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Exporting Gender Bias: Anglo-American Echoes in Swedish Advertising Creative Departments

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Chapter 9

Exporting Gender Bias

Anglo-American Echoes in Swedish Advertising Creative Departments

Jean M. Grow

"At the top of the industry is a closed loop of White guys talking to other White guys." (Ember 2016a, B1). So says Cindy Gallop, founder and former chair of BBH London and an outspoken supporter of women in advertising. She underscores the power and pervasiveness of heteronormative gender cultural norms in advertising, whether in Sweden or any other country where the global advertising powerhouses Omnicom, Interpublic, WPP, or Publicis have influence.

Previous work has explored the under-representation of women in advertising creative departments (Broyles and Grow 2008; Grow and Broyles 2011; Grow, Roca, and Broyles 2012; Klein 2000; Mallia 2009; Mallia and Windels 2011; Nixon 2003; Nixon and Crew 2006; Weisberg and Robbs 1997; Windels 2011; Windels and Lee 2012; Windels, Mallia, and Broyles 2013). Such studies have investigated women's experiences in the United States and in Britain, homes to three of the world's major advertising holding companies: Omnicom and Interpublic in the United States and WPP in Britain. A fourth, Publicis, is French. This work also demonstrates that the advertising industry functions within a heteronormative gender system, which presumes women and men to be different (Broyles and Grow 2008; Grow 2009; Grow and Broyles 2011; Mallia 2009; Nixon 2003; Windels and Lee 2012). Further, they confirm that the cultural norms, those unconscious understandings governing individual behaviors within this cultural group, tend to be stereotypically masculine. The resulting "boys' club" (Grow and Broyles 2011) environment within advertising creative departments privileges men, while negatively affecting the hiring, retention, and promotion of women (Broyles and Grow 2008; Grow and Broyles 2011; Klein 2000; Mallia 2009; Mallia and Windels 2011; Nixon and Crew 2006; Weisberg and Robbs 1997; Windels 2011; Windels and Lee 2012; Windels, Mallia, and Broyles 2013).
In this chapter, I explore the experiences and perceptions of women working in advertising creative departments in Sweden, the most egalitarian country in the world (Rothstein 2012). In doing so, I offer further evidence of the global pervasiveness of the Western heteropatriarchal gender culture in advertising creative departments. My work is framed by feminist theory, which helps articulate how Anglo-American heteronormative sexism is also experienced by Swedish women creatives and suggests that locally specific or indigenous cultural norms and values have limited influence within advertising creative departments. Ultimately, I argue that gender bias is exported around the world as part of an industry-wide white, Anglo-American, heteropatriarchal cultural norm.

To provide context, I begin with an overview of women in advertising, followed by a review of Swedish cultural norms and values and of the Swedish advertising industry. Next, I outline relevant feminist thought before turning to the theoretical underpinnings that frame the gendered system that defines advertising. I then address the method I used to gather information, in-depth interviews with management-level Swedish women creatives. The analysis, based on the experiences and perceptions of these Swedish creatives, echoes the experiences and perceptions of women creatives in Britain and the United States. I contend that an Anglo-American version of advertising creative culture has been exported around the world. In the process, gendered practices have become the norm, creating and reinforcing a systemic heteronormative masculine culture that pervades advertising creative departments, despite their geographic location or the local norms. I write as a white, heterosexual, feminist woman who made a career in advertising before joining the academy.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

To help readers understand the cultural context in which advertising women creatives work, I first provide a brief overview of women working in the advertising industry before focusing on women working in creative departments. I then turn to a discussion of Swedish cultural norms and values, and the Swedish advertising industry.

Women in Advertising

Creative departments are the location where ads are concepted (conceptualized) and created. People working here are referred to as creatives and include art directors, copywriters, and creative directors, who are the creative managers. In the United States, women make up 56 percent of the advertising workforce (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission 2014);
a study by the British Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) found that women represent 49 percent of the British advertising workforce (Klein 2000). According to the Swedish Association of Communication Agencies (KOMM), an organization that parallels IPA, women make up 49 percent of Sweden’s advertising workforce (KOMM 2014). Although these data suggest that women in advertising are employed in roughly equal numbers, in creative departments things look different. In a study using advertising industry data across fifty countries, Tao Deng and I found that worldwide women make up only 20.3 percent of all creatives and only 14.6 percent of all creative directors (Grow and Deng 2014). We also found that in the United States women make up 27.7 percent of the creative department and 25.2 percent of creative directors; in Britain women make up just 13.9 percent of the creative department and 8.1 percent of creative directors. Data from KOMM (2014) show that in Sweden, women make up 38 percent of the creative department and 16 percent of creative directors.

