to one senior copywriter

(Interview #2).

Another participant, an Assistant Creative Director, expressed frustration at

the amount of people involved in giving feedback and guidance from the

client's side, believing this resulted in a lack of accountability and

responsibility from the client regarding the approval of creative concepts:

> "It becomes a watered-down message, it becomes a watered-down concept, it becomes watered-down simply because you have five, six, seven voices instead of one or two…And so a lot of people who just simply say, 'I don't want that decision, because I don't wanna be fired and I wanna keep my bonus" (Interview #8).

Because of these pressures from the client, many respondents suggested that micro-management has generally increased, with one Vice President and Group Creative Director mentioning that expectations of both timeliness and perceived efficiency have been raised:

> "I think the clients are definitely more involved than they used to be. There always seems to be more of, uh, in general, lots of check-ins across the board. I think you have more touch-points along the way than we used to where you…get a brief go off and come back" (Interview #7).

An Assistant Creative Director believed that an expansion in client marketing and brand positions was responsible for this new change:

> "There's a lot more marketing people that you have to kind of go through…and it seems to me like that's the…norm rather than the exception" (Interview #8).

For one Creative Director and Executive Vice President, client reliance on testing has hampered creativity in copywriting. And this was fundamentally destructive of the creative process:

> "…in terms of making a lot of key creative decisions, it is probably the least helpful thing you can do…making people think they can rely on data to make creative decisions vs. having experience and looking at situations and deciding which creative decisions are going to be best for them" (Interview #9).

While two interviewees acknowledge that certain clients were more generous of time for "concepting", one Senior Copywriter cited work with large technology brands as the most rewarding these days:

> "The most interesting work I've gotten, I was working for a brand like Google...the tech brands are more, I mean they're such behemoths they can do kind of whatever they want in a sense"  (Interview #2).

Compared to these technological and financially stable companies, seven of

the participants believed that the vast majority of clients are nervous and

suspicious when it comes to allowing creativity into strategy:

> "So what happens is, the creative director who was over it gets a giant,
> you know, job offer, or raise, or more famous, and the CFO or the
> brand manager got fired. And so, they learn from that, then they go,
> 'Okay, you want to do this wildly creative thing out there. Well, I got
> fired for following the last person down the rabbit hole. So, shit's not
> happening again" (Interview #3).

This Chief Creative Officer went on to state that striking a balance between

creatively fulfilling and 'impactful' work, and pleasing wider strategy and

objectives was the only solution to forming relationships:

> "…that more and more these days, you have to do it with work that's
> gonna break through. And then, I think, once you start to see
> successes with that brand, they will take more chances with you,
> because they see you as a business partner and not just this artful
> person who wants to come out and make themselves famous and use
> the band money to do it" (Interview #3).

Risks to brands have increased due to market pressure, with one Senior

Copywriter stating that this lead to increased management and monitoring of

the creative process:

> "Clients are much more involved now…because much more is at stake.
> Years ago it was just, you know, do a TV campaign, do a print
> campaign. We're gonna throw a lot of money at it and just go ahead
> and do it. Now, because it's not just big American corporations that
> really run advertising, any company of any size can compete, so clients
> really get involved because big clients are afraid that a newcomer
> could unseat them" (Interview #1).

For one Chief Creative Officer, this apprehension has also extended to

budgets for advertising:

> "… people are spending less money on more bets… making smaller
> bets in a lot more places. And we're seeing craft kind of disappear a
> little bit, in, going the way of, you know, just getting a bargain. And, I
> understand why, but unfortunately, I think people are starting to

become a little savvy for that, and. It's just a different methodology I think" (Interview #3).

As part of building trust with clients, this participant mentioned a process of creatives and agencies proving themselves to clients, compared to earlier in their career, when the client-agency relationship could evolve through success and mistakes:

"… more and more these days, you have to do it with work that's gonna break through…once you start to see successes with that brand, they will take more chances with you, because they see you as a business partner and not just this artful person who wants to come out and make themselves famous and use the band money to do it" (Interview #3).

All participants confirmed that client relationships had changed during their careers, either through exterior budget pressures, or increase in staffing and expectations in the client's brand and company. This had impacted staffing of agencies, perceptions of creative freedom, and faster turnaround for deadlines and deliverables.

