

GENDER DYNAMICS IN THE ADVERTISING INDUSTRY:  
THE INTERPLAY OF WORKPLACE CULTURE AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT

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Master of Arts

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by  
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

GENDER DYNAMICS IN THE ADVERTISING INDUSTRY:

THE INTERPLAY OF WORKPLACE CULTURE AND CAREER ADVANCEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses a central research problem related to gender in the advertising industry. It outlines existing literature from various scholarly traditions, including gender studies, consumer behavior, evolutionary psychology and sociology fields. This report bridges theories ranging from feminist literary theory to tokenism, gender-role congruence, situated learning and homophily theories. It further summarizes a qualitative methodological research approach consisting of in-depth interviews with 15 female executives in the advertising industry. The study concludes with an examination of factors that contribute to, or hinder female career advancement to executive positions in the advertising industry. It further offers critical determinants that influence women to remain in the industry when others leave for client-side or other opportunities.

*Keywords:* advertising; gender roles; tokenism; feminist theory; work environment; gender identity; organizational culture; interviews



## Introduction

*“Media is the only business industry where we can literally paint a picture of the world the way we want it to be. One 30-second spot can make a lifetime impression. Advertising as a storytelling medium is as important as the programming it is attached to... [it] can take a lead position and ignite the advertising and content industries to jump on board and embrace [the gender equality] movement.”*

— *Madeline Di Nonno, chief executive, Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, 22 June 2016*

Advertising is a nimble industry currently engaging in an important conversation about gender equality within its ranks, and the associated ethical responsibility ingrained in the work ad agencies produce. Due to the nature of their work, advertising professionals hold a mirror to an ever-changing society. Unfortunately, this is a society in which sex and sexism sell. Half a century after sexist messaging came to define the male-dominated industry in the Mad Men era, antiquated gender stereotypes of women in subdued, often secretarial roles still prevail. Advertising images of women have been historically stereotypical and limiting, often portraying them as domestic providers, dependent on men and incapable of making significant decisions. Though offensive ads have declined alongside shifting social sentiment over the past few decades, many ads still confine women to the private sphere (Ember, 2016).

This trend of gender subordination is beginning to receive intense criticism from within the advertising industry. Recently, “brave” advertisers have portrayed women and girls in a new light to break down stereotypes instead of reinforcing them (Wojcicki, 2016). Always’ #LikeAGirl, Dove’s #RealBeauty and Nike’s #BetterForIt celebrate women for what they can accomplish, not how they look. These groundbreaking and

disruptive feminist campaigns are part of a larger trend, dubbed “femvertising” (Iqbal, 2015). In the past year, the number of empowering advertisements appearing on the YouTube Ads Leaderboard more than doubled. These ads don’t just generate impressions, they leave impressions. Women ages 18 to 34 are twice as likely to think highly of a brand that made an empowering ad and nearly 80 percent more likely to like, share, comment and subscribe after watching one (Wojcicki, 2016).

This trend is beginning to be acknowledged in juried competitions and major industry conferences. Industry leaders at several prominent advertising agencies, and holding companies like WPP and Publicis Groupe, are speaking out about gender equality, diversity and the subtle sexism that some fear to be “endemic of what’s happening in [the] industry” (Birkner, 2016). Veteran female executives, such as Cindy Gallop, have taken to social media to call out sexism in the industry (Usborne, 2016).

Looking at gender inequality from an agency perspective raises a whole other topic. In the United States, women represent 56 percent of advertising employees (EEOC, 2009, in Windels & Mallia, 2015). One major point of concern, however, is the lack of female representation at the executive level across the advertising industry. Surprisingly, there are no comprehensive numbers quantifying gender disparities in advertising, despite the visible lack of women in senior roles (Wohl & Stein, 2016). As recently as the 1980s, few women held important roles in ad agencies. Men occupied nearly all leadership roles before the industry underwent a generation of affirmative action programs, discrimination lawsuits and consciousness-raising to move forward into the new reality. Women have made great strides in this industry, and have achieved parity representation in account management. They even outnumber men in media agencies and in strategic planning

(Dan, 2016). Women constitute a majority of the advertising workforce, just not at the top. To date, researchers have focused on the absence of women at the top of creative departments. My research seeks to understand the workplace cultural and personal factors that influence gender inequality across several advertising departments, especially at the top.

In my thesis, I do not intend, nor is it necessarily possible to, suggest that the gender breakdown of executive-level positions within an advertising agency causes the gender tonality of the work it produces. Gender tonality refers to the gendered stereotypes ads promote, both traditional and non-traditional. However, in a time where the gender tonality of ads is changing, it is important to contextualize this shift by acknowledging gender as one factor that plays into the decision-making fueling tonal changes. In the literature review to follow, I examine the industry's slow movement to reflect the changing shape of gender identity, both in the ads produced and in the individuals promoted to executive-level positions. This study contributes to an existing two-pronged body of research examining the impact of gendered advertisements on consumer behavior and societal discourse, as well as the experiences of female professionals in advertising fields. Informed by this research, I pose the following overarching research problem: Why are there so few women at the top of the advertising industry? For the purposes of historical comparison, gender will be generally defined along a binary spectrum of male and female roles.

### **Discussion of Topic Significance**

Working toward gender equality is likely to have significant commercial advantages for advertising agencies and their clients. Women control 80 percent of

consumer spending and drive the economy by bringing more than half of the income in 55 percent of U.S. households (Dishman, 2013). Women now make up almost 50 percent of those working in the advertising industry, but only 11 percent of creative directors are female (Hanan, 2016). It seems counterintuitive that the creative department should remain as male-dominated as it is today. Scholars have begun to examine workplace culture and gender-based developmental experiences as moderators of female career advancement in advertising creative departments (Alvesson, 1998; Faulkner, Kokkeler & Wesson, 1989; Ibarra, 1992; Mallia, 2009; Mallia & Windels, 2011; Nixon, 2003; The 3% Conference, 2014), but very little research examines and compares the experiences of female advertising executives across other departments, such as media and account.

Agencies are beginning to take a critical look at how they depict gender in ads, and how they treat their female employees. TBWA/Chiat/Day launched a network-wide initiative “to achieve a more balanced representation of women in leadership roles across offices, across departments and across the network.” This came after a June 2015 global survey of women’s experiences in advertising careers revealed the double standards of life in the agency world (#TAKETHELEAD2020, 2016). In the past year, this effort to work toward gender equality in the ad business has been mirrored by agencies big and small, nationwide. In January 2016, Badger and Winters made a pledge to stop objectifying women in ads (Richards, 2016). SheKnows Media launched the #Femvertising Awards to honor excellence in pro-female advertising (Monllos, 2015). Free the Bid formed as an initiative guaranteeing women directors equal opportunity to bid on commercial jobs in the ad world (Diaz, 2016). Cannes introduced the “Glass Lion” to award better gender representations in media and marketing (Toure, 2015). These

examples demonstrate an industry-wide movement toward leading with a female perspective, and subsequently helping brands grow lasting relationships with women. Brands and agencies alike are urging industry peers to follow their lead.

Fast-forward to March 2016 and the industry was shaken by a scandal at the world's oldest advertising agency, J. Walter Thompson. When a female executive filed a shocking discrimination lawsuit accusing the company's chief executive of racist and sexist behavior, the accusations brought to light what women in the industry have talked about for decades: gender bias, whether blatant or accidentally insensitive, continues to affect the positions women hold, whom they interact with and how they are treated. Female executives working in advertising say it is the "subtle stuff" that is "chronic" and "damaging." Some take this a step further, identifying the ads themselves as a paradigm of sexism manifested beyond agency walls (Ember, 2016). This lack of diversity in the business spurred discussion at the 4A's Transformation Conference, Cannes Lions and Advertising Week 2016.

It is clear that advertisements influence gender-role perceptions, consumer behavior, buying habits and impression formation. It is separately made clear that both advertising students and industry professionals understand the societal influence of the work they produce. Prominent advertising professionals are rallying for the industry to challenge and change how it portrays gender (Ember, 2016; Granatstein, 2016; Kosin, 2015; Sweney, 2016; Toure, 2015; Osborne, 2016). Keith Weed, Unilever chief marketing officer, acknowledged that the "industry spends billions of dollars annually shaping perceptions and we have a responsibility to use this power in a positive manner." Unilever, the world's second-biggest advertiser, has pledged to drop all sexist stereotypes

from its advertising, following two years of global ad research that found the issue of stereotyping is most acute in the portrayal of women. The commissioned study found that just 1% of ads surveyed show women being funny; 2% of ads show intelligent women; just 3% feature women in managerial, leadership and professional roles (Sweney, 2016).

There is a certain “cool factor” around female leadership following Sheryl Sandberg’s “lean in” rallying cry to empower women in the workplace (Granatstein, 2014). This conversation is no longer confined to “bathroom talk” among women in the ad industry. As evidenced by the wealth of articles, thought-provoking panels and commissioned research on this subject, the lack of diversity in the advertising business is real, relevant and extremely timely. This research draws upon a larger conversation among industry leaders at prominent agencies, speaking out about gender equality and the sexism that plagues industry. This research also calls into question which factors affect the success or failure of female career advancement in the advertising industry. The following literature review and research analysis explain the powerful juxtaposition of groundbreaking and disruptive feminist campaigns, and an industry that still fails its women by presenting challenges to reaching the upper ranks of agency leadership.

## **Literature Review**

In my thesis, I explore an interesting dichotomy of industry-wide female empowerment and the continued use of limiting gender portrayals in ads. To examine gender dynamics in the advertising industry requires a multifaceted approach observing various scholarly traditions, including gender studies, consumer behavior, evolutionary psychology and sociology fields. The goal of this literature review is to explore the role of women in the workplace, contextualized in advertising agency culture and practices. It further examines the actual gender breakdown of industry leadership positions and the gender-typed advertising portrayals produced. The following discussion sheds light on the various angles scholars have taken in exploring gender dynamics in the advertising industry and beyond.

### **Introduction**

Many researchers agree that the time has come to reexamine whether people truly favor traditionally gendered depictions in advertisements for products commonly associated with one sex but actually purchased and used by a substantial proportion of both men and women (Johar, Moreau & Schwarz, 2003; Morrison & Shaffer, 2003). This is set against a backdrop of shifting gender dynamics in the advertising industry itself (Mallia, 2009). This literature review begins by evaluating gender-based career advancement and workplace studies outside of the ad industry (Lyness & Thompson, 2000; Ragins, Townsend & Mattis, 1998; *Women in the Workplace 2016*). These studies apply tokenism theory, gender role congruence theory, structural theory and situated learning theory to examine career histories, perceived barriers and facilitators of

advancement for women in the workplace. The review then bridges into advertising-specific studies looking at differential hiring and compensation practices, as well as gender-based professional and leadership skills, learning and advancement (Alvesson, 1998; Grow & Mallia, 2015; Mallia, 2009; Windels & Mallia, 2011; 2015; Windels, Mallia & Broyles, 2013).

This review examines both qualitative and quantitative studies on gender in advertising, but the articles fail to draw parallels between the gender breakdown of the industry and the creative work agencies produce. For this reason, this literature review analyzes studies revealing the impact of gender stereotypes on advertising effectiveness, and points out some of the strands scholars have taken in measuring consumer opinion, self-referencing and purchase behavior. I do not intend to comprehensively review all that has been done to date, but rather to map and draw parallels between changes in the advertising industry and transitions in feminist thought and cultural trends.

Because this research is partially rooted in a feminist theoretical framework, I turn to Mager and Helgeson's (2010) content analysis chronicling feminist theory through the *prefeminist* (pre-1950 to early 1960s), *feminist* (1960s through 1970s) and *postfeminist* (approximately 1985 to present) periods. I evaluate literature from the early 1970s forward to fully contextualize my study of print, digital and audio ad campaigns, consumer behavior, gender-role congruence studies, advertising curriculum and professional standards. This discussion also identifies topics previously explored by feminist scholars, worth reevaluating in light of contemporary advertising campaigns and gender parity initiatives within the industry.



## **Review of Key Literature**

This review includes broad industry research exploring the gendered differences in expectations among students preparing to enter careers in advertising (Faulkner & Kokkeler, 1988), as well as the perceptions and motives of advertising professionals currently working in the industry (Tuncay Zayer & Coleman, 2015). From a workplace culture angle, it is important to examine the gender authority gap, disparate treatment, informal power dynamics and tokenism (Bielby, 2000; Howell, Carter & Schied, 2002; Huffman and Cohen, 2004; Huffman, Cohen & Pearlman, 2010; Malefyt & Moeran, 2003; Smith, 2002; Timberlake, 2004; Zimmer, 1988).

On a micro-level, this includes research regarding gender schema theory and Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Bem, 1981; Bem; 1981; Lafky, Duffy, Steinmaus & Berkowitz, 1996; Stern, 1988), exposure to traditionally feminine and masculine advertising stereotypes (Eisend, 2009; Furnham & Paltzer, 2010; Lafky, Duffy, Steinmaus & Berkowitz, 1996; Mager & Helgeson, 2010; Neuendorf, 2010; Pedelty & Kuecker, 2014; Stern, 1993), and the social and behavioral ramifications connecting gender-typed advertising portrayals to identity, impression formation, and subsequent advertising effectiveness (Grover & Hundal, 2014; Jansen, Moore & Carman, 2013; Johar, Moreau & Schwarz, 2003; Keshari & Jain, 2014; Lieven, Grohmann, Herrmann, Landwehr & Tillburg, 2014; Morrison & Shaffer, 2003; Sirgy, 1982).

## **Tokenism Theory**

A breadth of research has sought to explain women's occupational experiences, namely the difficulties they face as they enter traditionally male occupations, such as engineering. To be clear, advertising is hardly a "nontraditional" industry for women or

entirely dominated by men. But why then, are there so few females in executive-level creative positions? Zimmer (1998) discusses the concept of “tokenism” as a gender-neutral theory capable of explaining the experiences of men and women in the workplace. Tokenism effectively explains a woman’s inability to achieve equality on the job, often attributed to her token status, or “low proportion in a workplace dominated by men” (p. 64). Because women continue to be underrepresented in senior management, tokenism theory (Kanter, 1997a, 1997b) provides a useful framework for making predictions about how female executives’ experiences may differ from those of male executives.

According to Kanter’s (1997a, 1997b) structural theory, skewed gender ratios at upper organizational levels affect interactions between the dominant group (men) and the token group (women). By exaggerating differences between themselves and the tokens, men create negative consequences for token women, such as performance pressures resulting from their heightened visibility, exclusion from informal interactions with male peers and being viewed stereotypically as women instead of managers. Subsequent studies in a broad range of occupation settings have arrived at findings consistent with this theoretical framework (Zimmer, 1998; Yoder, 1991).

Scholars have expanded on Kanter’s predictions about token women, finding evidence that the negative effects occur for female but not male tokens. In fact, men’s negative behaviors toward token women were found to be more likely when women held male gender-typed positions such as senior management jobs (Yoder, 1991). This suggests that gender discrimination may be involved. Lyness and Thompson’s (2000) research on the careers of female and male executives mapped and compared the careers of matched samples of 69 female executives and 69 male executives by examining

perceived barriers and facilitators of advancement, self-reported developmental experiences and career histories. Their work builds on Kanter's (1997a, 1997b) categorical analysis of at least six negative consequences that could be barriers to the career success and advancement of women. Tokenism theory offers a narrowed framework to observe gender dynamics in the advertising industry.

### **Gender Dynamics in the Workplace**

A quick keyword search around this terminology yields an enormous body of organizational and sociology research, connecting tokenism to the gender authority gap, disparate treatment, informal power dynamics and homophily. Looking at historical data from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission reveals that women's presence in managerial positions is positively related to gender integration, as are organizational size and growth (Huffman, Cohen & Pearlman, 2010, p. 255). It follows then, that workplace inequality often reflects establishment-level processes that shape job assignment, advancement opportunities and distribution of rewards (p. 271). If managerial action is essential for sustaining inequality in an organization, historically male-dominated leadership might explain the small proportion of women in such roles.

**The Corporate Pipeline** The higher you look in companies, the fewer women you see. "In corporate America, women fall behind early and continue to lose ground with every step," says a recent study conducted by McKinsey & Co. and LeanIn.org (p. 3). *Women in the Workplace 2016* is a comprehensive study including pipeline data of over 32 companies and survey responses of 34,000 employees. It suggests that women are less likely to receive the first critical promotion to manager, and are therefore far less likely to be hired into more senior positions. This disparity is most pronounced early in

promotion stages – for every 100 women promoted, 130 men are promoted. This means fewer end up on the path to leadership. External hiring isn't improving the representation of women, either. Compared to women, almost twice as many men are hired from the outside as directors—and more than three times as many are hired as SVPs (p. 6).

When it comes to negotiating, women are lobbying for promotions as often as men, but face pushback when they do (p. 12). They are 30 percent more likely than their male counterparts to receive feedback that they are “intimidating,” “too aggressive,” or “bossy.” Feedback is also critical to career advancement. Women ask for feedback as often as men, but are more than 20 percent less likely to say their manager often gives them difficult feedback that improves their performance (p. 14).

**Organizational Behavior and Employee Experiences** The number of women entering the workplace has steadily risen over the past several decades, and yet they continue to lag behind men in terms of career advancement and compensation. The root of this problem often lies in lack of access to social capital, the “norms and social relations embedded in social structures that enable people to coordinate action and to achieve desired goals” (Cohen and Prusak, 2002, in Timberlake, 2004). The role of social capital in organizational behavior and its relationship to gender is pertinent to understanding career advancement.

Women report greater barriers, such as lack of culture fit and being excluded from informal networks, and greater importance of having a good track record and developing relationships to facilitate advancement than did men (Lyness & Thompson, 2000). The McKinsey & Co. report also suggested that women face a workplace skewed in favor of men. Women get less access to the people, input and opportunities that accelerate careers

(p. 3). Compared to men, they are less likely to report they've gotten a challenging assignment and participated in an important development or training opportunity (p. 10). According to the career histories of matched samples of male and female executives, men have more overseas assignments and women are likely to have more assignments with non-authority relationships (Lyness & Thompson, 2000). Seeking out difficult or highly visible assignments, what Ragins et al. (1998) calls "stretch assignments," has been found to (1) provide professional growth and learning challenges; (2) serve as grooming exercises for career tracks leading to executive positions; and (3) provide critical access to key decision-makers and influential mentors in a company. In fact, 94 percent of women executives interviewed regarded this as important to their career progress.

Professional networks, sponsorship and mentorship by senior leaders are essential components for career success. Yet 51 percent of women in senior management report they interact with a company at least once a week, compared to 62 percent of men. This means women are less likely to have substantive interactions with people with the clout to open doors for them (*Women in the Workplace 2016*, p. 13). Career success, measured by organizational level and compensation, is positively related to breadth of experience and developmental assignments for both genders, but successful women are less likely than successful men to report that mentoring facilitated their advancement (Lyness & Thompson, 2000). This is concerning, considering that individuals with mentors receive more promotions, have more career mobility and advance at a faster rate than those lacking mentors. Having an influential male mentor, with pre-established networks and credibility, can sponsor female protégés into senior management circles and offer insight usually obtained in the old boy networks (Ragins, Townsend & Mattis, 1998, p. 32).

Women are also less than half as likely as men to say they see a lot of people like them in senior management. In fact, only one in five senior executives is a woman (*Women in the Workplace 2016*, p. 10). This leadership disparity is compounded by differences in professional networks. Women are three times more likely to rely on a network that is mostly female, which systematically exacerbates this problem (p. 13).

**The Glass Ceiling** The lack of progress of women in the workplace has been attributed to the glass ceiling, an invisible barrier to advancement based on an attitudinal or organizational bias (Morrison, White & Van Velsor, 1988). “Glass ceiling” is a term coined in the United States in the 1970s to describe the “invisible artificial barriers, created by attitudinal and organizational prejudices, which block women from senior executive positions” (Wirth, 2001, p. 1). Commitment to shattering the glass ceiling isn’t enough. For change to occur, CEOs must understand the overt and subtle barriers to advancement faced by women in the workplace, as well as strategies to overcome such barriers (Ragins, Townsend & Mattis, 1998). Survey data and in-depth telephone interviews from 461 female executives and 325 CEOs from Fortune 1000 companies revealed interesting disparities around gender in the workplace. Women ranked “consistently exceed performance expectations” and “develop management style that men are comfortable with” as the top two key strategies for career success (p. 29). This second strategy also points to an important dual perspective outlined below.