In addition to limited numbers of women being employed in advertising creative departments, creative women earn less than creative men (Grow and Broyles 2011; Mallia 2009; Windels, Mallia, and Broyles 2013). One of the key factors that can increase a creative’s salary and provide the ability to rise into management is winning creative awards, such as the Cannes Festival of Creativity, the One Show, the Effies in marketing, the American Advertising Federation’s Addys, Communication Arts’ CA Awards, and the Clio Awards. However, when it comes to these coveted awards, women win far fewer than men (Mallia 2009; Windels and Lee 2012). A 2014 study found that 11.5 percent of the Communication Arts award winners were women creative directors, representing a 319 percent increase from six years earlier, when women were only 3.6 percent of the award winners (3% Conference 2014). Awards competitions are further complicated by the fact that very few women judge these awards (Mallia 2009; Windels and Lee 2012). This is a significant problem, according to Jean Batthany, executive creative director at DDB: “If all the advertising is being created through that dominant male lens and you look at what the result is, there’s a bias in that and there’s only one perspective” (Ember 2016a, B1).

The scarcity of women creatives and the gender bias that drives it are not new topics. We should be shocked by stories such as the recent ouster of J. Walter Thompson’s CEO, Gustavo Martinez, for allegations of gender and racial bias and sexual harassment exemplified by speaking of raping women who did not comply with his wishes, and calling African-American employees “monkeys” (Birkner 2016; Coffee 2016; Ember 2016b; Vranica and Tadena 2016). But the truth is, gender bias garners headlines infrequently, and the trade press largely ignores racial bias. Publicis’ CEO Maurice Lévy referred to Martinez’s comments as a “one-time mistake” and not something
"endemic of what's happening in our industry" (Birkner 2016, 34). In a swift and powerful response, WPP's CEO, Maurice Sorrell, said he "violently" disagreed with Lévy and noted that "when we get to senior levels of management, the number of women drops, unacceptably, to a third [of all executives]" (Birkner 2016, 34). It should not surprise us that fear silences many women. "It is difficult for them [women] to address gender bias in the [advertising] industry . . . because they want to protect relationships in the industry" (Ember 2016a, B1).

It is important to note that, despite Martinez's Argentinean heritage, advertising is largely a white, Anglo industry. Further, the topics of racial bias or minority hiring in advertising draw little attention from the trade press. African Americans accounted for just 5.3 percent of the employees within marketing communications (including advertising and public relations), yet they represent 11.7 percent of the US workforce (Vranica and Tadena 2016). Hispanics make up 11.7 percent of marketing communications employees, yet they represent 16.4 percent of the US workforce (Vranica and Tadena 2016). Further complicating matters is a siloed industry structure with non-whites and non-Anglos largely employed within multicultural advertising agencies. These agencies are segregated from the elite general market agencies (Altstiel and Grow 2017). As I turn my thoughts to Sweden, I am struck by the need for scholars to expand our work to address minority representation in American advertising.

**Swedish Cultural Norms and Values**

For the purpose of this study, I chose Sweden because it highlights a counterpoint to the Anglo-American cultural norms that frame American and British advertising agencies. Sweden is the most egalitarian country in the world (Rothstein 2012). According to the Gender Equity Index (2015), an index produced by the European Institute for Gender Equality to measure gender equity in Europe, Sweden demonstrates the most gender-neutral cultural norms and equitable social practices of any European country. Cultural norms are the unconscious understandings that govern an individual's behaviors; cultural values are ways in which society or social groups express cultural norms (De Mooij 2014). Stereotypical masculine cultural norms may be expressed in ways including, but not limited to, competitiveness, risk-taking, toughness, and so on (Broyles and Grow 2008; Grow and Broyles 2011; Mallia 2009). Stereotypical feminine cultural norms may be expressed in ways including, but not limited to, collaboration, empathy, and good listening skills (Broyles and Grow 2008; Grow and Broyles 2011; Mallia 2009). Equitable cultural norms are norms that both women and men may embrace (De Mooij 2014). Considering that the mean gender equity score, on a scale
of 0 to 100, for all twenty-seven EU countries is 54, whereas Sweden’s score is 74.3 (The Local 2013), it is fair to say that Sweden may be one country where legal and social structures encourage social institutions and commercial enterprises to robustly support gender equity.