*Technology*

When asked the general opening question of change within copywriting and advertising, all respondents mentioned the rise and adoption of the Internet. As one President and Creative Director stated: "…until the internet, there wasn't any sort of significant change to advertising on a foundation level" (Interview #10)

This interviewee summarized the difference between commencing his career and the current advertising industry for copywriting as:

> "…we live in this age that's….wonderfully, dramatically, painfully, you know…different" (Interview #10).

All participants emphasized just how revolutionary the introduction of digital technology has been, with one Senior Copywriter mentioning:

> "…You could pretty much avoid it. And nowadays, you can't avoid anything digital…You always have to kind of understand it, where before, it was more of a specialty" (Interview #6).

According to eight interviewees, perhaps the most important change that technology has brought about has been the opportunity for communication with consumers, due in part to social media. One President and Creative Director explained just how dramatic the introduction of this medium has been:

> "… we have that conceptual age and it started in the 60s…none of that really changes until the internet came around and all of a sudden you've got an interaction"  (Interview #10).

Three participants stressed the level of change this introduction brought to the industry, as copywriters and creative employees attempted to make sense of, and succeed in implementing this new technology. One Associate Creative Director elaborated:

> "…I would say probably [around] the mid 2000's, it just felt like there was…a little bit of a Wild West mentality."  (Interview #8)

Another participant, a Creative Director believed that the "digital revolution" has made "everything a conversation" in advertising, changing the rules for interaction forever (Interview #5).

Because of this, three copywriters mentioned an increase in consumer power

— as copywriters have to craft messages focused on enticing and

persuading, rather than just informing. A Creative Director and Executive Vice

President stated:

> "This has resulted in a lot more crowd sourced stuff, it has resulted in a lot more trying to garner consumer opinions…kind of include consumers in a more creative role in determining product assets, telling a products story, or simply engaging with the products message" (Interview #9).

This participant (and every other interviewee) lauded the potential and

opportunity for interesting or compelling work that digital and social media

could bring about:

> "…Usually you didn't see a lot of things that were over 30 seconds. Now we're doing a lot of small films, a lot of online content, a lot of social content that doesn't need to be thirty seconds and doesn't even need to be so much of an ad. So we get a lot more opportunities too different kinds of things and some of things go down to social posts, and banner headlines. But some of those things are extremely interesting and very exciting. So yes, we do everything we've done before, but we also now do an amazing amount of work in both digital and social that really expands our horizons and opportunities" (Interview #9).

When pressed further about the effect on creativity, the Creative Director /

Executive Vice President further explained changes:

> "We are now in one of the most productive and creative times in advertising since probably the early 90's. Things are very very exciting now. Much of the emerging media has stabilized to the point where we can now tell really great stories. We're no longer solely focused on technological development. Which is interesting but it's not creative. It's technologically creative…but it's not imaginative. It doesn't tell a story very much. So for people like me, who like to be writers, who like to tell stories, who like to really engage people…technological development doesn't help us. It breaks down in the early stages…" (Interview #9).

For copywriters in particular, technological extensions have provided further

responsibility, as mentioned by one Senior Copywriter with over 31 years of

experience:

"…we basically had four mediums. Now, my responsibilities as a copywriter extend to learning about our new mediums, our digital mediums, our social mediums, um, how do we communicate? How do we touch people and move people through those mediums? ... How do we create pieces that aren't ads, that are just other pieces of communication, that excite someone or surprise someone? So in the last 30 years, we went from advertising, which persuades people to do something, to a much wider area of responsibility where it's not just advertising or persuading. It's entertaining or it's informing or it's connecting…or it's intriguing. So because of the growth in media, we've had to take on more responsibilities as copywriters" (Interview #1).

Two participants, including one Creative Director / Executive Vice President

focused on the change of language and tone that has permeated through

copywriting:

"This is mostly due to the emergence of social and digital media as a real and primary touch point for consumers interactions with brands" (Interview #9).

However, with the addition of social and digital mediums to copywriters'

workloads, four participants were concerned about their ability to produce

influential work with longevity, with one President / Creative Director

explaining the rise of 'disposable' content:

"We're in an era where we're making more and more quote unquote 'disposable' content. I mean, advertising has always sort of been disposable content…we just make more of it now" (Interview #10).