**Disparate Perceptions of Leadership and High-Ranking Women** Another factor to explain gender inequality in the workplace is the disconnect that exists between female employees and senior executives. In one study, Fortune 1000 CEOs had vastly different perceptions of organizational and environmental barriers faced by their female

employees, and in their companies' progress towards equality in the workplace (Ragins, Townsend and Mattis, 1998). For instance, women were twice as likely as the CEOs to consider inhospitable work environments as a barrier to women's advancement: 52 percent of the women executives cited "male stereotyping and preconceptions of women" as a top factor holding women back, compared with 25 percent of CEOs; 49 percent of women identified "exclusion from informal networks," compared with 15 percent of CEOs; and inhospitable corporate culture was identified by 35 percent of women, but only 18 percent of CEOs (p. 35).

Interviews with 20 male CEOs further revealed four themes underlying their perceptions of the corporate climate faced by women in their organizations. Firstly, *gender-blind treatment results in gender-blind outcomes*. Put simply, treating men and women exactly the same assumes a level playing field in an organization. However, female executives attributed their success to developing a managerial style appropriate for their gender, which is clearly a gender-typed career strategy (p. 37). Next, *gender generalizations suggest that all women are alike and they are all very different from men*. The authors cite existing research indicating a reciprocal relationship between group stereotyping and exclusionary corporate climates for women. This results in a dual environment in an organization, in which men are treated on the basis of their individual character and women are automatically grouped in categories (p. 38). Thirdly, *consciousness raising in the executive suite*. This theme necessitates that male CEOs be conscious of the exclusionary climate faced by their female employees. Many of the CEOs in this study recognized that their own personal experiences influenced their awareness of gender issues (p. 39). Finally, *the mantle for change*. This fourth and final

theme revealed that it is the responsibility of CEOs to make change occur in organizations (p. 39).

**Workplace Authority** Several scholars have taken sociological approaches to study job authority as an important dimension of social inequality. Workplace bias refers to the “differences in career outcomes by gender or race/ethnicity that are not attributable to the differences in skills, qualifications, interests, and preferences that individuals bring to the employment setting” (Bielby, 2000, p. 120). Smith (2002) traces the historical roots of gender as a determinant of, and impediment to, attainment of job authority. This is based in the theoretical treatises of Max Weber and Karl Marx’s theory of class relations and conflict. Smith identifies various conceptual and measureable understandings of authority, as a class typology or status scale. Research linking occupational gender segregation to the workplace authority gap often assumes that gender composition is invariant across occupations. Scholars have made the argument that gender differences in human capital account for only part of the workplace authority gap. Huffman and Cohen (2004) note the importance of whether an occupation’s relevant labor market is local, or in the case of advertising, national in scale.

The concept of workplace authority has been studied extensively in ethnographies examining gender and women’s experience at work. Howell et al. (2002) uses human resources offers an interesting vantage point from which to examine women’s workplace learning and eventual organizational change. This outlines several dimensions, such as gendered patterns in labor recruitment and the feminist concept of voice, which becomes “problematic” when tonality deviates from expected gender norms of cheerfulness, support and positivity (p. 118).



### **Perceived Barriers to, and Facilitators of, Advancement** Lyness and

Thompson (2000) neatly outline measureable gender-based barriers and facilitators of advancement (p. 101). Perceived barriers include lack of culture fit, excluded from informal networks, lack of mentoring, poor organizational career management processes, difficulty getting developmental assignments and difficulty obtaining opportunities for geographic mobility. On the flipside, perceived facilitators of advancement include having a good track record, developing relationships, managing own career, mentoring and developmental assignments. Taking these factors in consideration, in conjunction with the research presented above, this raises the following question:

*RQ1: What factors contribute to, or hinder female career advancement in the advertising industry?*

**Gender Socialization and Career Selection** The culture in which individuals are raised also affects career success. Gender socialization defines women and men's career expectations, which influence subsequent behavior in the workplace. Scholars propose a "sociopsychological" model for women's career choices. According to Astin's foundational work, female occupational behavior is driven by psychological variables and contextual-sociological variables (Astin, 1984). After taking a look at the personal and social forces that shape career decision-making, it is also important to examine the interplay between decisions about career and personal relationships. Studies suggest that these relationships are characterized by shifting priorities at different points in time, and that the pace of women's career progress is often culturally based (Wirth, 2001).

**The Divergence of Male and Female Career Paths** Scholars present the gender-role hypothesis to explain why female authority is questioned in the workplace (Rudman & Kilianski, 2000). Women face gender discrimination in leadership positions. On top of

this, parental status has been shown to influence perceptions of job competency. Mothers face greater discrimination in the workplace, whereas fathers are judged more leniently (Heilman & Okimoto, 2008; Fuegen et al., 2004).

**The Benefit of Balance** There is a growing awareness and mounting research to suggest that gender equality boosts enterprise productivity, spurs economic growth and improves the welfare of families. Today, the best performing organizations and firms depend on a balanced mix of so-called “masculine” and “feminine” attributes. In the wake of confirming research on diversity management, more and more companies are adopting measures to attract and retain women in order to benefit from their qualifications and inimitable talent (Wirth, 2001, p. v).

*RQ2: What are the critical determinants that influence women to remain in the industry when others leave for client-side or other opportunities?*

### **The Advertising Industry**

So far, this literature review has broadly explored gender in the workplace. This section offers a technical breakdown of working dynamics within the advertising industry. Advertising is an industry that exists as a niche within the larger marketing and communication field. Advertising refers to “the market communication of goods and services of various sellers” (Malefyt & Moeran, 2003, p. 2). Scholars have moved beyond a traditional and somewhat limited view of the field to encompass advertising’s role as a “vehicle of social communication.” It is in this latter definition that advertising attempts to “sell goods, by appealing to consumers through gender identity...and other cultural dimensions not tangibly related to the advertised product or service” (p. 2). In evaluating the ad world, it is important to consider the people who work in the industry, the campaigns they produce and the organizations with which they interact.

**Organization Type** The industry is comprised of various networks of cooperative social, personal and financial arrangements among clients, advertising staffs, freelancers and consumers (p. 2). The scope and scale of the industry depends on the medium, audience and organization type. There are media institutions in which ads are placed, such as television networks, radio stations, and newspaper, magazine and online publishers. The organizations that commission advertising services are called clients. Clients may be large or small, global or local, single- or multi-product manufacturers and/or sellers. Finally, there are organizations that plan and create advertising for clients that consumers then see and hear across various media platforms. These organizations are called advertising agencies, and are a vital concept in the study of workplace dynamics within the industry (p. 3). It is important to note that agencies come in all shapes and sizes, from job specific to full-service agencies offering clients a complete range of creative and strategic work on a multitude of accounts.

**Consolidation Under Holding Companies** There is a saying in the business that “almost everyone in advertising works for one of five different companies” (Tungate, 2013, p. 149). Keith Reinhard of Needham Harper merged DDB and BBDO into a new holding company, Omnicom. This first merger in April 1986 moved three creative agencies, what felt like half of Madison Avenue at the time, under one roof to “safeguard their identities through an increasingly rapacious market” (p. 152). Today, Omnicom serves more than 5,000 clients in 100 countries and has an operating income of US\$1.6 billion a year. The company’s hands-off management policy allows outfits like BBDO and DDB, as well as its subsidiaries (TBWA, AMV, Goodby Silverstein & Partners) and media specialists (OMG, PHD) to carry on their work relatively independently (p. 154).

Other major holding companies include WPP, Interpublic, Publicis Groupe and Japan's Dentsu. WPP Chief Executive Martin Sorrell oversees four historic advertising agencies, J. Walter Thompson, Ogilvy & Mather, Young & Rubicam and Grey, as well as a host of 100 marketing services, communications, research and branding operations. Sorrell dislikes the term "conglomerate," insisting that the businesses are not disconnected. WPP offers its clients access to any of its component parts, a practice that led *Fortune* magazine to dub the holding company a "marketing machine" (p. 155). It is important to understand this unique management arrangement of advertising industries to understand jobs titles and how they correspond to level of influence within an agency.

### **Departmental Organization of an Advertising Agency**

Three bodies are involved in the advertising business: the client, the agency and the consumer. Although organizational structure may differ from agency to agency, there are several main functional areas that make-up a full-service agency. For most agencies, these four pillars of job function are: account management, account planning, creative and media (Kelly & Jugenheimer, 2011, p. 7). Some scholars divide these four pillars differently: account management, which is said to encompass account planning and market research; media planning and buying; creative services; and internal services, including finance, personal and traffic (Malefyt & Moeran, 2003, p. 4). The Advertising Educational Foundation elaborates on this four-pillar model, including interactive marketing as fifth category. Advertising tasks require people with different educational backgrounds, professional "experience and ability in overall management and specialized skills" (*Advertising Career Possibilities*, 2009). Advertising agencies are usually led by a chief executive officer and several vice presidents, who may oversee a

board of directors with members representing the departmental areas outlined below (Malefyt & Moeran, 2003, p. 4).

**Account Management** Account managers “manage” the client/agency relationship and counsel the client (Kelly & Jugenheimer, 2011, p. 7). Put simply, the account manager is the client’s representative at the agency, and the agency’s representative at the client’s organization. This means ensuring the client get the best possible work, but at a profitable return for his or her employing agency. The account manager has to develop a thorough knowledge of the client’s business needs, the consumer, that marketplace, and all aspects of the advertising agency he or she represents, including creative, media, research and production. A manager is both a team leader and a strategist, communicating the client’s needs to the agency team while balancing different personalities and skillsets. See *Figure 1* in the appendices.

**Account Planning** This role did not make its way into United States ad agencies until the late 1980s. This “elevated research function” takes on a variety of different names across the industry, such as account planning, brand planning, cognitive anthropology and strategy (Kelly & Jugenheimer, 2011, p. 7). This is a skill set distinct from account management and research, but often spanning both areas. Researchers typically focus on using the right research technique to fit the problem, and their work is often heavily weighted toward quantitative research. The account planner fills voids in the research process by synthesizing consumer information as it pertains to brand strategy and campaign execution (p. 7).

Though a planner’s role may vary from agency to agency, the job broadly involves representing the consumer point of view in the marketing and advertising

process. The planner immerses himself or herself in the consumer mindset, by identifying with the consumer and internalizing the research. While a researcher can present statistics about how consumers behave, a planner can tell you not only who the consumers are but what they feel (p. 9). The product of the account planner is the creative brief, which delineates the parameters of message content to be produced by the creative team and executed by the media department. Most account planners have academic backgrounds in liberal arts, specializing in psychology, sociology and cultural anthropology. See *Figure 2* in the appendices.

**Creative** Within an advertising agency, the creative department is the team of individuals responsible for developing ideas, images and copy in ads. Though other positions in the agency contribute to the creative process, copywriters and art directors are mainly responsible for the invention and production of advertising deliverables. A copywriter writes, edits and proofreads ad copy, which may take the form of body copy in print campaigns or dialogue for TV commercials and scripts for radio ads. Copywriters with proven ability and experience may be assigned merchandising and sales promotion materials or generate product or company names. Although not required, a bachelor's degree in English, journalism, advertising or marketing may help in the job search.

Art directors must have strong visual concept skills, as well as technical ability in drawing and design. These individuals prepare visual concepts and designs, oversee photo sessions and filming of television commercials, and work on layouts for print ads and television storyboards. See *Figure 3* in the appendices.

**Media** This department is responsible for the actual placement of advertising materials developed by creatives. They must reach the right people at the right time in the

right place in a manner that is most cost-effective for the client. This job involves research about people's media consumption, viewing and reading habits. Media planners must evaluate editorial content and programming on different media platforms, and familiarize themselves with media data banks and information sources. Media planning and buying are constantly changing alongside technological advances in television, Internet and mobile platforms. See *Figure 4* in the appendices.

**Interactive Marketing** This recent development in the advertising field focuses on the changing relationship between the advertiser and the target audience. Traditional advertising finds ways to garner consumer attention, whereas the interactive marketing consumer seeks out a company's website or social media channel and decides how long, and in what capacity, they will engage. This role involves crossover between creative and media departments, and often focuses on the consumer's online user-experience. Since this is the fastest growing phenomenon in the media world, ad agencies are scrambling to hire computer-based designers and programmers, as well as strategists who understand the increasing role of digital technology and interactive media.

**Cross-departmental Work** Advertising is an industry that solves ambiguous problems through communication solutions. As evidenced above, this requires the coordination of diverse minds working to examine problems and solve them creatively (Windels, Mallia & Broyles, 2013). When an agency wins a new account or is assigned new business from an existing client, it forms an account team. This is comprised of an account supervisor, a senior planner, a media buyer and a creative team made up of a copywriter, art director and producer (for television and/or radio commercials). Each

individual has an assigned role as outlined in his or her job description above. Malefyt and Moeran (2003) outline several organizational difficulties facing account teams.

An account team often finds itself having to deal with at least two different audiences whose interests may or may not be the same. The account planner and creative team focus their attention on how to advertise a product to a targeted consumer group. The account supervisor liaises between the client and the agency, and is responsible for conveying the client's marketing needs to her colleagues, as well as for selling the agency's plans to the client. The account supervisor has to resolve the difference of opinions between the consumer-oriented strategy proposed by the agency's account group, with the ask of the client who is ultimately paying for the services (p. 5).

A second organizational difficulty that often emerges in the work of an account group is the internal conflict between agency departments. Account planners develop a strategy based on objective, scientific criteria informed by in-depth qualitative and quantitative research. Creatives then adapt this data-based strategy into intuitive and artistic ideas that may "have little actual relationship to the expressed marketing aims" (p. 6). These teams have to work together harmoniously to achieve a client's aims.

### **Gender and the Advertising Profession**

The relationship between gender and advertising careers has been widely discussed in industry publications over the past several years. *Adweek* and *Advertising Age* are provoking discussions about gender issues in the advertising world, an "industry today that is untouched by the extraordinary pace of progress" (Granatstein, 2016). This section addresses the ongoing dialogue about gender equality within the industry and



advertising professionals' understanding of their associated ethical responsibility to produce work that combats gender stereotypes.

From an academic perspective, the topic of gender and career advancement has been examined in various disciplines, including social psychology, management and human resources. It is important to look at societal norms, organizational culture and policies, and advertising-specific variables that influence differential gender hiring and retention. This section also introduces gender as a factor that influences workplace experience and advancement, specifically in the ad industry.

**Buzz in the Advertising World** Several articles cite J. Walter Thompson's sexual harassment lawsuit as a cultural example of agencies failing to support gender equality in their ranks, much less in the creative work they produce (Birkner, 2016; Ember, 2016; Granatstein, 2016; Richards, 2016). Earlier this year, 4A's President Nancy Hill opened the organization's annual Transformation Conference with some stern words hinting at the recent allegations against J. Walter Thompson's former CEO Gustavo Martinez. JWT chief communications officer Erin Johnson filed a lawsuit against the global CEO earlier this year, alleging that Martinez routinely joked about raping female colleagues. Publicis Groupe chief Maurice Lévy, however, said, "It is a one-time mistake, a huge mistake, but it's not a fair representation of the industry" (Richards, 2016). The takeaway: the marginalization of women still occurs in the advertising industry.

This buzz has been building over the past year. Back in 2015, *Harper's Bazaar* sat down with four of the ad industry's leading ladies to discuss the representation of women in the ad world. Alison Burns, global client services director of J. Walter Thompson, suggested that women are under-represented in creative departments, which

“tend to be highly structured, very male, very heterosexual and very white.” She summarized that, “You need diversity of imagination and you need a colliding of disparate views to be inspired in that way and yet the opposite is true” (Kosin, 2015).

**Students Entering Advertising Fields** In the past decade, women have been enrolled in advertising programs and portfolio schools in equal or greater numbers to men, and have been entering the field in equal or greater numbers (Mallia, 2009). In fact, women represent a majority in advertising’s academic programs, where 61.6 percent of students enrolled in mass communication Bachelor’s programs and 65.7 percent of those in Master’s programs are women (Becker, Vlad & Kalpen, 2012, in Windels & Mallia, 2015). However, studies have uncovered differences in interests and motivations between men and women students entering the advertising industry. This body of research also observes these students’ perceptions of discriminatory treatment in hiring and advancement in advertising careers (Faulkner, Kokkeler & Wesson, 1989). The Professional Freedom and Responsibility Committee of the Advertising Division of AEJMC undertook a study of gendered differences among advertising students as a result of the nationwide observation of rising interest in advertising careers and education among women. Though females generally reported greater interest in the field than males, they also anticipated greater difficulty advancing in the field once they had their first job (p. 7). In fact, women executives profiled in *Advertising Age* articles in 1986 and 1987 indicated that they had to “fight” and to be “ambitious” (male-oriented characteristics) to be taken seriously (p. 10). More recent accounts from female executives suggest that these problems prevail.

Other studies have examined the relationship of gender and length of employment as determinants of ethical perceptions among advertising professionals and students (Keith, Pettijohn & Burnett, 2008). It is suggested that female students held stronger ethical views than did male students. For agency personnel, the longer males were employed in advertising agencies the more important they perceived ethical behavior and the less likely they were to engage in unethical activities.

**Who Stays, Who Goes** In the United States, women represent 56 percent of advertising employees (EEOC, 2009, in Windels & Mallia, 2015). There is a relatively equal sex distribution among those graduating from such programs, and women are starting careers in advertising. However, empirical and anecdotal evidence shows women leaving creative jobs after seven to fifteen years (Mallia, 2008). Research has suggested that female underrepresentation at the top is related to women exiting advertising mid-career, not disproportionate entry-level hiring (Mallia, 2009). Studies present conflicting findings as to whether there is a hiring, promotion or retention problem in the business (The 3% Conference, 2014; Grow, Mallia, Williams, Pollock & Klinger, 2015). In a recent panel of the American Academy of Advertising, Mylene Pollock, executive vice president and creative director at Leo Burnett, acknowledge that it will take 66 years at the current rate of hiring to realize equality in the advertising industry (Grow, Mallia, Williams, Pollock & Klinger, 2015).

**Situated Learning in Creative Roles** Women constitute about half of individuals in specialized advertising portfolio schools (Mallia, 2008). However, studies suggest that it is typically harder for women to break into and succeed in creative advertising roles (Mallia, 2009; Nixon, 2003). Creative departments are notorious for their boys' club

culture and “subculture of sexism” which serve to maintain the status quo of masculine norms (Alvesson, 1998; Mallia, 2009). Windels and Mallia (2015) use this information to preface a situated learning study on female creative learning and membership in a male-dominant community of practice. Applying situated learning theory, the authors were able to track the negotiated experiences, community membership and learning trajectories of women as they progressed from the periphery to the center of the advertising creative departments.

**Gender as a Component of Organizational Culture** Organizational culture is a determinant of working environment and subsequent gender interactions in businesses with a strong division of labor. This topic has been studied extensively in broad-reaching workplace studies (Morrison, White & Van Velsor, 1988; Ragins, Townsend & Mattis, 1998; Lyness & Thompson, 2000; Timberlake, 2004), but less so in the advertising field. These studies focus on male-dominant fields and gendered organizations in which women experience difficulties such as a lack of access to informal social networks, a shortage of mentors and difficulty navigating organizational politics (de Vries, Webb & Eveline, 2006, in Windels & Mallia, 2015).

An ethnography of a Swedish advertising agency where men hold all senior posts discusses creative advertising work in terms of “femininity” and “masculinity” (Alvesson, 1998). Gender studies research suggests that gender is constructed in an organizational context. This particular study emphasizes advertising workplace sexuality as “ambiguous” and problematizes the domination of masculinity at work. The authors found that the feminization of advertising work, and the nature of client relations, put

strain on male gender identity in account management roles. This led to gendered workplace interactions that would restore their feelings of masculinity.

Organizational culture is also a contributor to an individual's career success and advancement. In the field of advertising research, the creative department is often examined as a subculture. The 2013 *Communications Arts Advertising Annual* revealed that only 11.5 percent of creative directors are women (The 3% Conference, 2014). For this reason, a "boys' club" pervades the creative department of most agencies (Nixon, 2003). This raises the issue of homophilous relationships. Organizational and network researchers have found that culture affects communication networks, which subsequently affects career advancement. In a male-dominated company culture, men reap greater network rewards in the form of individual and positional resources (Ibarra, 1992).

Organizational policies and practices also limit the career progress of women (Davidson & Burke, 2016). Advertising agencies rarely offer family-friendly policies, such as flexitime or flexiplace, despite technology that easily allows for women to work remotely. Therefore the long hours and demand for presenteeism required to work in the advertising industry adds further constraints for those with childcare responsibilities, which are most likely to be women (Mallia, 2009). Little research on gender dynamics in the workplace focuses on the advertising industry. For this reason, this literature review expands its scope to encompass broad workplace studies focused on gender diversity.