Sweden’s embrace of equality began in the 1970s; it emerged out of the women’s movement and is based on redistributive social justice. Swedish policy changes ultimately enshrined values of equity and social justice within Swedish legal structures (Swedish Institute 2013). For instance, Swedes have long had universal healthcare and institutionalized childcare subsidies (Järvklo 2013). In 2002, parental leave was increased to 480 days, and in 2009 a strict Discrimination Act solidified Sweden’s egalitarian values into the social fabric of Swedish life (Swedish Institute 2013). Yet, according to a United Nations report from the Commission on the Status of Women, Swedish women still take more parental leave than men and work part time in greater numbers (United Nations 2013). In addition, Swedish women working full time are paid lower salaries than men (Statistics Sweden 2012). Despite Sweden’s commitment to equality, disparities remain. Nonetheless, gender equity is higher in Sweden than virtually any other country in the world (Järvklo 2013; Swedish Institute 2013).

Like agencies in the United States and Britain, Swedish advertising agencies are located in major urban centers with the majority located in Stockholm, along with a few in Gothenburg. Although women and men are employed in generally equal numbers in Swedish advertising, women constitute just 38 percent of the creative workforce and account for only 16 percent of all creative directors (KOMM 2014). Further, according to the KOMM, creative women are paid less than men. Women copywriters younger than thirty earn 10 percent less than men, whereas women copywriters older than fifty earn 11 percent less than men, and women creatives at mid-career, ages thirty to fifty, earn 32 percent less than men creatives (KOMM 2012). The Gender Equity Index places Sweden as the leader in gender equity overall (The Local 2013). Yet in terms of both hiring and compensation for women creatives, it seems creative gender equity is not found in Swedish advertising.

Alvesson’s (1998) early work on the institutional culture of Swedish advertising finds it, as a whole, more feminine. That is, he suggests its structure is collaborative with pairs or couples at the nexus of creative production. He also highlights structural forms of support including childcare, flexible work hours, and a generally more malleable work environment, all of which appear to reflect Swedish cultural values. However, Alvesson (1998, 984) also observes that Swedish advertising agency practices are “extraordinarily patriarchal,” which he defines as having an institutional culture where “masculine values are predominant and gender oppression [is] pronounced.” Taken in totality, it appears that Swedish advertising agencies are also dominated by
masculine, heterosexist norms, not dissimilar to the culture within Anglo-American advertising agencies in the United States and Britain.

**GENDERING THE SYSTEM**

Cultural and organizational feminism, along with feminist perspectives on language, support my analysis of in-depth interviews I conducted with Swedish women creatives to shed light on the gendered creative culture in which they work.

**Feminist Perspectives**

As citizens of the Western world, we live in a predominately masculine culture, which constrains women by privileging men. Women and men are socialized into gender roles, which "operate in relatively autonomous yet interrelated spheres" (Calasanti and Bailey 1991, 38). Gender refers to a culturally determined set of characteristics ascribed to women and men (Tannen 1999). In that sense, gender functions as a "mechanism that enjoin(s) people to live as women and men" (Golombisky 2015, 391). Gender is also "politically constructed" (Dow and Condit 2005, 449). In fact, "gender and sex have been repeatedly attended to throughout history as a means of controlling and subordinating women" (Dow and Condit 2005, 453). The subjugation of women is the foundation for gender-based social and economic inequities (Calasanti and Bailey 1991; Jamieson 1995; Tong 2013). Further, women within Western cultures are often sanctioned if they claim to be different from men or the same as men. In this way, women are held to a different set of standards. In other words, women are systematically trapped in a nearly intractable double bind (Jamieson 1995).

In advertising agencies, there are norms and codes that frame its fraternity culture (Broyles and Grow 2008; Grow 2009; Grow and Broyles 2011; Klein 2000; Mallia 2009; Mallia and Windels 2011; Nixon 2003; Nixon and Crew 2006; Weisberg and Robbs 1997; Windels 2011; Windels and Lee 2012; Windels et al. 2013). This fraternity culture can also be explained, in part, by cultural feminism, which suggests that women and men are reared in and experience life in separate gendered cultures. Cultural feminism posits that women and men "perform [gender] in different ways in different cultures" (Dow and Condit 2005, 455). Living in separate cultures and performing gender differently reinforces culturally constructed gender differences.