The interviewee stated that one of the most concerning results of the

introduction of digital and social is expectation of faster workflow: "…the

patience for craft has disappeared" (Interview #10).

This opinion was confirmed by another participant —a Vice President/Group

Creative Director — who went on to state that pressures from new mediums

had complicated matters for copywriters:

> "…it just becomes this churn and burn… like the craft, in a lot of ways,
> ends up disappearing… it all stems back to clients, understandably,
> don't know what the right answer is anymore. It used to be really easy.
> The right answer was you bought a 30-second TV commercial on
> Friends. On Wednesday night, between 8:00 and 8:30, you know? ...
> everybody would see it, because everybody would be watching that
> show, and now…what do you put all your money into? You have a
> finite amount of money to put your brand, you know, brand message
> out, and there's just no place you can buy with confidence to know that
> anybody's going to be able to see what it is you're trying to say"
> (Interview #4).

The same participant stated a wider appreciation and time for the creative

process is still necessary:

"Sometimes people think well, just, fast, and be responsive is, that's what your
goal is. And it's like, no, actually that's not the goal at all. It just means it's
even harder. A, a tweet is a headline, and it needs to be crafted, and if it's not
smart, there's no point in putting it out there" (Interview # 4).

*Media for Creativity*

Interestingly no participants expressed disappointment or concern regarding

social media and new mediums — rather all considered it a puzzle, a new

frontier that had not been cracked effectively yet. However, only one

participant mentioned social media as their favorite platform to work with. For

the most part, all of the respondents believed that traditional forms of

advertising were the most exciting and fulfilling creatively — especially radio

and television.

Those who mentioned a love of working with radio had a holistic approach to explaining this, believing it to be the purest form of writing, or as one Vice President / Group Creative Director stated "it's all you" (Interview #4).

Several other reasons were also mentioned, a Senior Copywriter focused on control:

> "…it's a writer's medium, writer owns it, writer directs it, writer produces it" (Interview #6).

Likewise, a sense of accomplishment that one Associate Creative Director saw as unparalleled by other mediums:

> "I love the radio….if you can write a really good radio spot, you can write anything" (Interview #8).

Television came in second as the preferred copywriter's medium — with a Creative Director / Executive Vice President highlighting the medium's reach and impact:

> "… when you do a great 30 second TV spot that is nationally run and you get to go out into the world, and maybe you're in a bar and you see your spot played on the TV and even though the sound is off, the people around you can say the punch line of the ad and laugh is an amazing thing! Its amazing because you realize what advertising can be when its good. It becomes a pop culture influencer. It entertains, and it even has people looking forward to seeing a piece of advertising and that's…wonderful. It's a great feeling! ...and occasionally….well I will find somebody who remembers something and I thought I've achieved something…there's not may other things that are like that. That's extremely rewarding" (Interview #9).

While radio and print have suffered a decline, as one Chief Creative Officer pointed out, television has survived new mediums and technology, allowing copywriters access to traditional advertising that is still relevant:

"…it's not called television anymore. People call it film … or technically pre-roll… somebody had a great quote recently where it's like, it's not, you know, somebody at some point said television was dead, and television is definitely not dead. It just had a bunch of babies" (Interview # 3).

*Originality*

When it came to discussing originality in copywriting, nine of the participants believed that this had decreased over time, and instead the emphasis was in the uniqueness of delivery, as explained by one Creative Director / Executive Vice President:

"There used to be an incredible emphasis in this industry about purely original ideas; ideas no one had ever thought of before…truly unique modes of execution that had never been done before. Very very kind of once in a lifetime story telling kind of opportunities. Now, we're not so focused on that. We're very much focused on uniqueness of expression. So it could be a very familiar idea, even a relatively familiar execution, but the way that its being done is different. Sort of what's the new take on it? What the new way of telling a story? What's the new way of expressing that idea…that happens quite a lot more now than it ever did before" (Interview #9).

This participant compared approaches to originality from when he started working:

"When I first got into the industry, if you even presented an idea that was basically the same as somebody else's idea…you often times wouldn't be able to get that idea through the most creative people in the industry. It just simply wouldn't make its way to a very creative shop… Now we're a little bit more comfortable with saying 'oh well, this is not a completely unique idea and what we're gonna do with it is going to be very very interesting, very very of the moment, and certainly relevant now.' That's what's going to make it unique. As long as there is some part of your expression that is truly original then I think you're safe, but it's no longer about the idea being a truly original idea" (Interview #9).