**Professionals' Perceptions and Moral Obligations** Scholars have recently begun studying this ongoing dialogue about gender equality within the advertising industry. Prominent studies explore the ethical responsibility advertising professionals feel to produce work that combats gender stereotypes. This involves investigating

advertising professionals' perceptions of how gender portrayals impact men and women, and how these perceptions influence their strategic and creative decisions. Researchers have conducted in-depth interviews, focus groups and field observation to reveal varied findings with regard to informants' recognition of the negative impact gendered images have on audiences. Both institutional forces and individual moral obligations guide the decisions advertising professionals make in creating gendered messages to sell products (Zayer & Coleman, 2015, p. 271). Study findings also reveal ad professionals' perceptions about women's vulnerability and men's immunity to the negative consequences of gendered portrayals in advertising. This body of research suggests that both societal discourse and long-standing institutional dynamics drive gender-related business decisions in ad agencies.

**Emerging Technologies Present New Opportunities** Digital media has shaken up the advertising industry as new channels supplement traditional media. Viral video and social networking are changing creative processes within advertising agencies. The nature of advertising is changing, and advertisers have yet to maximize the creative potential of non-traditional advertising on mobile devices. As outlined above, a breadth of research examines creative careers of women constrained by the "boys' club" culture and organizational structure dominant in twentieth century ad agencies. Mallia and Windels (2011) look to anecdotal evidence of new digital agencies using project management or integrated production styles rather than art director-copywriter teams. They hypothesize that more collaborative work processes may lead to changes in agency culture. Initial findings suggest that digital agencies develop their work differently than traditional ad agencies, resulting in more positive workplace experiences for women.

Further research is needed to determine how digital advertising skill specialization and larger creative teams will shift the historic gender imbalance within the industry.

### **Feminist Theory**

This portion of the literature review begins with a broad discussion of feminist theory, explores various content analyses on gender in advertising and segues into gender schema theory studies about impression formation. The review then looks at gender-based advertising effectiveness, to follow-up on the creative oversight and ethical responsibility of advertising students and professionals discussed above.

According to *Merriam Webster Online*, the term “feminism” refers to “the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities.” It is “the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes” (Feminism [Def. 1], 2016). For some in today’s culture, the word “feminism” is a stigmatized label. Each person who claims to be a feminist has a unique understanding of what the word means to them and how it impacts their life. Feminism has experienced several waves, first focused on suffrage and overturning legal obstacles to gender equality, and later broadening the debate to sexuality, family, the workplace, reproductive rights, de facto inequalities and official legal inequalities (Rankin, n.d.; Burkett, n.d.). A third-wave of feminism sought to embrace sexual concepts of femininity, including the sexual power of women (Lankford, 2010, p. 98). This movement works to semantically reclaim double-standard insult words, such as “slut,” to eliminate the social stigma applied to psychologically-, socially- and politically-empowered women (McMahon & Harris, 2016). In a burgeoning fourth wave, celebrities like Emma Watson and Keifer Sutherland have lent their voices to HeForShe, a solidarity movement for gender equality. The women’s movement was originally

conceived as a struggle led only by women for women, but in recent years, men have begun to stand-up in addressing gender-based inequalities and discrimination faced by women and girls (Our Mission — HeForShe, n.d.).

As with any controversial topic, a small but vocal group of outliers offer a loud voice to the movement and play a large role in shaping its definition and reputation. Despite the increasing integration of feminist theory into mainstream culture around the world, hostile attitudes toward the feminist movement, and toward feminists themselves, continue to exist. The bottom line: support for feminist goals is often hampered by a dislike of feminists. A research team led by University of Toronto psychologist Nadia Bashir found that participants' strongly negative feelings about such activists reduced their willingness "to adopt the behaviors that these activists promoted" (Penny, 2013).

**Feminist Literary Theory** Inquiry into gender-role portrayals in advertising has come to form the broad avenue down which many feminist scholars have taken their work. Ad content communicates commercial messages, facts, ideas, values and meanings. Objectionable ad content that stereotypes and demeans women has been criticized for decades, and more recently, has motivated advertising professionals to engage in conversations about the role they play in forming and reinforcing gender meanings in society. A feminist framework can incorporate into consumer research two relatively unexplored topics: issues of advertising as gendered text and consumer responses as gendered readings (Stern, 1988; 1993). By grounding advertising research in feminist literary theory, reader-response and postmodern feminist criticism coalesce to frame Holland's question about literature—"Who reads *what how*?" (Holland, 1975, p.



12). Stern adapts this traditional literature “reading” methodology to examine two archetypal cigarette-advertising figures—the Marlboro Man and the Dakota Woman.

Recent content analyses study gendered readings and then integrate feminist theory into ongoing consumer research on attitude toward the ad, inferencing and empathy. Stern’s work is disruptive in its postmodern feminist approach to consumer research, illuminating gender assumptions in advertising when read as a discourse of patriarchal society. She was, in fact, the first scholar to extend postmodern feminist criticism and constructionist theory to consumer research by adapting literary theory to present gender as a segmenting variable to evaluate the experience of commercial text.

**Deconstruction Theory** Postmodern feminist critics, and later contemporary feminists, turned to deconstruction theory to challenge the neutrality of text. These feminist scholars wanted to raise social awareness of hidden androcentric, or male-centered, bias in cultural texts and normative patriarchal views that positioned femaleness as the “other” (de Beauvoir, 1952). Stern builds on this foundational research to segment reader responses by gender, thereby accounting for masculine and feminine texts, as well as male and female readers. Androcentric values are deeply ingrained in advertising conventions, depicting femininity in stereotypes that disempower women by portraying them as subservient to their male counterparts (Goffman, 1979; Stern, 1993).

**Male and Female Reading Strategies** Feminist scholars have grounded their studies in different male and female reading strategies (Crawford & Chaffin, 1988), which offer evidence for gender-based consumer responses to advertising text. Studies have found men to be detached readers who tend to see a story from the outside (Bleich, 1988), whereas women tend to experience a story from the inside (Flynn, 1988). Other

factors to consider include authorial intent, inferencing versus judgmental readers, and attitude toward an ad. Advertising text can be evaluated in a variety of ways, from reinforcing gender perspectives to commoditizing gender characteristics to appeal to members of one or both sexes. Both Stern (1993) and Mager and Helgeson (2010) use role reversal to define appropriate, socially acceptable behaviors for members of each gender. Feminist theory must further be incorporated into consumer research, not as the subtraction of a masculine perspective but rather as the addition of a feminine one. Feminist criticism “leads to the embrace of a common humanity” (Stern, 1993, p. 564).

**Common Methods** Content analysis is a mixed-method approach commonly used by feminist researchers to evaluate advertising images (Mager & Helgeson, 2010). Others employ a research methodology called semiotic content analysis to identify subtle indications of cultural position, sexuality and sexism in advertisements (Goffman, 1979). Content analyses of portrayals of women and men in U.S. magazine advertisements over a 50-year period examine changes in those ads relative to transitions in feminism and cultural trends, using Goffman’s foundational work as a benchmark. Though women are still subordinated to men when measured by Goffman’s (1979) cultural positioning framework, there has been a shift in role depictions of women consistent with prevailing social trends in overall U.S. culture. Using a Goffman-based code scheme to analyze a “frozen frame” of magazine ads, feminist scholars have found empirical evidence that the feminist movement likely contributed to the increased portrayal of women in the public sphere. This is evidenced in the decreasing trend of males playing the executive role and also in females being instructed during the feminist and post-feminist time periods. In short, though women were “kept in their place” in more subtle aspects of advertisements,

males and females were shown more equally sharing role positions towards the end of the study's 50 years (Mager & Helgeson, 2011, p. 250).

### **Gender Role Expectations, Identity and Impression Formation**

Feminist scholars, advertising professionals, socially conscious consumers, political activists, media practitioners and others have expressed concern about the negative effects of female stereotypes in advertising. These images often portray women engaged in activities considered less valuable to society, positioning women as inferior or subservient to men (Lafky, Duffy, Steinmaus & Berkowitz, 1996). Much of the research in this area involves quantitative or qualitative analysis of individual images in the media to explore gender role stereotyping.

**Gender Schema Theory and the BSRI** "Lenses of gender" lead to differences in the ways males and females socially construct reality and produce (and reproduce) gender traits (Bem, 1981, p. 354). Gender schema theory proposes that one's sexual self-concept predicts how one structures items in memory. This memory structure plays an anticipatory role in the search for, and assimilation of, incoming information. Sandra Lipsitz Bem conducted foundational research in the area of self-concept, psychoanalytic theory, androgyny, gender roles, gender polarization and gender stereotypes. Bem created the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI), which acknowledges that individuals may exhibit both male and female characteristics. This self-report scale was developed to tell what kind of sex role an individual fulfills. At its core, gender schema theory explains the implications of gender-based information processing, including memory, persuasion and self-identification (Bem, 1981, p. 369).

**Gender Roles in Advertising** Cognitive heuristics theory takes into account how gender role socialization impacts the cognitive processing of advertising images (Lafky, Duffy, Steinmaus & Berkowitz, 1996). This points to findings suggesting that even brief exposure to stereotypical advertisements plays a role in reinforcing stereotypes about gender roles. Lafky (et. al) expands upon Bem's research to suggest that gender lenses also help to shape the images used in advertising as well as the ways individuals cognitively process visual advertising images. Audience response studies conducted by marketing and advertising scholars constitute a related stream of research considering effective ways to appeal to women consumers (Lafky, et. al, 1996, p. 381). Such research suggests that while stereotypical gender representations may not induce product purchase, they certainly encourage viewers to internalize the socially constructed image of femininity and therefore define acceptable female roles. The authors suggest that future social cognition and social psychology scholars might study the effects of images that fall on various places on the Consciousness Scale for Sexism in advertising. Similar literature in consumer behavior discusses attitude modeling at the intersection of consumer-decision making research and self-concept theory (Sirgy, 1982).

Other longitudinal studies examine gender roles by providing quantitative and qualitative content-analytical reviews of advertising images and text over time (Eisend, 2009; Furnham & Paltzer, 2010; Neuendorf, 2010; Mager & Helgeson, 2011). The majority of these studies focus on visual advertising data, such as imagery and text. Other studies, however, observe "scopocentric sexism" in voiceovers, the idea that a woman's relative agency, depicted by voice, is conditioned by her visual presence (Pedelty &

Kuecker, 2014, p. 256). Before 2009, scholars had not yet examined the relationship between gender stereotyping in advertising and role changing developments in society.

Results of a correlation analysis and simultaneous equation model show that gender stereotyping in advertising depends on gender-related value changes in society and not vice versa. More specifically, the results show that marketers react to gender-related developments in society and use existing values in society to promote their brands (Eisend, 2009, p. 436). Scholars code along gender role variables, including mode of presentation, credibility, role, location age, argument, product type, end comment and background. Other studies have offered an international perspective, including cross-time and cross-cultural dimensions by geographically classifying ads from five continents (Furnham & Paltzer, 2010).

**Impression Formation** A large body of social cognition research demonstrates that information is interpreted in terms of the applicable concept that is most accessible at the time of encoding. Scholars examine the role of chronic and temporary accessibility on impression formation, and the subsequent behavioral ramifications of individuals primed with gender-typed advertising messages (Johar, Moreau & Schwarz, 2003). In short, this body of research suggests that advertising has important implications for society. Advertising depicting women in sex-typed roles is likely to activate stereotypic constructs of women, and result in stereotypic judgments and behavior.

Scholars have explored gender roles through a socio-cultural lens, using content and factor analyses to look at the role portrayals of Indian women in ads (Grover & Hundal, 2014). Women are portrayed in several positions, including decorative, recreational, independent career, self-involved and family roles. Advertisers use a variety

of emotional appeals, such as fear, humor, sex and self-idealization, to suggest that consumers choose brands that fulfill both rational and emotional needs. Overall, “gender perception in communication has evolved by introspecting the roles of men and women in society” (Grover & Hundal, 2014, p. 29). Advertisers are willing to manipulate consumer behavior and exploit individuals’ anxieties about their identities to sell products. These findings about anxiety suggest that the projection of women in ads is effective along several general trends. Advertisements that depict extremely degrading representation and well clad women fail to attract the attention of consumers, whereas more middle-ground ads depicting semi-nude, attractive women results in higher brand recall, more consistent buying behavior and generally increased sales (p. 34).

### **Gender as a Determinant of Advertising Effectiveness**

Over the past five decades, scholars have observed significant changes in gender roles and gender-based divisions of labor, namely the influx of women into professions almost exclusively filled by men. Large differences still exist in people’s perceptions of behaviors considered appropriate for men and women (Morrison & Shaffer, 2003). Morrison and Shaffer’s experiment asked individuals with varied gender-role orientations to evaluate gender-stereotyped and non-stereotyped advertisements for “gendered” products actually used by both sexes. Their findings were consistent with a gender-role congruence model of advertising effectiveness, wherein traditional participants (masculine men; feminine women) responded more favorably to traditionally gender-stereotyped advertisements. Nontraditional, or androgynous individuals, reacted more favorably to nontraditional advertisements (p. 269). This directly coincides with earlier social science research (Bem, 1983; Goffman, 1979) suggesting that continued reliance

on gender-stereotyped advertisements clearly reinforces gender-role portrayals that many find constraining and harmful. Morrison and Shaffer took this experiment a step further, and revealed findings that when encouraged to self-reference, traditional participants were more responsive to nontraditional advertisements (p. 273). This finding holds enormous significance in considering the effectiveness of gender-typed ads.

These concepts can be expanded in gender-based marketing and psychology research by exploring five dimensions of brand personality that characterize brands as extensions of individuals (Lieven, Grohmann, Hermann, Landwehr & Tilburg, 2014). Earlier research found a correspondence between brand gender and consumers' sex identity leading to positive brand trust, brand attitude, attitudinal and purchase loyalty, and likelihood to recommend (Morrison & Shaffer, 2003). This study takes things a step further, establishing a direct effect of brand gender on brand equity by looking at psychological mechanisms underlying this relationship. Keshari and Jaine (2014) likewise acknowledge the importance of grabbing consumer attention and motivating them to purchase the advertised product. Their study of Indian consumers is concerned with advertising's affect on consumer behavior and how to formulate an effective advertising strategy geared to male and female consumers' responses to rational and emotional advertising appeals. Unlike past studies, their research did not show any significant effect of gender on response to these different kinds of advertising appeals.

In addition to gendered imagery and text, scholars have examined the effect of demographic targeting on the performance of sponsored search advertising (Jansen, Moore & Carman, 2013). To determine the effect of demographic targeting, the authors classified the campaign's key phrases by a probability of being targeted for a specific

gender. They then compared the key performance indicators among these groups using critical sponsored search metrics of impressions, clicks, cost-per-click, sales revenue, orders and items. This quantitative methodology deals with sponsored search, online keyword advertising, search engine marketing, gender targeting and demographic profiling. Based on the articles reviewed above, it is natural to assume that increased personalization will lead to a better online experience for the searcher. The research results from this study, however, indicate that gender-oriented key phrases are simply more expensive and fail to generate higher sales revenue. Gender-neutral key phrases generated nearly twice as many impressions as any other category of key phrases, and nearly two and half times as many clicks (p. 298).

This literature review has explored both the impact of gendered advertisements on consumer behavior and societal discourse, as well as the mindset of students and professionals in advertising fields. Based on the literature reviewed in this study, it becomes clear through gender role congruence theory that advertisements influence gender-role perceptions, buying habits and impression formation. It is separately made clear that both students and advertisers understand the societal influence of the work they produce. Lastly, gender is posited as a factor influencing the career advancement of women in the advertising industry by tokenism and situated learning theories. Very little research has been conducted about women in executive-level positions within the advertising industry. And of the studies that have been conducted, most focus on the underrepresentation of women in creative roles.

Based on the theories explored in this literature review, this study poses two central research questions related to female career advancement in the advertising



industry. *RQ1*, grounded in feminist, tokenism and structural theories, asks: *What factors contribute to, or hinder female career advancement in the advertising industry?* *RQ2*, grounded in gender schema and situated learning theories, asks: *What are the critical determinants that influence women to remain in the industry when others leave for client-side or other opportunities?*

## **Methods**

To answer the research questions posed above, this qualitative study was conducted in the form of 15 one-on-one interviews with female executives currently working in the advertising industry. Due to the client privacy stipulations inherent in the work of full-service advertising agencies, participants could not be directly observed on the job. This ruled out an ethnographic approach, which would have enabled the researcher to see female and male professionals interacting in the workplace. Interviews, on the other hand, are a “focused, purposeful conversation between two or more people” (Brennen, 2013, p. 27). For this reason, interviews were the most feasible and effective approach to gathering targeted insights about the career experiences of female advertising executives.

The goal of this research was to understand the factors that contribute to, or hinder the advancement of women in the workplace. It could not and should not focus on specific clients, or even specific employing agencies. Instead, these interviews focused on the intersecting experiences of women as they move through their careers in the advertising industry. Each interview was analyzed with consideration given to departmental role, years of experience, agency size and location. Common themes were synthesized and discussed in the findings, to explain how and why some women get ahead in the advertising field.

### **Rationale**

An interview design enables researchers to “ask questions to gather information, evaluate opinions, establish common views and understand key aspects of our lives”

(Brennen, 2013, p. 26). Some information accessed through interviews helps researchers broaden a knowledge base, while other information helps them understand alternative points (p. 27). In an interview format, participants were able to speak to their personal experiences and chart their educational and career advancement along a historical timeline. These women also offered up interpretations of their peers' advancement or stagnation in the workplace. From a constructionist theoretical orientation, reality is a socially constructed phenomenon. Viewed in this light, female executive interview respondents are important meaning-makers rather than "passive conduits for retrieving information" (Warren, 2002, p. 83).

Finally, the process for qualitative researchers is emergent, meaning that the initial plan for research could not be tightly prescribed, and some or all phases of the process changed or shifted after the researcher began to collect data (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). An interview format allowed the researcher to control the line of questioning along a fluid discussion guide. In general, researchers use three basic types of interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured open-ended conversations. This study employed a semi-structured interview approach. This method enabled the researcher to follow a predetermined and standardized set of questions, outlined in a discussion guide. Overall, it was consistent in approach, format and words. Unlike structured interviews, however, this design allowed for interruptions, improvisations and deviations from respondents. The researcher chose to vary the order of questions, and asked follow-up questions to delve into some of the topics or issues that arose in each conversation. This also allowed the interviewer to clarify answers given by the respondents (Brennen, 2013,

p. 28). Therefore, the emergent design was most evident in the flexible discussion guide discussed in the collection section below, and outlined in the appendix of this document.

### **Population, Sample and Participants**

The participant selection process was guided primarily by the work of Mallia (2009), and supplemented by information from online advertising industry organizational resources (*Advertising Career Possibilities*, 2009). This guiding study broadly selected creative women for 18 individual telephone interviews, several of whom were high-ranking creative directors at major agencies, and others who potentially could have reached that position had they not stepped off that career path in midstream. The study also included a creative recruiter and former creative manager who now work for an industry group. The subjects' prior and current positions included a breadth of work experiences: at large and small agencies, in larger and smaller advertising markets. Respondents were selected from a diverse range of U.S. locations: New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Indiana, North and South Carolina, Virginia and Georgia. Mallia (2009) experienced some difficulty in recruiting respondents, as several high-ranking creative women refused to participate, even with a guarantee of anonymity, "citing the precarious position they faced in middle age in male-dominated multinational agencies" (p. 3). This itself is a significant takeaway from these interviews.

As previously explained, advertising is an industry that exists as a niche within the larger marketing and communication field. Advertising refers to "the market communication of goods and services of various sellers" (Malefyt & Moeran, 2003, p. 2). Participants were selected from advertising agencies, the organizations that plan and create advertising for clients that consumers then see and hear across various media

platforms (p. 3). The units of analysis in this study were those individuals interviewed (i.e. female advertising executives). Interview subjects were selected from advertising agencies throughout the United States. Consideration was given to the size of the agency, and whether it is independently run or operated by a holding company (Tungate, 2013). This added richness to the variety of interviewee experiences. However, the sample size of 15 interviews in this study was not large enough to offer generalizable conclusions that distinguish agency role, size or location as factors influencing gender-based workplace experiences.

Women were selected by the department in which they work, and the rank they have achieved within their employing agency. When examining upward career mobility among women in advertising, it is necessary to define “executive-level” and “top” distinctions that qualify interviewees for participation in this study. The Advertising Educational Foundation outlines job titles for different departmental specialties (see Appendix A). This study included women from the top two categories, or the following titles: Account Management: Director of Account Services, Account Director, Group Management Supervisor; Account Planning: Executive of Account Planning, Chief Strategy Officer, Director of Planning and Development, Director of Account Planning, Director of Strategic Planning; Creative: Chief Creative Director, Creative Director, Group Creative Director, Executive Creative Director; Media: Executive Media Director, Chief Strategic Officer, Client Services Director, Executive Media Buying Director, Chief Negotiating Officer, Director of National Broadcast. *Appendix A* further outlines selection criteria and years of experience associated with each of these titles.