Fletcher's (1998, 164) feminist relational theory delves into how gender influences relationships and draws "attention to what has been hidden, obscured, or invisible." Drawing attention to women's frequent invisibility
makes clear the culturally constructed differences that separate women and men. Through the lens of cultural feminism, this research draws our attention to this culturally constructed gender divide, which is powerfully articulated by the "laddish" behaviors within advertising creative departments that create "fundamental barriers to women" (Nixon 2003, 98). Fletcher (1998) might argue that in doing so, everyone's interests are preserved. However, preserving everyone's interest is not the goal within the advertising industry. For advertising "is shot through with gendered understandings of the creative person" (Nixon 2003, 115). Those who run advertising creative departments, predominately white men, are "complicit in reinforcing links between masculinity and creativity" (Nixon 2003, 104).

In the end, "women's knowledge has been absent from what we believe we know to be true about the world" (Golombisky 2010, 169). In the same way, women creatives' expression of what it means to be creative is missing from advertising culture.

Feminist perspectives on organizational management suggest that organizations, including advertising agencies, are never gender neutral. "Organizations have been created by and for men and are based on male experiences" (Meyerson and Fletcher 2000, 129). Organizational systems are framed by gendered "interactions and interrelatedness of various components that make up the environment in which an organization functions" (Creedon 1993, 158). Organizational feminism further argues that the inequities that hamper women's success in business have been "rendered invisible" (Lewis 2014, 1846). This is, in part, because the "identified connection between masculinity and management is always interpreted as detrimental to women because of their difference from the norm [men]" (Lewis 2014, 1847). There is no point, from the perspective of the powerbrokers (men), to explore these gendered differences. Thus these differences, particularly the differences that hold women back, remain invisible.

Higgins, (1997) regulatory fit model proposes that there are two distinct organizational environments: promotion-oriented and prevention-oriented. Promotional environments welcome self-promotion, especially for men who have gender privilege. Prevention-oriented environments discourage self-promotion, especially for women who lack gender privilege. Thus, regardless of whether women work in prevention or promotional organizations, they are likely to experience the constraints of a sexist system, just as Jamieson's (1995) double bind predicts. Complicating matters, Carlson and Crawford (2011, 361) argue that "masculine principles and practices pervade organizational life under the guise of gender neutrality... making conforming to them a prerequisite for managerial success." Yet these biases "erect powerful but subtle and often invisible barriers for women that arise from cultural assumptions and organizational structures, practices, and patterns of interaction that
inadvertently benefit men while putting women at a disadvantage” (Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb 2013, 64).

This is particularly true in advertising’s “culture of commerce” where there is a masculine “cult of creativity” (Nixon 2003, 166). This cult of creativity is exemplified by “masculine juvenility and the childlike qualities of creative people. . . . [creating] intense bonds between young male creatives and the older men who manage creative departments that helped to fix the culture” (Nixon 2003, 163). Ultimately, organizations reinforce gendered arrangements in formal and informal ways (Acker 1990; Carlson and Crawford 2011; Creedon 1993; Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb 2013; Lewis 2014; Meyerson and Fletcher 2000). In advertising, these arrangements are “complicit in reinforcing the link between masculinity and creative jobs” (Nixon 2003, 104).

**The Power of Language**

I also find it useful in gender analysis to consider language in the context of interactions, as we know gendered language patterns are pervasive in organizational culture. Language has significant influence on social formation and cultural evolution. We often bring with us the language we have been socialized to use (Tannen 1990, 1999). Tannen (1990) suggests women are socialized to be listeners and not speakers, just as men are socialized to be speakers and not listeners. Men tend to use talk as a “means to preserve independence and negotiate and maintain status in a hierarchal social order” (Tannen 1990, 77). Women use language as a way of building rapport, “a way of establishing connections and negotiating relationships” (Tannen 1990, 77). Although Tannen’s (1990, 1999) work largely reflects a white world, so, too, does advertising. Within this social context, women can feel invisible in conversations with men. However, according to Kendall and Tannen (1997, 97), “researchers must ask not only about power, but also about how power and solidarity (or status and connection) interact.” In a heteropatriarchal advertising culture, the socialized and stereotypically gendered use of masculine language creates powerful interactions, which negatively affect women creatives more than men creatives. For example, in advertising, men are viewed as youthful and creative (Gregory 2009; Nixon 2003), whereas in broader culture, “women are seen as severe and lacking in humor” (Tannen 1999, 237). For women working in creative departments, this can be especially detrimental as youth and humor are significant drivers of postmodern advertising. Further, humor is judged through a masculine prism, which further limits women creatives’ access to creative departments. Finally, there is the use of the word girl, which is common in American culture. The problem is that the word girl sexualizes and infantilizes women (Duschinsky 2013). Not surprisingly, the word girl is a common linguistic reference for women
within the advertising industry. This proves problematic for women. Women creative workers are sexualized and infantilized, but so too are the women within the images that the advertising industry creates.