Another interviewee, an Associate Creative Director explained that industry emphasis is focused on delivery and interactions with consumers, rather than pure originality:

> "…it's just repackaging everything. And people are great at doing it, people are really smart at repackaging ideas that are usually pretty close to other ideas" (Interview #8).

Only one participant, a Senior Copywriter, believed originality hadn't altered, and stated that it was a primary goal of a creative:

> "I don't think it's changed. I think that's the, the number one goal, is always to be original…As a creative, that's what you always shoot for. You're inspired by everything that happens in your life and by the world around you, but you're always shooting to be original, to create an original idea, an original concept… touch people in a way they've never been touched before. That's ... I mean, I think that that's been universal since the beginning of man" (Interview #1).

The examination of *Process* brought about the most findings most of which are inexplicably linked. Overall participants felt that collaboration in the workplace has diminished due to faster deadlines due to expectations of clients — especially when working with digital and social media.

Client involvement was seen to be one of the most important factors for change in creativity, with relationships between agencies and clients becoming less personal, while the work has become more demanding with increased competition and expectations. Similarly, technology was viewed as a strong catalyst for change in creative processes, with some respondents lauding the opportunity for new avenues of creativity, while originality was almost unanimously seen to have decreased.

**Place**

According to all respondents, the demands of clients and the introduction of digital and online advertising had dramatically changed the structure of agencies, as one Vice President / Group Creative Director stated:

> "I think they're definitely a reflection of the outside world that we're creating a smaller version of it…" (Interview #4).

And nine participants described how cash flow into agencies is dependent on clients who are regarded as unreliable. A Senior Copywriter mentioned how this resulted in dramatic changes to staffing in agencies:

> "… it's just a wild rush. More, much more, much different playing field these days… frankly, just because a lot of brands aren't going to big agencies for ... to be an agency of record anymore…So they're not loyal, which makes it hard for big agencies to staff anymore. So we've really created this freelance mentality, of nobody's gonna wait around for you big brand, that when you decide to do something, all of a sudden everybody's at their plate and do whatever you need right away" (Interview #1).

This interviewee went on to mention another dramatic change in agency structure, due to the widespread use and reliance of digital and social advertising:

> "Agencies used to be…full service, one-stop shop. You'd have a creative department, an account department and a media department, and the media department would plan and buy media… then about 15 years ago, all of the big agencies started separating their media departments out into stand-alone companies, and so now ad agencies are creative, strategy, and account, and then we have these media companies that basically just work directly with clients. So we will have to work with whatever media company has the account for that particular client, so agencies have totally changed" (Interview #1).

The Senior Copywriter also stated that separation of media departments has also influenced funding to agencies:

> "Then, when they started breaking apart their media departments, the media companies were taking the commission… and then the ad agencies had to work on a retainer basis, on a fee basis. Now ad agencies work on retainers… if a client gives you a monthly retainer, that should cover all your expenses plus give you a profit…and that's been kind of tough because…it really cuts into the bottom line. Before where you just worked on commission and you'd have all this money coming in and you knew you were making a 15 percent commission and then you could mark up your production, agencies were like rolling in money. I remember when I started there was this benchmark where for every million dollars or revenue that an agency made for itself, they had seven people on staff" (Interview #1).

For all interviewees financial pressures have significantly influenced working conditions, with a Creative Director making the following observation:

> "So it just feels like this atmosphere that was there when I started that felt really fun and free, and you work hard, but you felt the security and the freedom to be creative has been a little more…I don't know…regimented in this kind of…budgeting world" (Interview #5).

While all interviewees are in senior positions, one Senior Copywriter made mention of how these concerns have affected younger copywriters:

> "…there's less money going around… and the really run much leaner. That's why freelance is so prevalent now. They don't want to bring people on staff. They'd rather just bring you in when they have a project when they need you" (Interview #1).

The biggest change for creativity in the *Place* category has been brought about by financial strains in the industry — causing staffing constraints, and focus on profit rather than product.

Of the 3Ps, *Process* was the category with the most detailed findings. *Person* dealt primarily with the impact of digital training on creativity, *Place* examined staffing of agencies, and *Process* enabled a further five categories to summarize results: collaboration in the workplace, client involvement, technology, media for creativity, and originality.