Drawing from Mallia's (2009) study, the author also interviewed several women who oversee hiring and promotion in the industry. Relevant positions include hiring managers, recruiters and related roles in talent services and/or human resources. The author used an adapted version of the discussion guide, as these interviews had fundamental thematic differences from those conducted with female ad executives.

Mallia (2009) focused on female advertising executives in creative roles. This thesis research introduces department as an influencing factor of female workplace experience and advancement within the advertising industry, and therefore included women from various roles in the advertising business. However, the sample size was not large enough to offer conclusive support for differences in departmental experiences.

For the purposes of participant recruitment, the author used key contacts made at previous internships with large, Midwestern and mid-sized, Southwestern advertising agencies to reach out to high-ranking individuals industry-wide. Secondly, the author relied on LinkedIn as a mineable source for contact information, job titles and education histories (The 3% Conference, 2014). See *Appendix B* for the Recruitment and Informational Brief Script and *Appendix E* for the Anonymized Interview Participants.

### **Time Frame**

These interviews took place throughout the spring semester 2017, but were consolidated into the months of March and April. This allowed for time to transcribe the interviews, synthesize the data and prepare a thesis on the topic for late spring defense and May 2017 graduation. These interviews lasted no longer than 45 minutes each.

## **Collection**

The interview format and discussion themes employed in this study were also guided primarily by the work of Mallia (2009), and supplemented by information offered up in industry publications and advertising conference papers. Due to time and budget constraints, these 45-minute semi-structured interviews were carried out over-the-phone, based on interview participants' schedules and availability. The researcher took notes throughout the discussion. With interviewee consent, these phone interviews were also audiotaped and transcribed for analysis at a later date.

The ethics of this data collection must also be considered. Interview participants were provided confidentiality in compliance with the human subjects approval received from the university's Institutional Review Board. Following the work of Mallia (2009), respondents were coded (W for woman) W1 through W15, in order to protect their identities. Each individual was identified by: region, agency type, position title, years of industry experience, educational background, marriage and parental status. See *Appendix C* for the Interview Participant Consent Form and *Appendix D* for the IRB Statement of Confidentiality.

## **Instruments**

For a breakdown of discussion topics and interview themes, see the Discussion Guide and Interview Protocol in *Appendices F* and *G*.

Brennen (2013) puts forth a framework of icebreakers and probing questions. The research interview began with a few icebreakers to engage respondents in conversations about key aspects of their lives, and to "establish an environment where questions can be asked and answered in a non-judgmental way" (p. 32). Once trust was established, the

interviews were approached as a funnel. The researcher began with broad questions and incrementally zeroed in on the pre-identified themes.

### **Rigor**

Potential limitations of interview-style research include the narrow generalizability of indirect information filtered through the views of interviewees. Also, this otherwise valuable method provides information in a designated place rather than a natural field setting. In interviews, a researcher's presence may bias responses of respondents. Lastly, being interviewed in their place of work may result in an unequal level of articulation and perceptiveness among interviewees (Creswell, 2014, p. 191). These interviews were conducted with female advertising executives who are ultimately some of the largest advocates for their respective employers. It is important to consider that it is their job to promote the agencies they work for, and to talk about the policies that are being initiated to improve the experiences of women working in advertising. It is also possible that some evaluated their careers with rose-colored glasses. From a different perspective, these limitations can also be evaluated as opportunities. As Gubrium and Holstein (2002) explain, qualitative interviewing strives to understand the meaning of information, opinions and interests in each respondent's life. It explores their feelings, emotions, experiences and values within their "deeply nuanced inner worlds" (p. 57). Acknowledging these nuances contributes to the richness of this study.

It is important to note that qualitative findings from this research approach represent the author's interpretations of the participants' reflections on their career paths, and the career paths of their peers. As Fontana (2002) explains, traditional research boundaries are blurred in the relationship between qualitative interviewer and



respondents. This research approach enables the two parties to construct empowering narratives that allow for diverse perspectives and multiple voices to emerge.

Continuing on this train of thought, it is important to consider reflexivity as a source of personal bias in qualitative research. The researcher must consider her personal background, culture and experiences as factors that may shape her interpretation, such as the themes she advances in her interviews, and the meaning she ascribes to her findings (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). This means explicitly identifying biases, values and personal background, such as gender, history, culture and socioeconomic status (p. 187). This 22-year-old, Caucasian researcher considers her upbringing in an upper-middle class Midwestern family, and education at a large state university, as factors that have shaped her personal and academic growth. Acknowledging these biases also means remembering the researcher's previous experience in numerous departments at advertising agencies in three cities across the U.S. (including Columbia, Chicago and Phoenix) has shaped the direction of this study. Peers of the researcher have also shared experiences about internships in different parts of the country (including Milwaukee, Dallas, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., New York, Los Angeles, Kansas City and St. Louis).

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis in qualitative interviews begins during the conversation itself (Creswell, 2014, p. 195). The researcher analyzed earlier interviews in conjunction with what respondents were saying, making notes as conversation progressed if important and insightful parallels arose. Following the interviews, the researcher transcribed each audiotaped interview into text. The researcher then examined the transcripts (and accompanying notes made during corresponding interviews) to code the data along

common themes and patterns in the interviews. The interview transcripts were analyzed relative to the respondents' identifying factors: region, agency type, position title, years of industry experience, educational background, marriage and parental status. This helped inform the emergent similarities and differences in participants' career experiences. The interview transcripts have been omitted from this published thesis in an effort to ensure anonymity for study participants.

As Creswell (2014) explains, qualitative researchers build their patterns, categories and themes from the bottom up by organizing the data into increasingly abstract units of information (p. 186). This is an inductive process that begins with a thematic interview structure, and builds to a more comprehensive set of findings along those themes. In order to arrive at themes, the researcher employed open coding to generate categories of information, and then selective coding to explicate a story from the interconnections of each category (p. 196). This process is explained in more detail in the "Analysis" section that follows.

## Analysis

Research question 1 asked, “What factors contribute to, or hinder female career advancement in the advertising industry?” Research question 2 asked, “What are the critical determinants that influence women to remain in the industry when others leave for client-side or other opportunities?” There are several units of analysis at play in this dynamic thesis: gender bias in the workplace, hindering and supporting factors to career advancement, and career and personal decisions to remain or leave the agency-side of the advertising industry. Ad women face a variety of challenges in the industry, some gender-specific and some generally characteristic of the industry itself. In the past year and a half, the topic of women in advertising, and specifically the upper-ranks of the field, has dominated headlines in publications like *Adweek* and *Ad Age*. This study investigates the perceptions of executive women, as well as HR and talent specialists working in the field.

“So my path was semi-unplanned” is the best summation of female advertising executives’ perceptions of career advancement in the advertising industry. There are diverging parties of thought with regard to the persistence of sexism in advertising agencies. However, the interview participants in this study unanimously agreed that the business has to keep evolving its inclusion practices, in terms of gender, ethnic, geographic, educational, religious and political diversity.

The 15 ad women interviewed for this study came from varying backgrounds in the business: Account, Creative, Digital, Experiential, HR, Media, Planning and Search. In evaluating the transcripts and synthesizing themes from these conversations, it quickly

became apparent that the findings couldn't be sorted into "Factors that Contribute to Advancement" and "Factors that Hinder Advancement." For this reason, the findings below are organized into three sections, containing themes within which often-contradictory views are juxtaposed.

### **Gender-Specific Factors**

The focus of responses in this category is on the gender factors in the advertising business that influence the career advancement of women alongside their male counterparts. These gender-specific areas trended toward three overarching motifs: relationship-status and motherhood, a boys' club atmosphere and pressures women inflict on themselves in their careers.

**Relationship-status and motherhood.** This topic arose unprompted in every single interview, often around the discussion of work-life balance or career moves between agencies. Interviewees with children discussed the challenge of unpredictable schedules and difficulty dedicating 100 percent to their teams in the office and their families at home. Interviewees without children expressed the general sentiment, "I don't know how they do it. They are superwomen in my book" (W12). One interviewee went as far as saying that seeking balance as a career mom is "one of the biggest challenges women face" (W3). In reflecting on the career paths of mothers in the business, one woman said they are at a definite "disadvantage," but explained, "The ones I've seen do it most successfully are the ones who do speak up and set boundaries" (W11). Another said it is all about "[making] tough decisions." This interviewee explained, "I hate to say it, but sometimes you're half-assing things. You don't get to spend the quality time that

you want with your kids, and you don't get to spend the time that you need at work" (W12).

Across the board, ad women expressed the importance of a strong "partner" or "spouse" if committed to a romantic relationship. One interviewee put this especially eloquently, explaining, "it seems that the higher you go, the more you need that partner who can help you navigate life" (W1). This includes couples with or without children, each juggling demanding careers. One woman made the observation that "the women I've been around at a C-level, more often than not, they have a spouse (and may have kids, too), who is extremely supportive and flexible in their own careers or work arrangements" (W1). There was a general agreement across these interviews that partners must take turns to jump at opportunities. One interviewee decided she wanted to attend graduate school to transition into the ad business, which involved moving from Denver to Texas. The interviewee's spouse arranged for a transfer to a different office, where the couple remained until this interviewee completed her degree (W2). Another interviewee confirmed the importance of a "supportive spouse," expressing how fortunate she feels to have a partner who has been "flexible" in moving twice for her job alone (W5). A SVP, Director of Shopper Marketing explained that her husband works from home, and can handle things if she gets pulled into a meeting and can't pick up her children from school as planned (W6).

When it comes to everyday challenges as a woman in the business, it was described that "you go through periods of unpredictability in scheduling" (W1). Several interviewees discussed the ebbs and flows of the business: "In a new business pitch, or a client fire drill, your schedule goes right out the window. And those turn out to be 70-

hour weeks to get those things done” (W1). One woman explained that she “fought for it” when she was a new mom, asking to have one day to work from home (W7). Her client was not local, so she could “be on conference calls and clean the house at the same time.” Navigating these ebbs and flows is particularly difficult for working moms who have to plan ahead and make childcare arrangements. When schedules change and women have to stay late at work, they need to have backup support.

Ad women with children expressed a change in perspective and how they prioritize work (W2, W4, W8). One interviewee is currently freelancing as she raises her 7-month-old baby. She explained, “Right now, I’m saying my child is more important than having money, or going on vacation, or buying shit, because it is. My kid is the most important thing” (W8). This same interviewee expressed a difference in perspective, looking back on some of the agencies she worked for in the past. She explained, “I don’t think you can work at some big agencies that are making the Super Bowl commercials... Obviously, people do work at those places, I’m just not sure many of them are women who have small children” (W8). She expanded on this point, reflecting that “there really weren’t that many higher-level women who were married or had kids. People just couldn’t work those kind of hours” (W8).

One interviewee without children suspected that there must be a “tremendous guilt” in determining what gives in a stressful situation. She further explained, “You feel like you’re letting somebody down, either your kids or your work family” (W1). An interviewee with children confirmed this sentiment, explaining that “there absolutely is guilt associated with it, but you have to make an effort to be with your children when you can” (W2). She explained that technology has made this possible, and described working

remotely from an iPad at her daughters' diving meets. This topic is discussed later in a section analyzing how technology has changed the concept of work-life balance, as well as shifting time demands inherent in the advertising business.

An interviewee without children expressed that not having a family has “enabled me to focus more on things continuously” (W1). Later on in the conversation, the same interviewee expressed finding joy in being able to give more to her career because she didn't choose to have children. Another woman without children described it as an opportunity to take more risks and sometimes reap greater rewards. She consciously took a step back in her career, including a \$40,000 pay cut, to learn more about the emerging digital side of the business. She explained, “It was a chance I could take. I didn't have a family to worry about. It was myself and a cat, so I think it made it easier to take those chances” (W3).

Women, with and without children, discussed the extreme importance of supporting working parents. Interviewees unanimously agreed that companies need to offer benefits to women that allow them to continue their career trajectory after taking time off to raise their newborns:

“When it comes to attracting and retaining female talent, we need to build better workplaces that account for, and empower mothers to come back to work, and not lose their career track when they take two or three months off for maternity leave” (W11).

Maternity leave and family-oriented policies have multiple components, including flexible hours and benefits suitable for working parents, as well as fair pay so that both men and women have an equal opportunity to stay home and parent.

Several interviewees explained that women who leave the industry to raise their children are at a disadvantage when they try to reenter the workforce. One interviewee

remarked that “when they’re ready to come back into the workforce, they can’t find an opening back. It forces them to leave the industry and pursue something else” (W1). This same theme applies for women who go on maternity leave for as little as three months. As one woman explained, “the guy who is gone [on paternity leave] for two weeks is not completely disconnected. He’s gonna come back and pick up where he left off and be just fine” (W11). She equated this two-week paternity leave to the length of a regular vacation. Women, on the other hand, will face a workplace upon their return in which so much has changed. Women who don’t get retrained after their leave “lose ground and visibility for a quarter of a year, and their promotion paths get derailed” (W11).

Additionally, a variety of factors influence companies’ maternity leave policies. One interviewee described a former telecommunications employer with “pretty stunning” benefits, where women could take a year off and “come back to the company with your old job, or a guaranteed job of like level and pay in a different division” (W2). A lot of that, she clarified, is because it was a large corporation. “When you are a publicly-traded company, you get that scrutiny” (W2). On a different side of the spectrum, a SVP, Director of Planning said she’d still go into the agency while on maternity leave, and “was happy to do it” (W10). Some new parents approach their leaves in this way, working flexibly between home and office so as not to miss out or fall behind at work.

In addition to maternity leave, interviewees expressed that agencies need to put policies in place that ease this transition back into the workplace. Many agencies have created women’s initiatives, female leadership groups and new mom programs (W2, W4, W6, W15). This push is three-fold: from women in the agency, from CEOs who are sensitive to supporting families, and finally, from holding companies encouraging



conversations about career advancement and issues women face in the ad industry (W2). One interviewee explained how important it is to have senior leadership, male or female, which is “invested in female leadership.” By providing a “top-notch maternity leave policy,” this woman has seen her company “turn the tide and keep women here, engaged in the workforce” (W4).

Some interviewees expressed that they are better moms being in the working world (W2, 6, 12). After taking a year leave to stay at home with her premie-twins, one interviewee suffered the tragic loss of her infant daughter to a rare pulmonary vein stenosis disease. When she and her husband were considering having another child, she said, “I can’t do this. I have to get me back and go back to work. I feel like I’ll be a better mom. I’m not meant to be a stay-at-home mom,” (W6). She was able to find sanctuary in her work. This same interviewee later elaborated, saying, “I feel like I am a better mom, fulfilled by my focus of work” (W6). One interviewee without children cited several friends as examples of mothers who really thrive at work because they couldn’t be stay-at-home moms. She explained, “They would go crazy if they were cooped up, and they enjoy a professional environment where they can have adult conversations and work. Then, they’re able to go home at night and be that awesome mom” (W12).

Relationship-status and motherhood were expressed to be hugely influential factors in some of the career decisions women make in the advertising industry. At the end of the day, the unpredictable nature of the business makes it tough to make plans outside of the office. Striving for a balance between work and personal commitments can be difficult for ad women, but leaning on family and friends and knowing when and how to set boundaries can ease this challenge. Also, advertising agencies need to do their part

to retain talented working mothers by continually improving leave and retraining policies, as well as offering women's initiatives and continuing to encourage conversation in this space.

**Boys' club atmosphere.** "I'm not going to lie, the world of Mad Men is alive and well" (W3). This was a common sentiment shared by interviewees, citing the industry's roots in client entertainment and the "two martini" lunch. One interviewee said, "I feel like the negative gender-related experiences I've had in the industry occurred at [male-led] agencies" (W5). However, not all interviewees felt as strongly about this male-dominant dynamic in their workplaces. One woman described an older, lead creative male who has a "very traditional" way of thinking, and "hasn't really evolved." He is creating a ripple in the creative department, but is somewhat of a "lone soldier" (W7).

Another interviewee described her experience in a Southern agency, which was "old-school Texas male" and "an interesting blend of extreme sexism and also incredible support for women" (W1). The woman worked under a female president, and quickly learned that the women around her "were smart as hell" and had figured out how to deal with the gender component so they could focus on their work (W1). Sometimes, this means learning to play with the boys:

"I learned very early on to play golf, drink scotch and smoke cigars. And go to strip clubs and be ok with it. Otherwise, you get left out of pertinent conversations and client meetings where decisions are being made... So, if you want to have a voice, you've got to figure out how to play with the boys" (W3).

This same interviewee explained, "It's all about playing to your assets." She described a friend who always wears a dress with a zipper on it. The zipper doesn't move and the dress isn't slutty, but the illusion is enough. Men want to see her again. This interviewee has adapted her friend's example into her own approach. As she explained, "This is one

of the areas where women do have a leg up. If you're going to stare at my boobs, great. I'm going to make sure you're giving me business" (W3).

Oftentimes, the types of clients agencies work with will determine "the type of people you are working with" (W8). In certain client industries especially, women have to learn how to make themselves relevant against their male co-workers. In describing her role as President of the Sports and Experiential vertical, one interviewee said it is "very male-dominated." In her words, this "doesn't mean there isn't room for women, but you have to force the issue." When it's "a bunch of guys standing around having drinks all buddy-buddy talking about football," women need to figure out how to "break into that conversation." That means a whole lot of preparation, reading the Sports Business Journal and "[inserting] yourself into it" (W2). Alcohol is another client business that tends to skew male in advertising agencies. As one interviewee explained, "most of the people on their Account team are dudes, because the dudes are the guys selling the beer." She expressed discontent with this established male-centric culture:

"I used to get pissed because I love beer, but it is a category I haven't been able to work in because I was passed up for guys. I feel that I could talk the talk just as well as the person with the penis" (W8).

Sometimes, no matter how often they raise their voices, and regardless of how informed they are on a product category, women get passed up for men on alcohol and sports-related advertising business.

Sometimes, sexism in the workplace is explicit. Today, however, these occurrences trend toward less obvious "micro-aggressions" (W5). When attending executive meetings, one EVP explained, "It is assumed that I'm the one who is going to order lunch" (W3). In another agency with a male CEO, as well as male heads of

Account and Creative, “there was a deference to the men in the room” (W5). This interviewee further explained that her female department head “didn’t speak up as often and didn’t have as much of a voice.” She described an overarching feeling that “your opinions weren’t quite as important.” Another interviewee explained:

“The lesson of the women who were growing up in corporate American when I did—you have to be 110 percent. If there’s a guy who is awesome and 90 percent, to get ahead you’re going to have to be just a little bit better” (W1).

At the end of the day, women have to be really good at what they do to get on certain promotion paths in the advertising business.

Both sexism and support for women seem to come from the top-down. One interviewee suggested, “So much of it depends on the culture and the agency leadership” (W2). A Human Resources Coordinator explained that her agency’s holding company is ideating and steering several new moms’ initiatives, so the holding company is “definitely leading this as it filters from the top-down to all of its agencies” (W15).

Another woman said, “There can be an element of sexism or favoritism” that “depends on your team and your agency and what people get away with” (W8). An EVP, Planning Insights and Performance Science suggested that this male-dominant dynamic is “a reflection of the creative industry, at large,” citing music and film as areas that are “not great places for women” (W1). Early in one interviewee’s agency career, there was a gentleman who walked around to make sure the women were wearing skirts (W2).

But, tides are continuing to change. One interviewee was optimistic about the future, stating, “There are several people fighting hard” and “lots of people are kicking back against it, but it is a huge boys’ club” (W1). Policies are changing that aim to even the playing field for women. It used to be that men would “do the scotch drinking, strip

club, martini lunches, golf thing and women were excluded” (W3). Now there are “rules about what agencies can spend on clients,” and what isn’t seen as bribery or kickbacks. When people follow those rules, things change for the better (W3). It is also important to consider that the boys’ club atmosphere may negatively impact men working in the advertising business, who are uncomfortable with prescribed language and behaviors espoused by their male co-workers.

**Female- and self-inflicted pressures.** A final gender-specific topic that arose in these interviews is the idea that “women are really tough on women,” both themselves and their female co-workers (W3). This theme often arose toward the end of conversations, when the interviewees were prompted to explain what could have made their paths in advertising easier. One interviewee put this simply, saying:

“The one thing, maybe, that would have made things easier, is probably me. I am the one who puts the pressure on myself to deliver. If I gave myself a break and said, ‘You don’t have to be perfect,’ that would have made it easier” (W2).