Sexism remains; “it has just gone underground” (Meyerson and Fletcher 2000, 128). The problem with the underground nature of gender inequity is that it creates “a subtle pattern of systemic disadvantage, which blocks all but a few women from career advancement” (Meyerson and Fletcher 2000, 128). Within the heteropatriarchal advertising industry, men benefit from this unfair advantage. This advantage also truncates creative outcomes by trapping creative departments within a masculine paradigm, which disadvantages women and limits everyone’s ability to think about advertising and creativity in other perhaps more creative ways. Further, even if women creatives choose to conform to masculine cultural norms, women creatives still remain women. As such, they remain outsiders judged to be inadequate by sole virtue of their gender. In the end, women working in advertising creative departments are not less creative. They are simply stymied by a system defined and replicated by and for men.

THE STUDY

In an effort to investigate to what extent local norms might affect the culture within Swedish advertising creative departments, I interviewed Swedish women creatives, gathering interpretations of their experiences.

Women creative directors were chosen as the participants for two reasons. First, individuals with more extensive work histories offer the greatest potential for teasing out patterns (Dodd 2012). Second, Swedish advertising is a small community; women in creative management with more job security may feel more comfortable speaking about their experiences than entry- or mid-level creatives, thus offering the greatest potential for candor.

I contacted the KOMM, which provided a list of twenty women creative directors, reflecting just how small the Swedish advertising community is. All potential participants were contacted via e-mail and told I was interested in their experiences working as advertising creatives in Sweden. I guaranteed them anonymity and let them know the interview would be done via Skype. Ten women agreed to participate. I knew only one of the participants prior to the interviews. Each interview lasted, on average, one hour, and all were conducted near the end of the workday or after hours. I conducted all the interviews in English, recorded them, and then immediately transcribed them. Follow-up e-mails were used to obtain clarifications. I asked open- and closed-ended questions, and I collected demographic information. I began each interview with broad, open-ended questions, allowing for a “more
complete understanding of the phenomenon through the eyes of the informants" (Windels and Lee 2012, 507). I also allowed the women to take the discussion where they wanted it to go.

Using grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967), I conducted inductive analyses of the transcripts as a whole, allowing themes to emerge. The categories that emerged were observed differences, hiring and promotion, practitioner descriptors, and suggestions for change. Verbatim quotes, which verified themes, were clustered under each of the four thematic categories. To honor anonymity, no references to particular participants are used in the present analysis. Third, I conducted inductive analysis within each of the four thematic categories. This analysis allowed me to focus on interpreting the thematic discourse, which in turn allowed me to contextualize the world in which Swedish women creatives work. Fourth, where appropriate, I employed a simple nonstatistical quantitative analysis to quantify responses. Finally, I applied feminist theories to interpret and articulate the nuances within and across the four thematic threads.

Additionally, I asked questions to capture and quantify demographic details. The ten Swedish women creative directors ranged in age from thirty-six to fifty-four and had been in advertising an average of 22.3 years. Five women held the title of creative director; two, founder–creative director; two, partner–creative director; and one, chief executive officer–creative director. Each woman had worked in management, as a creative director or higher, for an average of 8.5 years. Two women worked at large multinational agencies with thirty or more people in the creative department. Six worked at mid-sized agencies with five to fifteen people in the creative department. Two worked in small boutique shops with fewer than five creative employees. Each woman worked across a range of product categories, although every woman, at some point, had been assigned to women-oriented products such as feminine hygiene, hair care, or cleaning products. Only three of the women had worked on premier brands traditionally targeting men, such as beer, automotive, or finance. All participants were married and referred to their partners as men, and each had an average of 2.5 children. All the women were white and of Swedish or mixed Swedish–European ancestry.