There are two reasons that may explain why *Process* elicited the most detailed opinions: interviewees perceived that there were more factors or influences that make up *Process* as compared with *Person* and *Place*, and interviewees also perceived that there were more changes in these factors than the other two categories. When taking previous literature into account, *Process* was by far the largest of the explored categories, with Sasser and Koslow described *Process* as the most "elusive" of the 3Ps, and harder to narrow down compared to *Person* and *Place* (1998).

# 5: CONCLUSION

Since Reid, King & DeLorme's (1998) trend monitoring study into creativity and copywriting in advertising, there have been significant changes in technology and in the economic landscape of the United States. These two areas of greatest change have provoked changes to the  fundamental principles of advertising for its creative professionals.

As technology and economics continue to evolve and disrupt the advertising industry, the perceptions and opinions of experienced copywriters are also constantly changing. While interviewees do not unanimously agree about the current state of creativity in the advertising industry, they do agree about the causes of such dramatic changes. As a result, this study provides a more detailed explanation of the copywriter's perceived role in the current landscapes of media and advertising.

**Primary Results**

Utilizing semi-structured interviews with ten senior and executive level copywriters at top United States agencies, this study found a unanimous belief that creativity in advertising was changing. However, individual perceptions about degrees of change varied, even though there was unanimous agreement about the catalysts of such change. This study specifically examined whether the perceived level and kind of creativity within

advertising have changed since 1998, when the original study was conducted (Reid, King & DeLorme, 1998).

Only eight of the ten interviewees agreed that creativity was not in decline with this, with two dissenters believing creativity was in a state of decline across the industry. While there was unanimous agreement that creativity in traditional forms of advertising, such as print and radio had decreased, notably only two participants believed that creativity in television, as an evolved medium (online, pre-roll video etc.) had actually increased (Interview #2, Interview #8).

The state of creativity in the advertising industry was unanimously perceived to be in a constant state of change, the primary factors for this being new technology and its impacts on approaches to the creative process, and shifts in client relationships and expectations as a result of economic and financial difficulties. My survey questions helped Interviewees elucidate effects on the person, place, and process of advertising creativity.

Technology and the introduction of digital media, including social media, were reported to have drastically altered the creative process from start to finish. All participants cited these as the cause of a dynamic shift in consumer power, the development of new kinds of writing — i.e. of "dialogue" instead of a "monologue" (Interview #5), and the resuscitation of one traditional medium — television (Interview #3). Eight of the interviewees were split evenly between radio and television as their medium of choice.  The proliferation of the

"babies" of television online still made video a viable creative option, while radio seemed to have declined in creativity.  Only one interviewee chose social media, in particular Instagram as their medium of choice, while another believed the medium was immaterial over effective messaging.

However, three participants expressed concern about the expectations of increases in speed, and the quantity of work, due to online mediums (Interview #10, Interview #3, and Interview #1), and its impact on the quality of the work of new copywriters. Anxiety regarding "disposable content" (Interview #10), and creative processes being replaced with "churn" (Interview #3) were mentioned, along with beliefs that this process, and its dependence on technology had minimized traditional creative processes for copywriters (such as mastering headlines, and editing) and overall quality of creative content had suffered as a result (Interview #5).

Of all questions asked, the issue of client involvement with creativity in copywriting and the creative process as a whole was the most unanimously contentious. All of the interviewees believed that traditional client-agency relationships had fundamentally changed as a result of economic and budgetary constraints. This was perceived to have two widespread effects: clients were less loyal to agencies, and less likely to have favorites (Interview #6, Interview #4, Interview #9); and clients were adverse to risk-taking, preferring micro-management of the process  (Interview #7, Interview #4, Interview #2, Interview #8). Due to unstable client-agency relationships and micromanagement, copywriters and advertising creatives are experiencing

more pressure and an increase in demand for faster responses to deadlines than ever before (Interview #4, Interview #2).

These answers to questions detailed above justify the importance of updating current research, and enhance existing studies. This qualitative examination of a smaller niche group of copywriters and advertising executives has yielded an intimate, and comprehensive understanding of participant's perceptions of changes in creativity in advertising, and has, hopefully, contributed to role-based theoretical research by providing additional data to expand research using the original 3P model (Hirschman, 1989; Sasser & Koslow, 2008.)