Another woman said she would advise younger women getting into the industry “to be easier on ourselves and to be kinder to ourselves” (W5). This VP, Director of Digital Strategy expressed a sense of guilt when she isn’t in the office as late or producing as much work as someone else. She advised that you shouldn’t “feel guilty for wanting a life outside of your work” (W5). Another interviewee backed up this point, saying that once a woman has proven herself and has a degree of credibility, “You have to find balance, and remember that sometimes it’s ok to say no to work” (W6). A VP, Account Director wrapped this up, explaining that she wished she hadn’t worked 24/7, and had led a more well rounded life. As she put it, “You can stunt yourself when all you’re doing is working, working, working” (W12).

However, by standing up for themselves in certain agencies, women set themselves as a target. One interviewee put this particularly well: “In most of their careers, at some point, these women are called ‘bitches’ because we’ve gotta fight and be tough and hold our ground. We don’t want to be walked on or discounted in meetings” (W3). This same interviewee expressed a sense of competition that arises between women in advertising agencies. She explained a “reverse sexism” in which women “screw each other’s careers more than you see men do” (W3). She summarized, “I think we get discounted more internally than by clients... It is just so unnecessary how women do it. You would think women would help support women” (W3). Another interviewee expressed a preference toward working on a team of men, because “you can cut back on some of the drama you might get otherwise” (W8). That drama, she explained, arises when “you have the level of competition or cattiness or just girls being girls” (W8).

A variety of gender-specific factors influence the experiences of female executives in the advertising industry. Motherhood and relationship-status often influence decisions to remain in, or leave the advertising industry. Though the boys’ club atmosphere of the business may be less evident than in the past, women continue to grapple with an ingrained culture that has historically favored their male co-workers. Finally, women are tough on themselves and the women around them.

### **Industry-Specific Factors**

The focus of responses in this category is on industry factors in the advertising business that influence the career advancement of women alongside their male counterparts. These industry-specific topics trended toward five overarching motifs: a

focus on skill set, differences between advertising departments, hiring and promotional practices, the role of mentors and the time-demanding nature of the field.

**A focus on skill set and qualification.** Skill set frequently arose in these interviews as something that takes, and should continue to take, precedence over hiring for diversity. Diversity is an important component of group intelligence, and diversity of thought and experience contribute to creative ideation. However, interviewees in this study suggested that diversity isn't always the most important factor to consider when adding an individual to a team:

“I think it is important to know when to put that topic aside, and when to not make it a factor... We spend so much time focusing on diversity, in gender and ethnic diversity, and diversity of backgrounds. Sometimes it is important to say, ‘When is that a non-issue or a non-factor?’ We have to focus on who has the right background and skill set, and what chemistry is going to work well together. It is intangible what is going to pair well together” (W4).

One interviewee described working on a female-heavy senior team. She said that this is “not by choice or design,” but that “it just kind of ends up that way when you hire the best person for the job” (W2). When it comes to hiring the best person for a job, employers must consider many different factors. An EVP pinpointed two of the vital factors interviewees described: “We don't care who they are if they can do great work and fit in culturally with our people” (W3).

This practice of hiring for skill set and cultural fit may be more pronounced in small agencies. One woman suggested, “Especially at some of the small boutique agencies, people are more concerned about getting the right person than checking boxes off in terms of gender” (W10). A SVP in a smaller agency explained, “We tend to hire very smart people, and since we're small, haven't paid attention to... ‘Do we have African Americans working for us? Or Hispanics?’ We've never really thought about

that. It's been more about hiring the right people" (W3). Another interview described hiring as a balancing act of finding "complementary forces who support one another," and do not duplicate all the same strengths (W4). A Talent Specialist put this especially well, explaining:

"But it is always talent and skill set first, and then we look back and wonder if there was anyone else who had equal qualifications. At the end of the day, we don't want that to be the focus. Talent and fit for the agency is overall what we look for. We can't afford to hire someone to be a girl on a certain team. It just won't work" (W9).

At the end of the day, financial pressures and what is going to move the bottom-line determine and guide hiring practices.

Another angle that must be addressed in this conversation about skill set and qualification is a sense of insincere diversity. A VP, Director of Digital Strategy reflected on some of the opportunities she was given at past agencies, and questioned, "How much of it is because I'm smart and a good speaker, and how much of it is you wanting me to be a female face that makes the agency look good?" This same interviewee later expressed that she hates to say she's "overcompensating" when she takes opportunities that come to her as a woman working in Digital:

"I have to show I'm a really great employee and it doesn't matter that I am a woman or not. I recognize that I can't disentangle that from who I am. It is a fact of life, and kind of a double-edged sword" (W5).

Women appear to face an internal battle in taking opportunities that may advance their careers, but initially come their way because they are "a female face" (W5).

**Departmental differences.** "Account Management, Planning, Research, Production... they all tend to have a high degree of females. It's in Creative where the problem still exists" (W1). One woman worked in an agency with about 300 Creatives,



where only six were female (W3). Another interviewee concurred with these statements, suggesting, “There are far fewer Creative females” and guessed “it is probably 75-25 male to female” (W2). Many women share this view, that there are a few departmental “holdouts” in the industry that seem to employ fewer women. This is especially pronounced in higher ranks. At many “big advertising networks... inevitably the senior Creatives that we run across are male” (W2). When asked why Creative doesn’t seem to be adapting with the rest of the industry, one interviewee said, “I think there are just not enough women who are going into that side of the business” (W10). This topic will be further addressed in the “Hiring, promotion and retention” section that follows.

Some interviewees suggested these departmental differences exist due to ingrained personality differences and skill sets between men and women:

“There is a natural skill set that women have developed in a way different than men inherently, and that brings a really important balance to a group of people. We help people rally around a central problem or assignment. There’s a skill set that women have in bringing people together and articulating to work toward. Internally in an agency, that’s huge” (W4).

A SVP, Director of Planning suggested that advertising tends to skew female, “and it probably has to do with communicating—women being stronger communicators or more comfortable communicating” (W10). A VP, Account Director said women tend to be “much more organized, detailed, on the ball and Type A” (W12).

An interviewee working in digital expressed a sense of responsibility as “one of the few women voices” in the field. Digital is an area that tends to skew male, so she continues to inform herself on changes so as not “to misrepresent women in our industry in the tech-related field (W5). This interviewee further described Media as an industry where “there are a lot of women” (W5). She made several observations related to her

move to the Digital side of Media: “A lot of people are getting into Digital with coding, or with ad tech and data strategy. There are far fewer women, and I feel that” (W5). This VP, Director of Digital Strategy started working in a media agency that was “primarily female-led,” and now she is increasingly “dabbling in a space with far fewer women” (W5). When prompted to explain this culture gap in Digital advertising, this interviewee suggested it is a “more technology-driven space.” There are fewer female coders than male coders, and this tends to carry over into ad tech. She summarized, “There are more men working in the technical fields than there are women.”

Media and Search are emerging areas in advertising that continue to evolve at a rapid pace. For this reason, they seem to be departments in which women move up more quickly. An interviewee in Search reiterated these same points, suggesting “technology is heavily lopsided for men” (W11). Diversity is “super critical in a Search practice because of how many different areas we need to have expertise in.” Because Search is changing so rapidly, “not one person on our team can be an expert in all those areas” and agencies “need to leverage peoples’ different strengths to make up a whole.” This interviewee reasoned the unique gender make-up of Search teams, explaining:

“I think development in general is generations of society suggesting that women are not equipped to do work in STEM fields and that that's a man's job. So, they default to roles that are focused on relationships, and therefore end up in Client Engagement. This is painting with a broad brush and I'm overgeneralizing, but that is historically what has happened. So when you get a field like that lacks a clear division of men and women, I don't know why that is, other than it is made up of so many pieces. So whether you're good at relationships, or writing and creative, or the technical component, there is something for everyone in this field” (W11).

This lends search the “luxury of having a great balance” of men and women (W11).

Even in Account Services, which heavily skews female, a gender imbalance exists that favors men over their female co-workers as they move up in the ranks. One interviewee explained her frustration, suggesting, “In Account and in Media, the majority of people I see, especially from junior to mid-level are women” (W12). She juxtaposed the strength of women in the ranks to the low visibility of women in the C-suite:

“In the management roles for both Media and Account, I see more men than women. I always find this super fascinating, because there are so many females in the lower to mid-level range but when you get to the very top, it’s mostly male” (W12).

A Human Resources Coordinator pointed out a similar imbalance at her consumer engagement agency: “I would say we are honestly half-and-half female and male. As you go further up into senior titles, it is definitely male-heavy” (W15). Another interviewee offered a similar summary of these departmental imbalances, but said, “If there is a barrier there, you have to find a way to get over it. If there is not a way to get over it, then you’re probably not in the right place” (W2).

**Hiring, promotion and retention.** “Advertising is super incestuous; everyone knows everyone” (W8). Hiring practices in the business stand out as a primary factor to explain the gender imbalance across departments in some advertising agencies. A Talent Specialist explained the following:

“I think advertising is such a tight community, and turnover isn’t frowned upon but rather it is encouraged for you to check out other agencies and work on different clients. So people have a strong network within the advertising community and referrals are huge. When I started, my boss told me that 52 percent of our hires in 2015 were referrals. I would say that remained pretty consistent this past year” (W9).

This same interviewee described the hiring process for top talent out of universities: “For our entry-level openings, we really try to exhaust our intern pool before we do anything

else.” Aside from that, the Talent Specialist suggested, “we are not big on university recruitment.” On the Creative side, this agency strictly searches portfolio schools (W9).

In this light, it all comes down to having great relationships with the professors educating the next generation of advertising professionals. One interviewee explained how the importance of relationships persists in attaining a second or third job in the field:

“In advertising, and especially in Creative, you tend to hire people you know by reputation. It is a little bit different when you’re breaking in. At the entry-level, I think there probably are a high-degree of women in advertising Creative roles. I don’t know the point at which it begins to filter out, but at some point, certainly for the more senior roles, you’re hiring on reputation and people you know. I think that unless it’s a conscious effort, we just perpetuate that comfort-level and powerbase” (W1).

This supports the findings of several gender studies on homophily in the hiring of Creative and Account Services professionals. These studies suggest people tend to feel comfortable hiring individuals similar to themselves. However, several interviewees suggested that the advertising industry is beginning to frown upon homophily. Agencies are increasingly seeing the value in hiring people who come from different backgrounds and walks of life. This topic is discussed in more depth in a later thematic section on the “General Push for Diversity.”

So much of the competition that arises in advertising, both inter- and intra-agency, occurs because hoards of talented individuals are competing for the same promotions. One EVP described working at several agencies that had a deeply ingrained culture of fear. She previously worked at a large, well-known advertising agency where “you’re told you can’t go on vacation and you have to work because there are 100 people waiting for your job” (W3). In order to combat this problem, this woman is working with her agency to create development plans to help people know where they’re going.”

Otherwise, she explained, “Everyone lives from a point of fear, not knowing why they’re here and how to get from point A to B” (W3). A Talent Specialist reiterated this point, explaining the importance of “making everyone feel that professional development and personal growth is going to happen in their career” (W9). This interviewee’s agency has a “super organized process” that tailors specific goals to each individual employee so they aren’t left wondering “when the next time they’ll get promoted or when the next time they’ll get reviewed” (W9). A Human Resources Coordinator described a new initiative at her consumer engagement agency which will offer all employees a “set career path, or mapping guide” that explains “how to get to the next level.” She explained that this can be a difficult thing to navigate in advertising due to the unstable nature of client relationships:

“In other industries, they have more of a retainer so they know where money is coming from, and they can project financials in the next up to five years. But in the advertising world, we could lose a client tomorrow or the scope of work could be drastically reduced. So, with career pathing, it is a little different because it is not set in stone, 100 percent, this is how you get to the next level” (W15).

In this light, advertising agencies face a challenge in offering their employees a sense of where their careers are going, and what timeframe they should expect. This same interviewee explained that agencies are willing to work with employees and offer that mapping, but “just want their employees to stay longer.” She followed this up, saying:

“I think a lot of employees come in and don’t know where they’re going. They get anxious and scared, seeing their friends with more money and better titles. So, they jump before their employer can invest in them and let them know how much they care about them” (W15).

It is a two-way street. Employers need to show that they care, and employees need to trust that training, development and promotion will come with time.

Agencies face a talent or brain drain when they fail to provide these growth opportunities and outline promotion pathways for their employees. Many advertising professionals, with no scope or idea of what their career advancement path might look like, move over to the client-side of the business. In addition to providing development plans and clear routes for advancement, advertising agencies need to invest in their employees, male and female. They must constantly provide development opportunities so employees can hone their skills. One interviewee put this idea particularly well:

“I think it is making sure that everyone has the same opportunity to build the skills that they need. It’s not giving everyone the same seat at the table, because they have to be qualified. It is giving everyone the chances to build those skills and earn that seat at the table. They all have an equal say because they’ve all worked to get there. It’s more about giving people tools and opportunities and attention to get on an equal playing field” (W4).

Some women leave the business because they don’t feel they have the same opportunities as their male co-workers. It is also important to recognize that employees with tenure add value to agencies. Economically, it is smart for agencies to invest in their employees. As one Human Resources Coordinator explained, “If someone leaves, we spend so much money and time training new employees. So, if we invest in our employees early and give them opportunities and promotions, they’re more likely to stay” (W15).

However, it is important to note that a variety of factors can influence women’s decisions to move over the client-side. An SVP, Management Director explained the following:

“I think a lot of it is the work-life balance thing. It is probably a derivative of the tension and stress that come along with the job. If you’re working on some kind of new business, it’s pretty intense and the stakes are high. I do think that may be one of the reasons. On the client-side, people tend to leave a little earlier in the evening. There are often decent benefits on that side, as well. Or people are just ready for a change at some point. The advertising business can be pretty high stress” (W13).

For some, client-side is a great alternative to the long hours and often less attractive benefits offered by advertising agencies.

Age is another factor that impacts the hiring and promotion paths for both men and women. One interviewee suggested that Creative is “tough to be in as you age. I’ve made this point to several of my friends who are creative directors that you seldom see a lot of people over 40” (W1). At this stage, people have morphed into Strategy, moved over to the client-side or left the industry altogether. This area of research ties back to the findings summarized in the section on motherhood. Women often leave the business because they are unable to manage the crazy, ever-changing schedules characteristic of the advertising industry. One interviewee suggested “the challenge is that we do lose talent, either to people going home full-time, or that they will leave and go client-side” (W4). Another interviewee reiterated this point, explaining:

“I also know a lot of people who have left advertising by the time they’re my age, especially women who have gone client-side to have more freedom with their hours. And they can’t have a family and be on call 24/7 for their job” (W8).

When these women decide to go back to work, they’re put in “a whole other category of over-40” (W8). At this point, these women are “looked upon [differently] by teams and co-workers” because advertising is a “young business—drinking, hip, cool people rather than the older, settled workers” (W8).

Millennials, on the other hand, are shaping the industry in very different directions. As one woman explained, “Younger people are growing up in a different world than I did at the beginning of my career... And people are more vocal about, “Why the heck didn’t you invite me to that meeting? There is a bigger voice” (W3). They are navigating the job search differently, and negotiating for more benefits and higher

salaries than their predecessors. Several interviewees hinted that younger individuals entering the business have no problem raising their voices and demanding more out of the industry, sometimes to a fault. One SVP, Regional Growth Director expressed that she wished she had started advocating for herself earlier in her career: “You won’t get anything if you don’t ask for it... If you feel like you need something for yourself, whether it’s a raise, or more responsibility or work-life balance, advocate for yourself earlier” (W7). She followed up, explaining that Millennials don’t seem to have such a difficult time doing this: “Some people entering the workforce feel so entitled, and you’re like, ‘Whoa, you have to earn that a little bit’” (W7). It’s about striking a healthy balance in this area. Regardless, Millennials are asking for more as they enter the ad business. One SVP, Director of Planning expressed that she has seen her agency “become more flexible” in order to “continue to recruit the talent we need” (W10). This has meant making accommodations that are coming to define the Millennial workplace:

“We’ve realized that it is better to have great talent and people who are really good at what they do and be a little flexible with schedules, versus not allowing them to work from home every now and then. That’s better than having someone who can come in and work all of the hours, but is just so-so” (W10).

Flexispace and flexitime are increasingly important offerings in Millennial workplaces.

Advertising agencies have to navigate this new space in order to continue to attract talented employees to the business.

Promotion is a tricky topic in the advertising industry. An interviewee currently freelancing as she raises her child offered an interesting perspective on how the industry has changed since she took her first job:

“I think advertising can be hard. You make no money for a long time. Nowadays, kids coming out of school make more than I made in the first five years I worked, or they demand more. Everyone talks about the Millennials... You just have to



work. You have to shut up and do it. You have to learn all of the ropes. They don't promote people just to promote in advertising. You have to do every bit of your job and then the job ahead of you before you get promoted, because you don't really know what you're getting into in some cases" (W8).

Promotion means working hard and advocating for yourself, but younger generations will have to navigate this process in a way that doesn't alienate their superiors. Put simply, Millennials need to respect their bosses and understand the level of work their superiors put into their own careers to earn their status in the business.

On the topic of recent graduates entering the advertising workforce, several interviewees insisted that earlier outreach would be key in attracting diverse populations to work in the business. This surprising theme emerged unprompted in several interviews. Female executives explained how outreach provides an opportunity to showcase advertising as a potential career path for students before they enter university programs. One interviewee offered this interesting perspective:

"Having been a teacher in a largely black school, I don't think we will ever close the gap unless we start talking to people much earlier on. There is a whole host of people who don't see this as an opportunity for them or a career path within the realm of possibility. Once we start doing more outreach to people earlier in high school, and even junior high school, and connect them with people in the industry who look like them and have that shared experience... I think that is where we have to start. Starting in college is far too late" (W5).

A Director of Organic Search reiterated this point, seeing community outreach as a chance to "expose younger, more diverse high schoolers to the kinds of things that are possibilities for them when they go to school" (W11). Another interviewee expressed great concern in the underrepresentation of minorities industry-wide, explaining that it all comes down to exposure: "It is about bringing people in earlier so they know it is something they can study and a field that they can work in" (W10). According to a SVP,

Director of Planning, the 4A's has several programs that are tackling this issue by actively recruiting and mentoring individuals from diverse backgrounds.

On a separate but related note, several interviewees expressed interest in doing more outreach with advertising programs at universities. Guest lectures, workshops, career planning seminars, creative brief surgery and portfolio reviews are just a few ways seasoned professionals can train advertising students on up-to-date industry skills. One interviewee was especially adamant that "schools should get more involved with the ad agencies" (W11). This means bringing professionals in as guest lecturers "to expose people to the career paths that may interest the students." Agencies are beginning to develop curriculum and partner with universities to "help train students with the skills that we know we need, and are in demand right now." When those students graduate, "they're better equipped with real life skills for real companies" (W11). It is important to note, however, that this is far easier said than done. This same interviewee explained, "Colleges are bureaucratic and they're public institutions so government funding is involved. It is really hard to update whole curriculums as fast and frequently as our business changes, especially on the digital side" (W11). Many advertising programs hire professors who formerly worked in the industry. The longer they work as professors, the more removed they are from the business and the less exposure they have to innovation and change. Maintaining strong ties with advertising agencies may help universities supplement the education students receive in the classroom.

When considered in conjunction, hiring, promotion and retention are hugely influential in molding the careers of ad women. Professionals move around a lot in the business, to work at different agencies, gain exposure to diverse teams and build

experience in new client sectors. For this reason, professional ties and referrals are often the deciding factor in who gets the job. Hiring out of colleges often hinges on professors' industry connections with agencies. Since people move around so often, they sometimes miss opportunities to map out their careers or leverage professional development opportunities from their employers. Without this training, or a sense of where their careers are going, some women see no alternative to moving over to the client-side for stable employment and better benefits. Advertising is a business that tends to skew young, and Millennials are shaking up the industry by demanding more from their employers in terms of salary and flexible work arrangements. In order to keep these young people interested in the field, and to attract more diverse employees, advertising agencies are doing more outreach at the high school and college levels.

**Role models and mentors.** Depending on which report you look at, there are different figures on the percentage of women employed in the advertising industry. Though there are some common trends, even the concentration of women across departments seems to vary from agency to agency. One thing interviewees could agree on, however, is that there simply aren't enough women at the top of the business. As one EVP explained, "A list came out last year, like 'The Best 32 Women in Advertising.' I mean, you couldn't even get to 40 or 100? I remember thinking to myself, 'This is really sad. It is the exact same people that keep getting talked about'" (W3). Names like Wendy Clark, Nancy Hill, Susan Credle, Tamara Ingram and Chloe Gottlieb grace the covers of advertising publications, and these women seem to participate in panels about creating a culture of diversity in agencies on a weekly basis. But this begs the question, what about the ad women moving up in the ranks?