**ANGLO-AMERICAN ECHOES: AN ANALYSIS OF WOMEN CREATIVES' EXPERIENCES IN SWEDEN**

The experiences and perceptions shared by these Swedish women creatives point to a heterogendered culture within Swedish advertising creative departments, despite egalitarian cultural norms within Sweden. The insights these women shared articulate four themes: career trajectory through the lens of
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gender; perceptions of gendered differences and the experience of discrimination; practitioner descriptions and the silos they illustrate; and suggestions for change to break down barriers, which I include in my closing remarks. My initial analysis is guided by cultural and organizational feminism, which build on each other, as they both share the common thread of making the invisible visible. My analysis articulates the systemic nature of heteronormative gender bias, which echoes across the advertising industry, particularly in creative departments. I argue that the fundamental barriers that limit women creatives in Sweden reflect the same barriers that limit women creatives working in Western-style advertising environments worldwide, that is, a sexist culture that supports a masculine “cult of creativity” (Nixon 2003, 166).

Career Trajectories through the Lens of Gender

There was strong agreement among the participants that women are underrepresented in Swedish advertising creative departments. Three aspects emerged related to women creatives’ career trajectories: hiring, promotion, and salary.

Nine of the women perceived a lack of hiring equity based on either gender bias or the need to fit in, which feminists would argue is gender bias. For instance, one woman said, “There are more men in recruiting positions, and men tend to recruit other men.” Another observed, “The pressure of companies today is to have women creatives. But I think . . . the men are always going to recognize themselves in the man’s portfolio and not the girl’s.” This response, referring to women as “girls,” articulates how women creatives are routinely infantilized (Duschinsky 2013). Organizational feminism, including regulatory fit (Higgins 1997), provides context to these comments. It suggests that men will hire other men within promotionally driven environments, like advertising creative departments, which privilege men, whereas cultural feminism suggests that a heteronormative gender culture creates barriers to women. The single woman I interviewed who viewed hiring as equitable thought it was because “it is much easier in Sweden.” This may imply that local Swedish values have some positive effect in terms of hiring. It may also indicate external pressure, as suggested by the woman who spoke of the “pressure of companies today is to have women creatives,” despite what appears to be a tendency to ignore this external pressure.

Perspectives on promotion followed a similar pattern. Six women perceived that women creatives experience promotional inequity, and two indicated there was equity but qualified their responses, essentially demonstrating inequity. Two women were unsure. Those speaking of promotional inequity linked it to gender, noting pay disparities or unconscious bias on the part of the men making the decisions. This speaks to both cultural and organizational feminist arguments that many of the inequities that hamper women are rooted
in invisible bias, in large part because heteronormative gender rules require conforming to masculine principles and practices to fit into the organizational culture (Carlson and Crawford 2011; Creedon 1993; Dow and Condit 2005; Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb 2013; Lewis 2014). One woman put it this way: "Men get more opportunities all the time because it's other men who rule the opportunities. And I'm not certain that they are aware of it." Another woman mentioned family as a factor, yet ultimately brought her comments back to men promoting men: "Women suffer from the fact they are still often more burdened with the responsibilities for family and children, which limits how much they can give and thereby limits their promotions. . . . Men tend to promote other men." Another woman who qualified her responses said this: "Clients ask for women. . . . If you are super good in Stockholm today, it's easier for me to get a job because I'm a woman." Notice, however, her perception that women need to be "super good." Yet she provided no acknowledgement of the gender bias that her perception illustrates. Finally, the two women who were also unsure suggested family was a factor. "When you [are] having children, perhaps you will fall back." In this way, a masculine code is articulated, suggesting that family is feminine and implying that women (and not men) with families lack commitment.

When discussing salary, all of the women perceived compensation to be inequitable. Most women simply said "no" when asked if there was pay equity. However, some expanded their comments. Said one woman, "I know for a fact that men have higher salaries than women." Another woman perceived that women lacked negotiation acumen and confidence: "I think women are not good when you discuss salary. I think men are much better. They [men] know what they are worth." The idea that some women perceive themselves as less confident fits into Higgins's (1997) model of regulatory fit, in that these women appear to meet the gender expectations of androcentric organizational culture. Yet organizational feminism argues that gender bias prevents women from successfully promoting themselves and then blames the women for lack of career advancement. This is a systemic organizational problem and not an individual issue. The promotional struggles these women expressed also illustrate the classic double bind (Jamieson 1995). The ubiquitous privileging of masculine gender truncates Swedish women creatives' advancement, but it also distorts perceptions of work-style differences within Swedish advertising creative departments.