**Future**

As many studies have demonstrated, updating perceptions and opinions can provide valuable insights into the perceived changes of those working in advertising. When using qualitative approaches, these re-examinations offer material to compliment and enhance data and research that is purely quantitative. This validates other opportunities for further research beyond this study, and I agree with the original researchers who cited a need for continued qualitative niche examination within the creative side of advertising (Reid, King & DeLorme, 1998). Due to constant technological changes in media and advertising, new agency positions, that had not previously existed in the 1990s, would be worthy of research, to compare and contrast perceptions of creativity from a wider variety of roles in agencies.

There were two other topics brought up by my research which are worth of future examination, and comprise the education and training of copywriters, and the nature of originality in copywriting. One interviewee, particularly lamented the general poor quality of younger copywriters, comparing their reliance on technology as fundamentally opposed to older copywriters' creative processes (Interview #5). Future research could choose to either examine the education and induction of new copywriters in the advertising industry, or even address a re-education and continued learning of current copywriters as they adapt to new mediums and technological advancements. Research of this kind would be useful to those currently employed as copywriters, and those planning to pursue copywriting.

My research briefly examined changes in originality, and some interviewees described a definite decline in original ideas over delivery (Interview #9). A study determining how technology has had an impact on creative originality in advertising would be worth pursuing.

Technology, client involvement, and approaches to creativity within advertising have all been shown to have considerable impact on the creative process, and on copywriters' perceptions of creativity within their profession. These beliefs and observations have evolved, and continue to change in response to many influences. The answers to questions from ten creative professionals not only have theoretical implications, particularly regarding Sasser & Koslow's "3 P Model of Research", but they also provide a resource

and a guide for peers in, and newcomers to, the industry of creative

advertising.

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## Appendix A: Recruitment and Informational Consent Script

Hi, my name is Celia Murray. I'm a graduate student at the University of Missouri. I'm working on my thesis, a research study titled: Creativity and Change: How experience, environment and approach to creating advertisements have evolved for Copywriters. It is a qualitative study about creativity in advertising over a period of time, from the perceptions of the copywriters who have worked in agencies and professionally for some years.

To help me with research, I'm requesting your participation in a brief, 15-20 minute interview. This interview will take place at an arranged time that is convenient with you, and can take place in person, via video conferencing (Skype, etc.) or over the phone. As a part of this interview, you will be asked about your perceptions currently and at past points in your career. As a part of this process, it is important that you feel confident in your ability to speak to both past and present advertising environments.

These interviews will be audio recorded. The researcher understands that in open-ended conversations, it is important that the interviewee feel secure in the confidential nature of what is said. All recordings will be sent to a third-party transcribing service that has signed a non-disclosure agreement.

Following the transcription, pseudonyms will replace identifiable information such as your name, your employer's names, workplace names, etc. The audiotapes will then be destroyed. This is to insure that the data will be analyzed and used in a manner that does not pose unintended financial, employment or reputation risks for you. These are the minimal risks posed by the study, and I am obliged to mention them to you. The benefits are being part of a study that could better inform literature regarding copywriting and creativity.

I would really appreciate your help in this process, and will provide the results of my study to you in return for your time and assistance. As a fellow copywriter and advertiser, I hope you will review the findings and take them into consideration in your views on the current state of our industry.

Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefit to which the subject is otherwise entitled.

You may discontinue or withdraw from the study at any time without out penalty.

If you are willing to participate, understanding that the process is voluntary, please answer the following question in a reply to begin the process of arranging your interview.

*By answering and responding to this letter, I understand that I have been informed about the study, that I will participate and give my consent to participate as an interview subject. I understand that the researcher will keep any identifiable information in a confidential manner as to protect my person.*

*If you agree to participate in this research study, please mark "Yes". If you do not wish to participate please mark "No".*

[   ] Yes   [   ] No (If no, please send a simple reply to inform the researcher.)


Should any further questions regarding this study arise, please contact the researcher, Celia Murray, at cmmvrf@mail.missouri.edu or (608) 358-5514, or her advisor and committee chair Margaret Duffy, at duffym@missouri.edu or(573) 884-9746. Subjects may also contact the Institutional Board of Review (IRB) at the University of Missouri at (573) 882-9585.