One interviewee discussed how women find it difficult to take recognition for their accomplishments, feeling awkward about being published or honored for their work on notable campaigns. She shared a conversation she had with the president of her agency, a woman she looks to as a career and personal mentor. Her mentor explained:

“You have to show that to other people, because if you feel uncomfortable about that or don’t show that to younger people... I mean, they need idols to look up to, and to see that you’re in the ‘Who’s Who’ of whatever” (W6).

She summarized that you can “be humble about it and not toot your own horn,” but it is so important to “show people what you’re doing” (W6). She followed up on this subject, saying that it is not a matter of females being as qualified as their male co-workers, but rather that “they’re just not getting the recognition because the rest of the leadership is all male” (W6).

Many interviewees indicated that they had really strong male mentors early on in their careers. When someone invests time and energy coaching them to be leaders, or simply recognizes talent and ability in a young ad woman, it propels women’s careers forward. This can occur in many forms: career mentorship and sponsorship, references for promotions or career moves, and placement on accounts with growth opportunity. One interviewee explained a situation in which a boss wrote an incredible reference letter when she was looking to relocate to a new city: “That gave me such confidence that I really was good and really could do it. It set me off on a path of having more confidence in my abilities and what I could do in the space” (W2). Today, this woman is the President of Sports and Experiential at her agency. Another interviewee expressed a very powerful sentiment in recognizing how her male mentors shaped how she viewed her own position in the advertising industry: “I think this is part of the reason I never defined

myself as a woman in this industry; I simply defined myself as a person in this industry” (W1). In addition to empowering women, the value of mentorship can manifest in so many different forms. One interviewee explained the following:

“I think having an advocate at [CEO] level who I can learn from and understand why decisions are made, it offers the inside viewpoint on where the business is going and how I can better prepare myself to be a part of that” (W4).

Another woman explained that mentorship can be a two-way street, and may simply mean sharing different perspectives. This SVP, Management Director has stayed in touch with a college professor and former global Creative Director throughout her career:

“He is more old school in terms of the way he worked in the business, because it was very different when he was still active in an agency. It is interesting how we share with each other how the industry is evolving and changing. It’s nice to talk to him, because in his time, it was much more about the purity of Creative and the creative idea. It’s just not as simple as that anymore, so it is nice to think back to that, when ideas were more pure and singularly focused” (W13).

Whether it is learning to advocate for oneself, or having a powerful sponsor advocating for them, ad women benefit from mentorship. This mentorship piece seems to be a factor that separates out the women who get ahead in the advertising business.

Other interviewees indicated that they found strong mentors in female leaders at their agencies. Sometimes this is purposeful, and other times it occurs intuitively:

“To me, I wouldn’t say it was a conscious decision to find a woman as a mentor, but I have found that I gravitated more toward women in the workplace. I don’t know if it is shared experience or perspective, or what. But, I see myself gravitating toward these female mentors” (W5).

Whether connections with these female leaders turn into mentor relationships or not, some women indicated that simply the visibility of female advertising executives is important for the field. A VP, Director of Digital Strategy explained that having a female president at her agency gave her someone to look up to when she was starting out: “That

to me made me feel like, ‘Oh, I can do that. I could be a leader.’ Having that visibility early on in your career is really positive because it gives you something to aspire to” (W5). Another interviewee described an ongoing mentorship relationship with the president of her company: “To see how she has weathered the storm and the changes she’s made, she has been a visionary. I’m lucky to have her as someone to look up to and emulate in some ways” (W7). This mentor relationship offered this SVP, Regional Growth Director someone to turn to for guidance and advice as she grew in her role as General Manager, faced downsizing and layoffs, and eventually reached her current position. One interviewee offered an especially eloquent anecdote of how women leaders have shaped her career over the years. She has worked for both male and female bosses throughout her career, but summarized their leadership in the following way:

“... women are the ones who’ve changed my life. They get me. I get them. We communicate in a way that we understand. I can’t explain it. Currently, I plan to stay at [agency] to infinity and beyond. But let’s just say I didn’t. I know that if I wanted to go to another agency, having a strong female lead in my chain of command would be extremely important to me” (W11).

It is significant to note that interviewees did not unanimously share this viewpoint on female leadership. A Freelance Account Director expressed a preference to work with male teams in some scenarios (W8), and a SVP, Director of Planning explained that she “wouldn’t say mentors have been very present or prevalent in my career” (W10).

Women who benefited from the guidance and support of male and female mentors in their own careers expressed a strong conviction toward mentoring other women. One interviewee explained the following:

“I did not have any mentors or role models in this industry who were female. Mine were male. I learned from them, and yet I find myself today as a mentor to a lot of the women in this agency” (W1).

Those who didn't have female mentors are especially adamant about guiding the next generation of women over the hurdles they faced: "So being on the other side of it, I'm very conscious of making myself available and present so people who want that know there is someone they can have a conversation with" (W4). Sometimes this means offering career guidance, while other times it might be providing a sounding board:

"I don't think people tell you it is ok some days, or that you're not supposed to know everything. Or, things suck and it's ok. Or if you're pissed or sad or whatever, it is ok to cry and be upset. It is ok to ask me why something is the way it is. I didn't have that when I was that age" (W8).

In this case, a mentor can be a tenured ad woman who has navigated the difficult parts of the job, and can coach younger women on how to deal with those challenges. A VP, Group Account Leader explained that serving as a mentor helps her continue to learn and grow into her leadership role at her agency:

"It's hugely rewarding even to me personally on the mentor side. I think you get a lot out of those conversations and take stock of yourself as you're giving advice to other people to make sure you're following that advice. It keeps you honest day-to-day" (W4).

A Creative Director working as an adjunct professor offered up a similar experience from teaching the AAF/NSAC competition course at a nearby university. According to her, interacting with students "is one of those experiences that can keep us young. At some point, we've gotten older and we don't realize that" (W14). She followed this up by saying that "the students are invigorating" and "The excitement they get from being in this industry, or the potential of being in this industry, that is something you can't put a price on" (W14). Mentorship is an important piece in on-the-job learning, and subsequent career advancement for women at all levels.

Several interviewees expressed looking up to, and modeling their careers after, successful women in their agencies. The President of a Consumer Engagement Agency reflected on her relationship with a female executive early in her career:

“She was a rock star within the agency, and was more of a coach than a boss, and rose very quickly within the agency. She absolutely would be one of those people that helps everyone else around her, less worried about herself but in the process of helping others, lifts herself up” (W2).

The word “coach” arose frequently in these interviews. Often times these bosses-turned-mentors transformed into lifelong friendships between female ad women. One interviewee advised holding onto those contacts, and relying on them as someone to lean on in trying times:

“The higher you go in your career, you take on way more stress and responsibility. It can be super overwhelming, so it helps to have someone who is safe to talk to you off the ledge. They can keep you calm, so in a position of leadership, you can be that calm for everyone else” (W3).

Leadership does a lot to shape the culture of an agency. One interviewee expressed that she has chosen to stay at her agency for the “culture cultivated from the leadership and all through the organization” (W4). Another interviewee expanded on this point:

“It is hard in advertising. You’re reading a lot of headlines right now about people who are killing themselves, literally, because they’re pulling 100-hour workweeks for sustained periods of time. And that is just not who we want to be here. It is a two-way street with me. It’s not just leadership; it’s not just my corporation. It’s also the individuals who work here speaking up for themselves.”

This addresses the careful balance that must exist between leadership and the employees working at an agency. Leaders must set boundaries for their employees, and employees must stand up for themselves when even those boundaries seem out of reach.

Other interviewees expressed that, in hindsight, they wished there had been more female leadership to look up to earlier in their careers:



“I wish I would have had more female leadership that I could have observed, or had the chance to speak with, when I was in that transitional and formative part of my career. It wasn’t right in front of my face. I was lucky to have male leadership who understood and could help me with that side of things, but it was really three-and-a-half or four years ago that we started bringing on a lot more senior female leadership at the agency” (W4).

This same interviewee expressed that she may have made changes in her professional and personal life earlier on. Had she seen other women successfully navigating their careers and raising a family, she “maybe would have decided to have kids earlier if I had seen someone I could have patterned off sooner” (W4).

The manner in which mentorship arises seems to vary on a case-by-case basis. Some mentorships are organic and arise because women put themselves out there and ask for guidance on difficult topics. Other mentorships are structured, and led by agencies, holding companies or advertising community organizations. One interviewee was part of a media company’s pilot mentorship program, which she said was “weird because it was a forced mentorship.” She explained that, in her experience, “mentorship is one of those things that needs to be a natural thing” (W5). Another interviewee expressed that she “never worked anywhere where a mentor program was promoted or encouraged” (W12). This VP, Account Director now contributes to a mentoring circle headed by a group of senior management across a number of agencies. She meets with a group of young people for a six-month period. In reflecting on the program so far, she said, “I’m encouraged and I think it is great that more agencies are trying to make that available and accessible for people” (W12).

Overall, the interviewees’ shared outlook on female leadership and mentorship is optimistic and overwhelmingly positive. One woman put it this way:

“Everywhere I have gone, I have had women I felt I could approach with questions and ask for their guidance. I have never found a shortage of women to grab coffee and talk. That has inspired me, and I want to pay that forward. I try to be approachable to women in the industry, because I know how valuable that has been for me” (W5).

Mentorship offers ad women a chance to learn the ropes and seek guidance from their superiors who have already navigated the many hurdles of the business. It also offers mentors a chance to reflect and learn from the up-and-coming advertising professionals who are shaping the business for this next generation.

**Time demands and finding a work-life balance.** “In advertising, there is this martyrdom thinking, like, ‘If I’m the last person here every night, I’m going to be the best Account Executive’” (W12). This theme is arguably one of the most significant takeaways from the interviews conducted for this thesis. Work-life balance was expressed to be one of the most important factors influencing women’s decisions to remain in or leave the advertising industry. As one interviewee explained, “Advertising can be a really challenging career to find a work-life balance because there is just so much to do, and many times you’re working with a lean staff and a lot of work” (W12). Another interviewee justified this, saying, “It is part of what we do, and it is not a great part of what we do, but it is something we have to reconcile with” (W14).

Technology is fundamentally changing the way people work, both within the advertising industry and beyond. Flexitime and flexispace consistently arose in conversations related to juggling work commitments outside of the office. One SVP, Regional Growth Director said:

“It is an old way of thinking that you have to be here at certain hours, and there’s no flexibility. Our industry is going more toward flex hours and getting work done from home one day a week. That is something we’re struggling to navigate right now” (W7).

Advertising is a collaborative industry that requires people work together, but technology is increasingly enabling workers to get facetime in new and flexible ways. An EVP, Planning Insights and Performance Science explained the following: “Technology means that you don’t necessarily have to be in your office all day. You can work from anywhere. But again, you have to plan it out, and you still have deadlines that aren’t going to shift” (W1). It is important to note that this isn’t all positive. Technology means you’re always plugged in, so you never truly leave the office:

“I think often what happens is people, say they have to go get kids, come back on, finish their work in the evening and then they’re up until 2 a.m., trying to get things done and that is tough. Doing 100 percent at two things is just hard” (W1).

Another interviewee reiterated this point, explaining, “People tend to think if they don’t see you in the office, you’re not working. With technology, we’re always on. I’m on a call on my way into work, I’m on a call on my way home from work” (W6). A President of Sports and Experiential at a consumer engagement agency also made this point, explaining how technology helped her attend her daughters’ diving meets while working remotely from her iPad. She explained, however, that technology has its downsides:

“From a work perspective, the advertising industry absolutely has gotten so much harder. There are budget pressures all over. Beyond traditional advertising, there are so many more ways to connect now than television, radio and outdoor. It was a pretty simple formula for most brands. But now you have Digital, Social and so many other ways to engage. People are looking at trying to find miracles and a way to navigate through the noise and make an impact that gets the attention of this very attention-deficit society we live in” (W2).

This interviewee expanded on this point, citing the average tenure of a CMO at two years. She said the business is “way more stressful” than it was when she started 17 years ago, because employees constantly have to prove themselves to that changing leadership.

In this environment, “nobody has the magic formula” and “things are constantly changing with new technology” (W2).

Overall, the influence of technology in the advertising business is two-fold. It helps women get their work done on more flexible terms, but it has also raised the bar and increased the number of channels on which ad people are expected to have expertise. As a SVP, Management Director explained, “The amount of channels you could advertise in were like, three. And it is definitely different now” (W13). Another interviewee put this short and sweet: “Connectivity has changed the game in the past 10 years” (W7). Technology is a mitigating factor of innovation and change because people are “always on.” Ad women have to find new ways to create balance in their work and personal lives in this digital age. As one interviewee explained, “When I walk through the door, I’m mom and wife... It’s hard for me to feel torn between my son and work, so when I leave I check out” (W6). Another interviewee echoed this, saying, “I’ve gotten really good at turning things off. I don’t feel that I have to constantly respond to every email, and I think it is really important to figure out how to be in moment” (W10). She described having to miss her kid’s Christmas concert when no one else could attend an “insignificant client work session,” but she makes sure to use opportunities to leave the office and take her daughter to a gymnastics meet. A SVP, Marketing Director summed up this conversation on technology, calling it “a blessing and a curse that you can respond to anything at any moment no matter where you are because you have your phone. So it helps keep things moving at a faster pace than before” (W12).

In discussing work-life balance in this industry, it is important to consider the nature of the advertising business itself. Advertising is a business of “ebbs and flows”

(W6). Regardless of how well someone plans out their work, a client fire drill might arise and suddenly the team is in the office late into the hours of the night. One interviewee suggested that, “during those times, it does feel like the world is crumbling around you. And you have to try to navigate it without feeling overwhelmed” (W6). This makes it hard to schedule for and manage commitments outside of the office. The industry is unpredictable by nature. This is coupled with the stereotypical, “male perspective” that “it is always the moms who have to leave and pick up their kids” (W6). One interviewee left the office to pick her kids up from school for years:

“Whether I came in early, or went back online at night, if the work gets done, nobody is worried about it. I was able to balance that throughout my career, but it wasn’t easy. I think balance is the wrong word because there’s never a balance. There’s an ebb and flow of the work, and sometimes it’s really heavy on one side” (W2).

By finding ways to work remotely, this interviewee was able to spend time with her family and keep up with her work commitments. In the end, her absence from the office was never a problem because she always got her work done.

One SVP, Director of Shopper Marketing reiterated this point, saying, “As long as you’re not letting your team down, there’s no reason you can’t leave an hour early and get back online later that night” (W6). Another interviewee weighed in on moms having to leave the office, explaining, “As long as they are getting their work done... I mean, it’s not like you can fake that. So long as you’re holding up your end of the bargain, you should be fine” (W7). When offered flexibility that enables them to balance their career with parenting responsibilities, these new moms may even feel inclined to “work harder than ever” (W7).

Burnout is another topic that often arose in conversations about working long hours in the advertising industry. One interviewee expressed that, from a supervisor standpoint, she has lost people to burnout. She watched people on her team play the “first-one-in, last-one-out” game, and as she said, “That is not always the most valuable” (W4). This same interviewee explained how important it is for people to find balance and things they are passionate about outside of the office:

“... they need to have something in their personal life that is recharging and energizing them, and helping them bring that difference of perspective to work. That is how we help solve problems and collaborate on our assignments during the day. I need them to go away and find that balance, because I don’t want to lose someone and have to bring on someone new. Retention is huge, and balance is a big part of it” (W4).

One SVP, Director of Planning reiterated this point, explaining how pertinent it is that people in advertising get out from “behind a desk.” She explained, “If you’re exhausted and in the office all the time, you’re not going to understand consumers or the cultures they live in” (W10). This connects back to recognizing the ebbs and flows of the advertising business. As this interviewee suggested, “In terms of demands, it is about knowing when you need to rise to the occasions to meet those demands, and when you need to take time for yourself” (W10). Another interviewee offered great advice on how to avoid burnout:

“... you have to be great at setting boundaries and you have to have a backbone. You have to use the resources around you wisely, lean on other people and share the work. You have to speak up when you need help, and you have to stand up for yourself when it’s too much” (W11).

This interviewee followed up this advice by recognizing that setting boundaries isn’t a skill many people have developed. She stated that it is sometimes the responsibility of agency leaders to train people to advocate for themselves. From a supervisor’s

perspective, this interviewee explained, “We would rather build people who are strong project and time managers and communicators who can manage expectations and push back, than have someone destroy themselves to work 80 or 90 hours a week.” At a big meeting last year, the CEO of this interviewee’s agency expressly reminded people they had PTO and told them to use it. According to this interviewee, it comes down to “encouraging that balance and not penalizing people with our management style for taking care of themselves” (W11).

Several interviewees admitted that they failed to find ways to recharge early in their careers. One woman expressed how easy it is to “become blinded or overwhelmed by all the work and not see the impact it is having on your personal life” (W12). Burnout was a central topic of discussion with a Freelance Account Director who explained the following:

“Burnout is no joke. I’ve lived in Colorado for five years... What the hell have I done for these five years? Do I have any friends? What do I do? All my friends are in advertising. There were so many weekends and nights I made excuses for not being able to do anything because I was always on call. It sucks. It sucks that it is so much time and so much energy. And, for what? I mean, we did a few TV spots and we did a whole lot of fucking Facebook posts. Wooooo” (W8).

She followed this up by summarizing, “There’s been years where I don’t know what I’ve done, other than I can say I worked on XYZ and these were the productions and campaigns. I couldn’t tell you what else was going on in the world” (W8). A VP, Account Director offered a similar perspective, calling advertising a “really challenging career to find a work-life balance.” She said it has led to great success, “but it is not without a price”:

“About 10 years ago, I woke up one day and realized I had no friends, no hobbies, no extracurricular activities. I didn’t exercise. All I did was work everyday—late, early in the mornings, weekends. I was getting really burnt out, so I’ve made a

much greater effort to try and have a life outside of work. That is incredibly important, and something I stress for the young ladies who work for me. I tell them to schedule things so you leave work at a decent time. You may work late a few nights a week, but if you can get out one or two nights and go do something, I absolutely want to encourage that” (W12).

This interviewee followed up this story with a very powerful statement: “I’ve found that you have to work just as hard at creating a good life outside of work as you do with your career” (W12). Another interviewee and self-proclaimed “workaholic” offered the important reminder that, “It can be different for different people who set limits” (W8).

No matter how much these women express the importance of balance, many female advertising executives admit it is one of their greatest weaknesses. One VP, Director of Digital Strategy admitted, “I’m going to call myself a recovering workaholic, because I’m trying not to be one. But I’m very bad about work-life balance” (W5). She finds a silver lining in this because she really likes her job. But, this interviewee expressed feeling a tremendous sense of guilt when she is at the office and going to be late for dinner. She summed it up, saying, “I’m always feeling that push and pull” (W5). Another interviewee said, “I’m a terrible example. I basically do everything until my eyes bleed” (W8). She oversees Organic Search at a global full-service marketing and advertising agency, owns a part-time business and is enrolled as a Master’s student in a full-time graduate program.

This topic of work-life balance and time demands also has parallels to motherhood and family rearing. One interviewee expressed seeing many women at the director-level of the advertising business:

“Whether we will see them move up into the higher ranks, I don’t know. I hope so, but I think a lot of women I have worked with were also mothers. So, it is entirely possible that part of the reason they are choosing to stay in their roles and



not go for their bosses' jobs, is because they want a work-life balance with their family" (W5).

Motherhood was inextricably interwoven with the topic of work-life balance in the advertising industry. Several interviewees expressed how their perspective on balance and setting priorities changed when they became mothers. A VP, Group Account Leader explained the following:

"I think [motherhood] is a really good test, and forces you to take stock of what is important. I have a different way of prioritizing things now, both the importance of things and prioritizing how I spend my time. Before, it was really easy to work late and stay physically in the office. Now, I simply can't do that. I have to be present and have to be at home... That's been a huge difference in how I see priorities, and my criteria list for what makes it and what doesn't has gotten tighter" (W4).

This same interviewee expressed that being a mother and learning how to balance her work and personal life has made her a better leader. She is able to help her team "understand what is going to move the needle and what's not. What is just time spent, versus what is really going to bring about the change we're looking to bring about" (W4).

It is important to note that not all interviewees expressed confidence in being able to balance the demands of their careers and families. One woman in Account Services, currently freelancing as she raises her child, offered this perspective: "I'm really at the point right now, where you can't have it all. It's not possible to have it all—the career, the happy family, the happy marriage, all those things" (W8). She followed this up by saying, "I don't know if I'll ever get back to those crazy 80-hour weeks, nonstop, no sleep, always on my phone how I used to be. I just don't know that I can do it" (W8).

Ad women at all levels are acutely aware of the demanding nature of the business. One interviewee expressed the interesting perspective that often times, the emphasis of work-life balance in an agency setting "depends on the team you're working on and who

your manager is” (W6). In the end, everything is relative to the expectations set by employees and advertising agency leaders.