Perceptions of Differences and the Experience of Discrimination

In discussions about work-style behavioral differences between women and men, three patterns of responses emerged: perceived differences, perceived discrimination, and why women leave advertising creative departments.
Eight of ten women perceived gender-based work-style differences between creative women and men. These women framed the differences around the masculine cultural norms that dominate Swedish advertising creative departments. One woman said, “Boys stick together very tight with the same outfits, the same interests, the same attitudes. And being a minority, being a girl, in the group makes it more difficult.” Another woman commented, “They (men) share the same humor and jokes. They build a culture that is very encouraging and nourishing for them. Because women are in the minority, we often just become the audience to this culture.” Four of the eight women who perceived differences pointedly discussed men’s way of expressing themselves. One woman said, “Men act more confident whether they are or not. They claim more space. They speak louder. They are heard. They confirm each other.” Another woman suggested, “It’s always better if you mix genders when you build a team.” Both of the previous comments illustrate gender performance and its negative effect on women. The two women who noted no gender-based work-style differences were ambivalent or perhaps unconsciousness of any bias that they, or others, might face. As one stated, “Of course, there are preferences (for working with one gender over another) between different persons. But I can’t say that when I work with women it’s a different thing than when I work with men.”

Seven women identified what they perceived as discriminatory attitudes or behaviors. The women’s responses suggest that discrimination is more prominent early in women creatives’ careers. As one woman said: “It was quite hard when I was younger. . . . I don’t think that’s so much a problem now [at my age].” Other women observed discrimination in purported attempts to hire other women creatives. One woman recalled being told, “We would really like to hire a woman, but they [women] don’t have any good ideas.” This suggests a cultural feminist explanation that in a masculine creative culture, men’s creativity would be highly valued while women’s creative ideas would be less valued. However, the most common experience women related was being ignored in favor of men. This is at the heart of both cultural and organizational feminist arguments. One woman stated, “They [men] went to the presentations [with my ideas], and I wasn’t allowed to come.” Another participant said: “I stand up for an hour and talk about the presentation and tell them [the clients] all about what we think. Then he [the client] asks his question to the man in the room instead of me. It happens a lot.” All seven of the women who perceived discrimination related their experiences as “a subtle thing.” Of the three women who said they had experienced “nothing major,” one woman said she thought it was a “plus to be a woman.”

I next turn to why women leave Swedish advertising creative departments. In fact, seven of the women indicated they believe that women leave
advertising for different reasons than men. Among these women, some thought women creatives leave because of family and the work–life challenges that children can bring. As one woman said, “It’s often because they [women] don’t get their family life and work to match.” Another woman said, “I don’t think it’s biology.” This woman thinks that women are socialized to take responsibility for the family; at the same time women are not recognized for having time-consuming family responsibilities or good time-management skills in the professional world. These comments suggest that women have difficulty finding a fit, as they lack gender privilege, which is an articulation of the power of regulatory fit (Higgins 1997). One woman spoke of her perceptions that the creative department is “so male.” A different woman said, “It’s so much about rules that men put up.” Yet another woman simply said, “Women are not recognized,” which speaks to feminist perspectives on women’s invisibility. Finally, another woman said: “Women feel alienated. They don’t really feel like they belong.” These comments support organizational feminist thought, which suggests that “organizations have been created by and for men and are based on male experiences” (Meyerson and Fletcher 2000, 129). Three women felt gender did not influence why women leave advertising creative. One woman stated, “I think it’s an age problem for both [women and men],” adding, “My female friends often do it [leave] because they think it’s [advertising] too shallow.” Another woman simply said, “It’s [advertising] not easy.” Yet another said, “After a while you get tired of it [the work].” These comments also might be interpreted as a problem of regulatory fit because it is more difficult to work in an environment in which one does not fit into the culture.