# Appendix B: IRB Approval

**MU** **Institutional Review Board**
**University of Missouri-Columbia**

190 Galena Hall; Dc074.00
Columbia, MO 65212
573-882-3181
irb@missouri.edu

June 2, 2015

Principal Investigator: Celia Margaret Murray
Department: Dean of Journalism

Your IRB Application to project entitled Creativity and Change: How experience, environment and approach to creating advertisements have evolved for Copywriters. was reviewed and approved by the MU Institutional Review Board according to the terms and conditions described below:

| | |
|---|---|
| IRB Project Number | 2002529 |
| IRB Review Number | 204582 |
| Initial Application Approval Date | June 01, 2015 |
| IRB Expiration Date | June 01, 2016 |
| Level of Review | Expedited |
| Project Status | Active - Open to Enrollment |
| Expedited Categories | 45 CFR 46.110.a(f)(6) 45 CFR 46.110.a(f)(7) |
| Internal Funding | Personal funds |

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

1. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
2. All unanticipated problems, adverse events, and deviations must be reported to the IRB within 5 days.
3. All changes must be IRB approved prior to implementation unless they are intended to reduce immediate risk.
4. All recruitment materials and methods must be approved by the IRB prior to being used.
5. The Continuing Review Report (CRR) must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date. If the study is complete, the Completion/Withdrawal Form may be submitted in lieu of the CRR.
6. Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.
7. Utilize the IRB stamped consent documents and other approved research documents located within the document storage section of eCompliance. These documents are highlighted green.

**Appendix C: Anonymized Interviewee Monikers**

General background is provided to help readers contextualize the data presented.

| Interview Date | Anonymized Moniker | General Background |
|---|---|---|
| July 8, 2015 | Interview #1 | 51 year old New York Senior Copywriter with 31 years of professional experience |
| August 29, 2015 | Interview #2 | 38 year old California Senior Copywriter with 14 years of professional experience |
| September 10, 2015 | Interview #3 | 46 year old New York Chief Creative Officer with 23 years of professional experience |
| September 15, 2015 | Interview #4 | 37 year old California Vice President/Group Creative Director with 16 years of professional experience |
| September 15, 2015 | Interview #5 | 46 year old New York Creative Director with 19 years of professional experience |
| September 21, 2015 | Interview #6 | 45 year old New York Senior Copywriter with 22 years of professional experience |
| September 29, 2015 | Interview #7 | 42 year old New York Vice President/Group Creative Director with 19 years of professional experience |
| September 30, 2015 | Interview #8 | 46 year old New York Associate Creative Director with 16 years of professional experience |
| October 2, 2015 | Interview #9 | 48 year old New York Creative Director/Executive Vice President with 17 years of professional experience |
| October 2, 2015 | Interview #10 | 48 year old Minneapolis President/Creative Director with 23 years of professional experience |

**Appendix D: Interview Question Bank**

General information questions:

1. Do you feel qualified to voice opinions about the past and present states of creativity in advertising?

2. What is your age?

3. How long have you been in the advertising profession?

4. What was the last level of school you completed?

5. What is your name?

6. Where do you currently work?

7. Who is your employer?


RQ1 Do copywriters perceive a(n) decrease/increase in advertising creativity?

1. Since you first began working in advertising, how would you describe any changes in creativity?

2. Is there a time period you believe to have the greatest amount of creativity in advertising?


RQ2 What factors are perceived as reasons for such a change?

1. What sorts of people are attracted to the creative side of advertising? Then, now?

2. Has originality in creative work changed? If so, how?

3. Have the responsibilities of the creative changed? If so, how?

4. Has there been change in regards to client involvement and creativity? If so, how?

5. What responsibilities do creatives have for their work?

6. Has the structure of agencies changed? If so, how?

7. Has collaboration on the creative process changed? If so, how?

8. Have professional relationships changed? If so, how?

RQ3 Have available technologies affected the creative process?

1. What mediums are most effective for conveying creative strategies?

   a) Producing enthusiasm among clients

   b) Producing enthusiasm among agency creative regarding their work

   d) Deliver ads with stopping power

2. What are your favorite mediums for creating advertising?

3. Has social media impacted creativity in agencies? If so, how?

4. What are some of the differences between creating advertising for traditional media and digital media?