### **General Push for Diversity**

The focus of responses in this final category is on a general push for diversity in the advertising business. These topics trended toward two overarching motifs: the influence clients exert in demanding agency-side diversity and the varying definitions that advertising professionals ascribe to diversity.

**Client-side push for diversity.** Perhaps one of the most surprising themes that emerged in these interviews was the perspective female advertising executives offered on the top-down push for diversity. Several women suggested that clients are the ones demanding diversity in the agencies producing their ads. A SVP, Director of Planning summed this up:

“I think we’re also seeing clients demanding greater representation of women and minorities. Agencies are doing it not because they think it is the best thing to do, or to be representative of the audiences they are trying to reach, but because their clients are demanding it” (W10).

Another interviewee suggested that this has a lot to do with the gender make-up in these clients’ companies. She reflected on the chain-of-command, explaining, “My client’s boss’ boss’ boss is a female and her boss is a female. Now, there is a male CEO, but boy do they focus on diversity that includes women at the company” (W2). Gender on the client-side seems to be balancing out. One VP Group Account Leader suggested that male-dominant client teams are something “we are seeing less and less, but is still a factor in some of our relationships” (W4). Another woman reflected, “Most of the clients I have worked on throughout my career have included really strong, capable, smart women” (W5).

Gender is something clients consider when evaluating advertising agencies before allocating business. One interviewee explained, “There are several, high-visibility RFPs where the client’s CMO has said, ‘We’re screening, and unless you have a high percentage of females in your creative department, [you won’t win our business]’” (W1). This same interviewee followed this up by summarizing, “I think it is very good that clients are pushing back and mandating... That will be the thing that forces change in the industry, is when your clients are not willing to turn a blind eye” (W1). Clients may also audit the gender make-up of the team pitching an upcoming creative campaign. A President of Sports and Experiential explained the following:

“Whether you are going into a new business pitch, or pitching a new idea to a current client, it is so important to know the room and how they will judge you. A lot of times, they will judge you on the diversity of thought and the team represented in the room” (W2).

A VP Group Account Leader echoed this general sentiment, explaining, “I also think with clients, it is extremely important to have female representation” (W4).

Clients have a stake in agency-side diversity for two main reasons. Diversity pays off because it has been proven to be fiscally responsible and good for business. As one interviewee explained:

“[Clients’] #1 priority is the bottom-line. ‘Am I making my company profitable in a healthy sustainable way?’ They are seeing firm and reliable evidence that targeting diverse audiences, and similarly hiring diverse staff to execute on it, is more profitable and malleable to them. From a purely fiscal perspective, not a moral perspective, diversity is the right thing to do” (W11).

In addition to this financial piece, clients recognize that they have diverse a consumer base. This same interviewee raised the point that advertising agencies must target diverse audiences. She expanded on this point by explaining the following:

“Some great big brands, and people on the client- and brand-side are holding agencies to task, telling them they need to hire a more diverse staff because these [straight, white people] are not the people we’re talking to. You’re leaving out a huge portion of these other market segments when you’re not appealing to a diverse target” (W11).

At the end of the day, diversity is good for business. Clients are beginning to realize that they must hire diverse employees who bring different perspectives to the table. They are also beginning to expect that their advertising agencies do the same.

**Differing views on diversity.** In discussing gender equality in the workplace, many interviewees made the point that diversity can mean a lot of different things. People can be diverse in terms of gender and ethnicity. However, they may also bring diversity into the workplace by offering a different perspective based on their upbringing, their educational background and the region of the country in which they grew up and have worked. One Human Resources Coordinator explained that her agency recently introduced a personality test to the interview and hiring process. She explained, “We want different types of people who can bring different perspective” (W15).

Agencies strive to hire people who come from different walks of life, and can therefore work and think differently. This idea of group intelligence arose frequently in interviews. One woman reflected, “At an agency I worked for previously, one of the mantras was that ‘We hire people who think differently than we do.’ ... The diversity of thought brings out better thinking and better ideation” (W1). This same interviewee expanded on this point, saying:

“At [current agency], we actually have a pretty robust diversity initiative. It is as much a social tool as anything, about getting people together to talk about a number of things going on... The point behind it isn’t [to] hire different genders, different ethnicities, different generations, etc. The idea is actually around this diversity of thought. That because people have different starting points, they’re

going to think differently, and working together, build a much stronger solution” (W1).

Another interviewee expressed a similar point:

“I tell my team all the time, I don’t want to hire people who look and think like me. That doesn’t help our product grow. It transcends beyond someone’s physical appearance or history. It can also be working in different sectors, or lending a different educational experience. To me, those things are really interesting and make us a better, smarter, more insightful team. People think about problems differently with diverse perspective or experience” (W5).

This woman later reflected on her work experience at several agencies, saying, “The diverse teams have brought more to the table” (W5). Another woman was adamant that she try not to “clone people or get the same type of person” when hiring for her team (W10).

This practice of hiring individuals who can contribute diversity of thought may be particularly important in certain departments over others. One woman explained, “Our Planning and Strategy teams are so wildly diverse because it really helps us think things through. And we as an agency are embracing polyculturalism for our clients” (W1).

Another interviewee reiterated this point, saying, “Particularly in our Planning and Analytics departments, you have a lot of folks who are probably foreign or have a wide variety of experience. They’ve lived overseas or done different things” (W13). Another offered the following perspective:

“When you’re in Search, it is not about what you want to say, it is about what people want to consume. If you don’t have people who live and breath and are these different audiences, you’re going to miss a huge piece. There’s that, and we’re also looking for diversity of thinking, perspective, expertise, experience, knowledge... I think it is important that we keep a balanced team in that way” (W11).

Planning and Search are just two examples of advertising departments that need to be representative of the audiences they are trying to reach. At the end of the day, “it doesn’t

feel like there is any discrimination against anybody because of where they've come from, and in some circles, is seen as an asset" (W13). Interviewees indicated that advertising agencies need to value people who come from all walks of life.

One woman raised an interesting point in explaining how accounts teams are assembled in advertising agencies. She said, "Once a team is set, your team is your team, and it may not be that big or diverse." Working on new pieces of business offers agencies the opportunity to "cherry pick individuals to work on things." This SVP, Regional Growth Director concluded, "But where we have opportunity, I think we try to encourage diversity" (W7). New business provides this opportunity to set a standard of diversity for an emergent account team.

Several interviewees indicated that the diversity of individuals working in their Midwest office location might differ from that of offices in larger markets, like New York City. One woman suggested that as far as race is concerned, her Midwest office is "not diverse at all." She explained that her agency's New York office has a "much higher diversity ratio" (W15). Another interviewee expanded on this point, suggesting that the representation of men and women in an office may differ regionally:

"I think [the gender imbalance] is much more prominent in our New York office. I know there are no female creative directors there... So I think it is much more prominent there, plus they have a very different environment and vibe within their office. There is a different dichotomy coming into play, and the lack of female leadership there is on everybody's radar" (W14).

Overall, interviewees agreed that diversity is something advertising agencies must continue to strive for, both in the ranks and in the C-suite. They offered the valuable reminder that gender diversity is important, but so is diversity of thought that enables advertisers to view the world through the eyes of the consumers they are targeting.

## **Conclusion**

As the advertising industry continues to adapt to changing client demands and evolving technological capabilities, so do gender dynamics in the workplace. These changes mediate the experience of both men and women working in agencies nationwide. When examined in conjunction with previous findings of older studies, these changes also offer valuable insight and provide room to suggest future directions for research. This study focused on the career experiences and advancement of women in the advertising industry. It found consensus among interviewees that advertising agencies must continually strive for diversity, both in the ranks and in the C-suite. While those interviewed offered different perspectives on the gender distribution of ad professionals working across departments, and on the factors that shaped their own careers, some general themes emerged. As a result, this study provides a richer understanding of the perceptions of female advertising executives in a constantly evolving advertising landscape.

Through semi-structured interviews with 15 female advertising executives at agencies throughout the United States, this study revealed a variety of findings related to female career advancement. This study specifically attempted to examine the factors that contribute to, or hinder female career advancement in the advertising industry. It further sought to identify the critical determinants that influence women to remain in the industry when others leave for client-side or other opportunities. Finally, this study reveals parallel findings to the guiding studies, which examined female career advancement and the exodus of female Creatives mid-career (Mallia, 2008; Mallia, 2009).

## Primary Findings

RQ1 asked, “What factors contribute to, or hinder female career advancement in the advertising industry?” As expressed at the beginning of the “Analysis” section, it quickly became apparent that the findings couldn’t be sorted into “Factors that Contribute to Advancement” and “Factors that Hinder Advancement.” For this reason, the findings above are organized into three sections, containing themes within which often-contradictory views are juxtaposed. The factors at play were divided into three sections: gender-specific factors, industry-specific factors and factors concerning a broad push for diversity. In addressing this research question, sections were then boiled down into several thematic areas.

Interviewees discussed several gender factors that have influenced their career advancement, and the advancement of their female co-workers, alongside their male counterparts. These women indicated that relationship-status and motherhood are huge pieces in career decision-making. Those in relationships were adamant about having a supportive and flexible partner, willing to share responsibilities at home. Women without children expressed amazement at the dedication their child-rearing co-workers are able to devote to their career and family responsibilities. That being said, the sense that some mothers are “half-assing things” in both arenas (W12) supports research suggesting that mothers face greater discrimination in the workplace, while fathers are judged more leniently (Heilman & Okimoto, 2008; Fuegen et al., 2004). Women with children communicated two different perspectives on raising a family while working in the advertising industry. Some honed in on the scheduling challenges this industry presents due to its unpredictable and fast-paced nature. Others suggested that motherhood has



made them better at their jobs, and has offered them a new perspective on how to prioritize work. Across the board, interviewees agreed that advertising agencies must continually improve parental leave policies to retain female talent.

Women also discussed gendered interactions in the workplace, and several indicated that the “world of Mad Men is alive and well” (W3). This supports Zimmer’s (1998) tokenism theory, as well as Kanter’s (1997a, 1997b) predictions about how female executives’ experiences may differ from those of male executives. The most surprising theme to emerge in this section was that both sexism and support for women seem to come from the top-down. This relates back to a study by Ragins, Townsend and Mattis (1998), which suggested that in order for change to occur, CEOs must understand the overt and subtle barriers to advancement faced by women in the workplace, as well as strategies to overcome such barriers. Interviewees also touched on the inter-gender interactions that occur in the advertising workplace. One woman summed this up, stating, “Women need to start supporting women more” (W3). Several interviewees indicated that they are their own worst critics, and put an enormous amount of pressure on themselves to succeed. Other women honed in on the cattiness that sometimes emerges on female teams in the workplace.

The nature of the advertising business itself also influences the advancement of women in the workplace. Several interviewees indicated that skill set takes precedence over hiring for diversity, because at the end of the day, “We don’t care who they are if they can do great work and fit in culturally with our people” (W3). However, interviewees were well aware of the gender imbalance that exists in some advertising departments. One interviewee backed up the findings of several studies examining the

role of women in Creative departments (Alvesson, 1998; Faulkner, Kokkeler & Wesson, 1989; Ibarra, 1992; Mallia, 2009; Mallia & Windels, 2011; Nixon, 2003; The 3% Conference, 2014), stating, “there are far fewer Creative females” (W2). Other interviewees offered an interesting perspective in discussing opportunities to move up the ladder very quickly in emerging areas like Digital, Media and Search. Both the experiences of female Creatives and women working in Digital, Media and Search offer support for situated learning theory (Windels & Mallia, 2015).

Several women were adamant that earlier outreach to middle and high school students would be key to attracting diverse populations to work in the business. Mentorship is also a big piece in on-the-job learning and advertising career decision-making. Some women described strong mentor relationships with men throughout their careers; others suggested “women are the ones who’ve changed my life” (W11). Though not all interviewees benefitted from mentorship early in their careers, they all recognized its value and several indicated that they try to mentor young women in the business. Finally, women agreed that advertising is a very demanding industry and that it can be difficult to maintain a work-life balance. That being said, “It is part of what we do, and it is not a great part of what we do, but it is something we have to reconcile with” (W14).

Advertising is an industry that exists as a niche within the larger marketing and communication field. This business is grappling with the same diversity debate that is felt outside advertising agencies and client-side marketing departments. In discussing diversity in broad terms, interviewees indicated that agencies “want different types of people who can bring different perspective” (W15). This relates back to the concepts of group intelligence and gender schema, and provides further support for tokenism theory

(Zimmer, 1998). It also demonstrates the advertising industry trying to move away from practices that encourage homophilous relationships. Previous studies found that culture affects communication networks, which subsequently affect career advancement. In a male-dominated company culture, men reap greater network rewards in the form of individual and positional resources (Ibarra, 1992). However, by encouraging the hiring of people from different walks of life, advertising agencies are somewhat unintentionally putting an end to this cycle. The most surprising finding in this thematic area was that clients are the ones “demanding greater representation of women and minorities” in the advertising business (W10). Before allocating business or approving a new campaign, clients “will judge you on the diversity of thought and the team represented in the room” (W2). Interviewees seemed optimistic about this client-side push to support women in the advertising business.

Hiring, promotion and retention in the advertising industry are areas of research rich with nuances that explain differential career advancement experiences between men and women. RQ2 asked, “What are the critical determinants that influence women to remain in the industry when others leave for client-side or other opportunities?” One interviewee offered up an umbrella response to this question, saying, “There are so many different components that are important to attracting and retaining female talent” (W11). That being said, the decision to leave the advertising industry broadly seemed to relate to motherhood. Attempting to balance the role of motherhood and the time demands of the industry seemed to be the primary determinant influencing women to leave the agency-side of the advertising business.

This research has found conclusive evidence that managers and leaders play a key role in strategizing success for themselves and their employees. Interviewees indicated that managers must effectively set and manage expectations for a work-life balance among their team members. Similarly, HR professionals play an important role in shaping women’s perceived paths of career advancement through agency feedback processes and career mapping. In this light, it is partially the responsibility of these managers and HR professionals to teach employees how to advocate for themselves. These lessons may arise in mentorship and sponsorship relationships, where bosses function as coaches and instill confidence in ad women. However, these processes can be standardized into a framework and enacted in the form of HR best practices in agencies hoping to retain and promote female talent. In order to shift the responsibility for change from the women working in this field to the advertising agencies employing them, this study concludes with the recommendation that agencies implement an annual climate survey. The following survey questions encompass the research findings summarized in this thesis, and address some of the thematic areas that influenced interviewees’ experiences as women in the business:

Motherhood	Do you have any children? If so, do you feel that [agency] has policies in place to help you balance your career and personal responsibilities? What could [agency] do to make this easier for you? How would you rate [agency’s] maternity leave policy?
Gender Stereotypes	Have you felt stereotyped as a woman at [agency]? Have you ever felt that your opinion did not matter, or your idea was not given the same consideration as those proposed by your co-workers?
Departmental Differences	What department do you work in? How would you describe the diversity make-up of your team?
Hiring, Promotion and Retention	How long have you worked in your current capacity at [agency]? When do you anticipate your next promotion? Do you have a sense of where your career is going at [agency]? Do you feel that [agency] provides you training and growth opportunities? Is there anything you would like to see [agency] introduce?
Mentorship	Do you have a mentor at [agency]? Do you feel that you can go to your supervisor or boss to ask for guidance?
Work-Life Balance	Do you feel that you are able to maintain a reasonable work-life balance? What could [agency] do to make your workload more manageable?

	Do you find time in your day to unplug from your email and work-related communications?
Diversity	How would you rate the diversity of [agency]? Do you think [agency] fosters a comfortable environment for individuals of different gender, racial, ethnic, political and religious backgrounds?

In closing, it is interesting to reflect on the dissimilar perspectives female advertising executives offered at different points in their careers. A mid-career mother, freelancing as she raises her child offered the following viewpoint:

“I don’t know that I would do advertising if I could go back. On one hand, I love it. I’ve seen some really cool shit and worked with some really cool people... [But] there are things you can do that people work way less hard at and make way more money than we do. So, sometimes I wish I had done that...” (W8).

This offers a stark contrast to the perspective of W1, a women who has climbed to the top in her 21-year career and has an overwhelmingly positive outlook on the industry and the advertising professionals who surround her. Both perspectives can also be juxtaposed to the outlook of a woman working in HR who is a newcomer to the advertising industry:

“Now that I’m in advertising, I don’t know that I’ll ever leave. I really get this industry, and like talking to people about it. And with [agency], I know that I’m not selling them on any crap, I’m selling them on something I believe in” (W9).

In reviewing and comparing these different perspectives, it is important to reference in this conclusion the subjective nature of this thesis, shaped by the opinions of the interviewees with whom the researcher spoke.

### **Direction for Future Research**

Like studies before have shown, updated investigations and opinions provide valuable insights into perceived changes in the mediated experiences of advertising professionals. When conducted in a qualitative format, these reexaminations offer researchers the ability to read between the lines of purely quantitative figures on the

number of women working in different advertising departments, and at different levels. This presents an ongoing opportunity for future research.

This research has simply scratched the surface on women's advertising roles outside Creative departments, as well as their perceptions of the workplace dynamics that have influenced their career paths. Future research will need to be done in the emerging Digital, Media and Search areas of the advertising industry. These areas, in particular, must be studied and considered in conjunction with changes in the tech and STEM fields. Similarly, research will need to continually monitor how technology is influencing work-life balance, both within the advertising industry and beyond. Further study may also examine some of the cultural conventions and gender stereotypes women broadly adhere to in the workplace. This area of research may be tailored to the advertising industry by seeking to understand how women participate on teams in a prescribed way. It may examine how the stereotypes workingwomen are socialized into reinforce the types of reviews they receive from bosses and the ways in which they interact with co-workers.

Interviewees brought up many changes currently shaping the advertising industry. Scholars will have the opportunity to track the implications of these changes in future studies. For instance, several agencies and advertising networks are introducing women's initiatives, female leadership groups and new mom programs. Also, agencies are beginning to design university course curriculum and take part in outreach efforts to middle and high schoolers. Researchers will need to circle back and examine what influence these efforts have on women's careers in the advertising industry, and in contributing to more diverse workplaces.

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## Appendix A: Titles Constituting Qualification for Study

Job Title	Other Possible Title	Job Description
Dir. of Account Services	Dir. of Client Services	Responsible for mgmt. of the department. Responsibilities include budgets, costs, resource allocation. Provides strategic leadership. Top level Client contact with usually 20+ years relevant industry and advertising expertise.
Account Director	Group Mgmt. Supervisor	Responsible for leadership and overall management of the Client relationship on one large or multiple accounts. Drives long-term business building, oversees Account team management. 15+ years of industry and advertising experience.
Management Supervisor		Responsible for the overall service and profitability of assigned accounts. Represents the Agency's senior management on a day-to-day basis. Typically reports to the Account Director, with 10+ years experience.
Account Supervisor		Provides strategic recommendations and manages all Company/Agency resources to ensure the Client's marketing needs are met. Reports to Account Director, with 7+ years of industry experience.
Account Executive	Sr. Account Executive	Manages/coordinates Client projects and may take an active role in all disciplines from planning to completion. Effectively executes strategies, problem-solves, and develops solid business relationships, with 3+ years of experience.
Assistant Account Exec.	Jr. Account Executive	Provides Client service support to ensure that all assignments are executed timely and accurately. Assists in the daily operations of Client projects internally. Essentially an account executive "in training."

Figure 1: Advertising Career Possibilities in Account Management, retrieved from (*Advertising Career Possibilities*, 2009)

Job Title	Other Possible Title	Job Description
Exec. Account Planning	Chief Strategy Officer; Dir. Planning & Development	Responsible for management of the global/national/regional/local account planning department. May be an integral member of new business team, with 15+ years of planning expertise.
Dir. Account Planning	Dir. Of Strategic Planning	Responsible for the management of one or more Client groups. Responsible for developing ad strategy and creative brief and bring a strong consumer focus to all decisions based on 10+ years of expertise.
Account Planning Mgr.	Supervisor Planning	Oversees day-to-day activity on assigned accounts, may include training and development of staff. 7+ years of experience.
Account Planning Supervisor		Responsible for applying consumer understanding to creative problems on assigned accounts. Partners with other departments to ensure the quality of the creative brief. 5+ years industry experience.
Account Planner	Strategic Planner; Sr. Account Planner	Manages all research pertaining to strategy and creative development. Provides insight to Clients regarding consumer preference, with 3+ years of experience.
Assistant Account Planner	Jr. Account Planner	Responsible for assisting the planners in applying consumer understanding to creative problems.

Figure 2: Advertising Career Possibilities in Account Planning, retrieved from (*Advertising Career Possibilities*, 2009)

<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Other Possible Title</b>	<b>Job Description</b>
Chief Creative Director	Dir. of Creative	Overall responsibility and accountability for the management of the total creative function of the agency. Establishes the 'creative tone' and pace of the agency, based on 15+ years of experience.
Creative Director	Group Creative Dir.; Exec. Creative Dir.	Responsible for the quality of all creative work produced by the agency for all clients. Maintains standards of creative excellence. Typically has 15+ years of experience.
Assoc. Creative Director	Creative Manager; Creative Group Head	Supervises and guides the total creative effort of one or more creative groups. Insures creative compliance with clients' goals. Usually has 10+ years of expertise.
Creative Supervisor	Art Supervisor; Copy Supervisor	Integrates art, copy, and production functions and guiding overall creative effort of assigned general advertising creative groups on one or more accounts. 8+ years of experience.
Copywriter	Sr. Copywriter; Lead Copywriter	Responsible for generating concepts/ideas and highly targeted copy on one or more accounts. May adapt to changes in format, media and/or Clients' strategies. 2+ years of experience.
Art Director	Creative Artist; Sr. Art Director	Responsible for the visual creation of general advertising campaigns on one or more accounts. Coordinates the design and reproduction of the copy with the art and production staff. 2+ years of expertise.
Illustrator	Sr. Illustrator	Prepares a variety of illustrations for one or more accounts. May design, select layout materials, prepare interpretive drawings from written plans. 2+ years of experience.

Figure 3: Advertising Career Possibilities in Creative, retrieved from (*Advertising Career Possibilities*, 2009)

<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Other Possible Title</b>	<b>Job Description</b>
Executive Media Director	Chief Strategic Officer; Client Services Director	Oversees management of media planning, including budgets, costs, resource allocation and strategic leadership. Plays lead role in new business and acts as a consultant to top corporate officers. 20+ years of expertise.
Executive Media Buying Director	Chief Negotiating Officer; Dir. Of National Broadcast	Responsible for management of the media buying and/or operations. Handles sensitive Company/Agency negotiations. Involved in policy-making decisions, based on 20+ years of media expertise.
Group Media Director	Client Service Dir.; Managing Dir.- Planning; Media Dir.	Leads overall management of one large and/or multiple Clients setting strategic direction and driving long-term business. Holds accountability for budgets and planning. 15+ years of experience.
Media Buying Director	Associate Dir.; Media Placement Dir.	Represents Company/Agency's senior management on a day-to-day basis and is involved with negotiations. 15+ years of experience.
Associate Media Director		Responsible for the overall service of assigned accounts and media teams. Approves the development and execution of media strategy, communications plans while maintaining cost controls. 7+ years expertise.
Media Supervisor	Media Account Manager; Network Supervisor	Provides strategic recommendations and analysis. Manages media planners to ensure Client's marketing needs are met. 4+ years of media experience.
Media Planner	Sr. Media Planner	Responsible for developing, executing and managing media plans best suited to meet established Client requirements and objectives. May supervise, train, delegate assistant media planners. 1+ years expertise.

Figure 4: Advertising Career Possibilities in Media, retrieved from (*Advertising Career Possibilities*, 2009)



## Appendix B: Recruitment and Informational Brief Script

### Recruitment Email

*The principle investigator will primarily reach out to potential study participants via email. The following script will be used to inform individuals that they are being asked to participate in a research study:*

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I'm reaching out to you for an interview pertaining to my graduate research. As a Master's candidate at the University of Missouri, I'm conducting interviews with female executives about gender in the advertising industry. \_\_\_\_\_ suggested that I speak with you about your career history, and factors that you feel contribute to, or hinder female career advancement in the field.

You are being asked to take part in a research study examining the workplace cultural and personal factors that contribute to gender inequality within the advertising industry, especially at the top. Interviews will be conducted over the phone, and should take no longer than 45 minutes. With your permission, I will tape the interview for transcription and reference when analyzing findings for my thesis. Only my thesis chair and myself will have access to the recorded interview and transcript.

Participants will confidentially have a chance to speak to their experiences as women in the advertising industry. You will be contributing to a larger, industry-wide discussion about inequality in the workplace.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time.

Your answers will be confidential, and all interview records of this study will be kept private. The published thesis will not include any directly identifiable information connecting you to your responses. You will be identified as a W1-W15, with the following details: region, agency type, position title, years of industry experience, educational background, age, marriage and parental status. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher and thesis chair will have access.

The researcher conducting this study is Kiersten Kuc. If you have questions, you may contact Kiersten at [email] or at [phone number]. You can reach Dr. Margaret Duffy, the professor chairing this thesis, at [email].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 573-882-9585 or access their website at <https://research.missouri.edu/irb/>.

I have prepared a consent form for participation that I'll send your way, as soon as we find a time that works. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Kindest regards,

Kiersten Kuc

**InMail**

*For potential participants with whom the principal investigator does not have any connection, and cannot find email contact information, LinkedIn InMail will be used as the first level of contact. Due to LinkedIn's 300-character limit, I will have to contact these individuals in a more concise manner:*

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

As a Master's candidate at the University of Missouri, I'm reaching out to female executives to discuss gender in the advertising industry. Please let me know if you are interested, and I will follow-up with more information. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best,

Kiersten

## **Appendix C: Interview Participant Consent Form**

### **IRB Consent Form**

You are being asked to take part in a research study examining the workplace cultural and personal factors that contribute to gender inequality within the advertising industry, especially at the top. Interviews will be conducted over the phone. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

#### **What is the study is about?**

The purpose of this study is to identify factors that contribute to, or hinder female career advancement to executive positions in the advertising industry. You must be working in the advertising industry, as a female executive, or overseeing hiring and promotion, to take part in this study.

#### **What will I ask you to do?**

If you agree to participate in this study, I will conduct a 45-minute telephone interview with you. The interview will include questions about your career history and perceptions of the advertising industry. With your permission, I will tape the interview for transcription and reference when analyzing findings for my thesis. Only my thesis chair and myself will have access to the recorded interview and transcript.

#### **Risks and Benefits:**

I do not anticipate any risks to you participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. Participants will confidentially have a chance to speak to their experiences as women in the advertising industry. They will be contributing to a larger, industry-wide discussion about inequality in the workplace.

#### **Your answers will be confidential:**

The interview records of this study will be kept private. The published thesis will not include any directly identifiable information connecting you to your responses. You will be identified as a W1-W15, with the following details: region, agency type, position title, years of industry experience, educational background, marriage and parental status. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher and thesis chair will have access.

#### **Taking part is voluntary:**

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time.

#### **If you have questions:**

The researcher conducting this study is Kiersten Kuc. If you have questions, you may contact Kiersten at [email] or at [phone number]. You can reach Dr. Margaret Duffy, the professor chairing this thesis, at [email].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at 573-882-9585 or access their website at <https://research.missouri.edu/irb/>.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:** I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Your Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.

Your Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name of person obtaining consent \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

*This consent form will be kept by the researcher for seven years after the study has been completed.*

## **Appendix D: IRB Statement of Confidentiality**

### **Confidentiality**

Participants will confidentially have a chance to speak to their experiences as women in the advertising industry. I will be coding the data, with a link from the data to the subject.

The published thesis will not include any directly identifiable information connecting participants to their responses. Individuals will be identified as a W1-W15, with the following details: region, agency type, position title, years of industry experience, educational background, marriage and parental status.

For instance, a particular sentiment or quote may be linked to W1, but neither W1 nor the employing agency will be named. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researcher and thesis chair will have access.

## Appendix E: IRB Approval



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

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

March 9, 2017

Principal Investigator: Kiersten Elise Kuc  
Department: Journalism

Your IRB Application to project entitled Gender Dynamics in the Advertising Industry: The Interplay of Workplace Culture and Career Advancement was reviewed and approved by the MU Institutional Review Board according to the terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	2007830
IRB Review Number	223569
Initial Application Approval Date	March 09, 2017
IRB Expiration Date	March 09, 2018
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)
Risk Level	Minimal Risk
Type of Consent	Written Consent
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 and deviations must be reported to the IRB within 5 business 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.

If you are offering subject payments and would like more information about research participant payments, please click here to view the MU Business Policy and Procedure:  
[http://bppm.missouri.edu/chapter2/2\\_250.html](http://bppm.missouri.edu/chapter2/2_250.html)

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB at 573-882-3181 or [irb@missouri.edu](mailto:irb@missouri.edu).

Thank you,  
MU Institutional Review Board

## Appendix F: Anonymized Interview Participants

	<b>Title</b>	<b>Agency Type</b>	<b>Years Experience</b>	<b>Educational Background</b>	<b>Marital &amp; Parental Status</b>
W1	EVP, Planning	Consumer engagement Agency	21	MPPA, Communications; BA, Government	Married; no children
W2	President, Experiential	Consumer engagement Agency	24	BS, Business Administration; MA, Advertising/Marketing	Married; two children
W3	EVP	Marketing innovation agency	20	BFA, Fine Art	Single; no children
W4	VP, Account	Employee-owned advertising agency	11	BJ, Advertising	Married; two children
W5	VP, Digital	Independent advertising agency	9	BJ, Journalism	Married; no children
W6	SVP, Shopper Marketing	Total Brand Experience agency	16	BA, English, Sociology, Textile & Apparel Management	Married; one child
W7	SVP, Growth & Account	Total Brand Experience agency	21	BS, Human & Organizational Development	Married; two children
W8	Freelance Account	Full-service advertising agency	12	BA, Communications	Married; one child
W9	HR/Talent Specialist	Independent advertising agency	1	BS, Sociology	In a relationship; no children
W10	SVP, Planning	Independent advertising agency	21	BA, Art History; MA, Journalism	Married; three children
W11	Director, Search	Global full-service marketing and ad agency	12	BJ, Strategic Communication	Unmarried; no children
W12	VP, Account	Holding company-owned, advertising agency	21	BA, Advertising	In a relationship; no children
W13	SVP, Account	Holding company-owned, advertising agency	12	BA, Journalism, Strategic Communication	Married; no children
W14	Director, Creative	Total Brand Experience agency	17	BA, Advertising/Marketing Communication; MA, Communications Management	Married; one child
W15	HR/Talent Specialist	Total Brand Experience agency	6	BS, Business Administration, Marketing	Married; two children



## Appendix G: Interview Protocol

As outlined in Creswell (2014), an interview protocol will be followed for asking questions and recording answers during these 15 qualitative interviews. The interview notes and transcriptions will be formatted in the following manner:

Date: 1/25/17

Location: Phone call

Researcher: Kiersten Kuc

Interviewee: W1

*My name is Kiersten Kuc, and I am a MA candidate within the Missouri School of Journalism, conducting research for my thesis on gender in the advertising industry. Thank you for agreeing to speak with me about your career experiences as a woman in the business. This interview will last no longer than 45 minutes, and will cover a range of topics related to your personal, academic and professional experiences throughout your advertising career.*

*Every opinion is valid, and there is no right or wrong answer to the following prompts. Please feel free to interrupt me throughout the interview, as I hope to approach this in a fluid, conversational manner.*

*As previously discussed, you are ensured confidentiality according to the stipulations laid out by IRB human subjects guidelines. Neither your name and nor that of your current or former agency will be included in any published academic materials.*

**Question 1: Tell me about yourself. PROBE FOR: Where do you live? What do you do?**

Researcher Notes:

**Question 2:**

Researcher Notes:

**Question 3:**

Researcher Notes:

**Final Question: Before we wrap up our discussion, is there anything else that you would like to share and haven't had the chance to say?**

*Thank you for taking the time to speak with me. As evidenced by the wealth of articles, thought-provoking panels and commissioned research on this subject, the lack of diversity in the advertising business is real, relevant and extremely timely.*

*This research will focus on gender equality, diversity and subtle sexism that is endemic within the industry. From a practical perspective, I hope to garner insights about stepping-stones career strategies that have helped (and/or hindered) women progress in their advertising careers.*

**Transcribed Interview Notes:**

## **Appendix H: Discussion Guide for Female Advertising Executives**

**In-Depth Interviews** Seek to answer the outlined research questions:

- (1) What factors contribute to, or hinder female career advancement in the advertising industry?
- (2) What are the critical determinants that influence women to remain in the industry when others leave for client-side or other opportunities?

### **Purpose**

Industry-wide discussion is mounting about the lack of representation of women in executive-level advertising positions. To date, research has focused on the absence of women at the top of creative departments. This research seeks to understand the workplace cultural and personal factors that contribute to gender inequality within the advertising industry, especially at the top.

### **Self-Introduction (2 minutes)**

My name is Kiersten Kuc, and I am a Master's candidate within the Missouri School of Journalism, conducting research for my thesis on gender in the advertising industry. Thank you for agreeing to speak with me about your career experiences as a woman in the business. This interview will last no longer than 45 minutes, and will cover a range of topics related to your personal, academic and professional experiences.

Every opinion is valid, and there is no right or wrong answer to the following prompts. Please feel free to interrupt me throughout the interview, as I hope to approach this in a fluid, conversational manner. Also, please stop me and ask questions at any point throughout the interview.

As discussed, you are ensured privacy according to the stipulations laid out by the IRB human subjects guidelines. Neither your name nor that of your current or former employer will be included in any published academic materials.

### **Discussion of Education and Career (7 minutes)**

1. To begin, please tell me about your career path.
2. What is your current position, and how did you arrive there?
3. What jobs have you held in the past?

*Probe for: What influenced you to make career moves? How often did you move jobs? What level of education? Did you return to pursue higher education?*

*Confirm available information from LinkedIn here.*

### **Thematic discussions (28 minutes)**

#### **Theme 1: Gender in the Workplace**

Wirth (2001) discussed overarching gender equality in society, observed through economic and social indicators (p. 20). Despite increasing participation in the labor force, there is still occupational segregation into men's and women's jobs (p. 20). There is also a pay gap (p. 13, 49), issues reconciling work and family

- responsibilities (p. 16) and overarching obstacles to breaking the glass ceiling (p. 52).
4. Do you think women have personality traits that differentiate them from men in the workplace?
  5. Is this good or bad? Why?  
*Probe for: “unconscious stereotyping” about capacity for leadership; Mallia (2009, p. 4) describes “femininity was either credited or blamed in their decision-making and management practices. Attributing decisions to their sex, rather than their personality, is testament to stereotyping.”*
  6. What made you choose to go into \_\_\_\_\_ in advertising? What are primary factors for hiring and promotion of \_\_\_\_\_ in your agency? In the industry?
  7. Do you see that there are fewer women than men in higher-level positions in \_\_\_\_\_ in your agency? Across the industry? Why do you think this is so?
  8. Do you notice a gender difference in \_\_\_\_\_ people? In their leadership styles?

**Theme 2: The Nature and Practices of the Ad Business** (Mallia, 2009)

“The agency business is a client-service business and, as such, has always been demanding... Most interview subjects consider this increased demand for availability and decreased project time an industry factor that simply doesn’t confront women in other industries” (p. 4).

9. Can you describe the work climate/culture of your agency? Of \_\_\_\_\_ within your agency?  
*Probe for: “boys’ club” atmosphere, organizational politics*
10. Tell me about the time demands of your job. Does this come from the agency, or from your clients?  
*Probe for: inflexible work arrangements (flexitime, flexispace)*
11. Advertising calls for integrated teams. Have you ever been in creative pairing (i.e. art director and copywriter) that was influenced by gender?

**Theme 3: Group Intelligence**

It has been suggested that client boards changed the nature of Madison Avenue by putting pressure on CEOs to hire more women. As Dan (2016) puts it, “agencies realized that walking into a pitch presentation with an all-male team was not smart, and they quickly began recruiting women.”

12. Is this something you have experienced in your career?  
*Probe for: Have you been placed on a team or in a meeting specifically because of your gender? (i.e. account planners may be asked to speak to the “femaleness” of the target audience)*

**Theme 4: Recruitment vs. retention**

“The advertising industry does not have a recruitment problem, but rather a retention problem. This is especially true when it comes to gender diversity in creative departments. Portfolio schools are graduating equal (if not greater) number of women than men. Yet these same women ‘disappear’ around the time they have the appropriate level of experience to be CDs” (The 3% Conference, 2014). Do you agree or disagree?

**Sub-theme:** Lack of support for motherhood (The 3% Conference, 2014); 60% of young females say they believe advertising is a career that doesn’t support young families (Hanan, 2009)

**Sub-theme:** Ageism

13. Was there ever a time you thought about leaving? What influenced your decision to stay?
14. How do you perceive your peers’ decision to leave, for client-side or other reasons?

**Theme 5: Mentorship, or Lack Thereof** (The 3% Conference, 2014; *Women in the Workplace 2016*; Mallia, 2009)

15. Do you have any role models/mentors who helped you get to your position today? Were they female or male?

**Theme 6: Visibility of Female Executives, or Lack Thereof**

(The 3% Conference, 2014); 88% of young female creatives say they lack role models and 70% of young female creatives says they have never worked with a female creative director or executive creative director (Hanan, 2009)

Build on Qs from Theme 5.

**Theme 7: Personal Life** (Mallia, 2009)

16. Do you have any children? Ages?
17. Who is/was their primary caretaker preschool? After school? During business travel?  
*Look for:* flexibility/inflexibility of employer; treatment by co-workers with/without children of their own; perceptions of peers who left the industry due to its conflicting demands with childrearing

**Background Demographics:**

Age/marital status  
Current title/position  
Number of years in current position  
Number of years in advertising  
Agency size/location

**Closing Discussion (8 minutes)**

18. In your opinion, what was the single most important factor that helped you get where you are today?

19. What was the most difficult challenge you had to overcome?
20. Is there anything that would have made your path easier?

### **For interviewees in HR and recruitment**

#### **Sub-theme: Management, organizational behavior** (Mallia 2009)

“Advertising women face a number of organizational practices and issues that are common to all industries, some of which are magnified in ad agencies. Managers tend to hire people like themselves. They’re looking for people with the same educational background, vision and interests. With more men in power positions, more men are likely to be hired and promoted in creative departments. Few women believe that they face outright discrimination; they agree, in the words of W3, ‘It’s more subtle than that. It’s wanting to hire a buddy.’

“This unconscious bias for hiring homogeneity jeopardizes minority men as well as women, despite concerted industry efforts to foster diversity. Despite the creative director’s being awed by the portfolio of a minority candidate, hiring stalled in the interview. Why? The anonymous black art director is quoted as saying he “wasn’t what they expected.

“Hiring those who think alike has another effect as well: it perpetuates inbreeding in numerous industries and institutionalized prejudices. In advertising, it contributes to perpetuating the male voice as the dominant voice and inhibits genuine creativity. Agency creative director Jeneal Rohrback dubbed the result ‘dumbing sideways.’”

1. How long have you worked in your current capacity?
2. Have you overseen hiring in other advertising settings? Other business sectors?
3. What are primary factors for hiring and promotion in your agency?
4. How does this differ from department to department?
5. Do you rely on any outside resources or services to supplement this search?
6. Do you see that there are fewer women than men in higher-level positions?
7. Why do you think this is so?
8. Do you have any suggestions for solutions to this problem?
9. How are account assignments given in your agency? Are women given the same type of assignments as their male counterparts?
10. Do you notice a gender difference in leadership style of women and men at the executive level? How? Is it more or less apparent in any certain specialties or departments?

## Vita

Kiersten E. Kuc (MA, 2017, University of Missouri-Columbia) is an account planner pursuing full-time opportunities in an agency setting. At MU, her graduate research focused on the factors that contribute to, or hinder female career advancement in the advertising industry. She served as a GTA and research specialist for AdZou, the largest Strategic Communication capstone, as well as Management of Strat Comm.

Kuc received her Bachelor's from the Missouri School of Journalism in 2.5 years, with an emphasis in Strategic Communication. During her tenure as an undergraduate, Kuc was the first MU freshman to receive a place on a Fulbright Summer Institute, and later received the prestigious MU Award for Academic Distinction for her psychophysiology research in the MediaBrain Lab. Kuc was a member of Griffiths Leadership, Kappa Tau Alpha and Phi Kappa Phi honor societies, Omicron Delta Kappa secret society and Kappa Kappa Gamma collegiate sorority. She served as a Peer Undergraduate Mentor, and as an Honors College and Fellowships Office ambassador.

Kuc lends nearly three years of agency experience in a variety of strategy-gearred advertising roles. As a brand planning intern at Cramer-Krasselt, Kuc conducted primary and secondary research for Porsche, Corona, Cedar Fair, Edward Jones and Pacifico Beer. Kuc previously interned at the Phoenix-based agency, LaneTerralerver, where she fulfilled roles in Strategy, Account Services and New Business departments. At the University of Missouri, Kuc led qualitative research efforts to uncover consumer insights and develop strategy-based creative executions for brands like Enterprise CarShare, Allen Edmonds, Ruth's Chris Steakhouse and Tide Dry Cleaners.