Practitioner Descriptors

To explore the perceptions these women creatives had of their fellow Swedish creatives, both women and men, I asked participants two parallel questions designed to elicit top-of-mind reactions. Specifically, I asked the women to state the first three words that come to mind when they think of Swedish women creatives and then the first three words that come to mind for Swedish men creatives. Eight thematic categories emerged (see Table 9.1). Five were attributed to both women and men creatives, two were exclusively attributed to men creatives, and one was exclusively attributed to women creatives. The five categories attributed to both women and men were “bold” (twelve cites for women and nine for men), “thoughtful” (five cites for women and three for men), “smart” (four cites for women and three for men), “alive” (four cites for women and two for men), and “creative” (two cites for women and three for men). The two categories exclusively attributed to men were “ego”
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<th>Women and Men</th>
<th>Men Only</th>
<th>Men Only</th>
<th>Women Only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thematic</td>
<td>Bold</td>
<td>Thoughtful</td>
<td>Smart</td>
<td>Alive</td>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>Ego</td>
<td>Humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution</td>
<td>12 Women</td>
<td>5 Women</td>
<td>4 Women</td>
<td>4 Women</td>
<td>2 Women</td>
<td>5 Men</td>
<td>5 Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribution</td>
<td>9 Men</td>
<td>3 Men</td>
<td>3 Men</td>
<td>2 Men</td>
<td>3 Men</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Attributions were derived from interviews with the 10 participants who were asked to state the first three words that come to mind when they thought of Swedish women creatives and Swedish men creatives.
Jean M. Grow

(five cites) and "humor" (five cites). The single thematic category attributed only to women was "responsible" (three cites). In the category "creative," the word was repeated multiple times. Likewise for the category and word "responsible." Other categories represent a clustering of the same and similar words. For example, the "bold" category includes words such as "strong." Other paired matches included "thoughtful" and "conscientious," "smart" and "intelligent," "alive" and "energetic," "ego" and "egotistic," as well as "humor" and "funny."

I begin with an analysis of the two categories shared by both genders. Nine out of ten women perceived men creatives as being bold. All ten women perceived women creatives to be bold, with one of the women repeating the word "bold" three times in her description of women creatives. These Swedish women creatives clearly perceived the need to be "bold" as a significant quality, no matter the gender. Tannen's (1990, 1999) work suggests "bold" and "strong" in the present case have stereotypical masculine connotations. The women's perception of boldness as the most common behavior trait powerfully points to Swedish advertising as a masculine world (Alvesson 1998). The women also said that creative women are bolder than creative men. Organizational feminism suggests that boldness and strength present "masculine principles and practices [that] pervade organizational life under the guise of gender neutrality . . . making conforming to them a prerequisite for managerial success" (Carlson and Crawford 2011, 361). This suggests that Swedish women creatives see either a compelling need to conform to the environmental cultural norms in which they work or a need for boldness to survive within the highly masculine culture. "Creative" is also a quality shared by both women and men working in Swedish creative departments. "Creative" had less than half as many references as "bold," despite the fact that "creative" described the work these women do. Regardless of gender, the quality of being "bold," a powerful masculine behavior quality, appears to trump the art of creativity. Indeed, I might argue women require a degree of boldness to attempt to compete in a patently masculine environment in the first place.

Two categories of behavioral qualities, "ego" and "humor," were perceived by the Swedish women creatives as exclusive to men. Swedish women creatives perceived "ego" as an exclusively male trait. One could argue that there is a US taboo against nice women exhibiting "ego" because women are meant to be invisible and selfless, which are traits incompatible with egotism. As Alvesson (1998, 984) observes, Swedish advertising agencies are "extraordinarily patriarchal." The second category that was perceived as exclusive to men was "humor." Tannen (1999) argues that women are perceived as lacking in humor. Without the cultural capital of "humor," women are less likely to find success in the advertising creative
department. The power of male humor was also demonstrated earlier when some of the women creatives spoke of jokes as a way of “nourishing” men, while diminishing women by scripting them as “audience to this [men’s] culture.” By citing “humor” as related only to men, these Swedish women creatives reinforced their role as silent audience members rather than active participants in creative culture.

Finally, the single behavioral category perceived as exclusive to Swedish women creatives was a stereotypically female trait, “responsible” (Broyles and Grow 2008; Grow and Broyles 2011; Mallia 2009). The fact that the women perceived themselves to be “responsible” while perceiving the men as having “ego” and “humor” correlates with socialized gendered norms. These norms are part of formal and informal arrangements that organizations use to reinforce gender conformity (Acker 1990; Carlson and Crawford 2011; Creedon 1993; Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb 2013; Lewis 2014; Meyerson and Fletcher 2000). These arrangements, evident in Swedish creative departments described here, are “complicit in reinforcing the link between masculine and creative jobs” (Nixon 2003, 104). If advertising creative departments nurture and protect a youthful lad culture of bad boys goading one another to push the boundaries and see how much they can get away with to achieve individual acclaim, then women as women creative directors might be positioned as babysitters and mothers “responsible” for making sure no one gets hurt. This frames creatives as naughty boys just trying to have a bit of fun while humorless mothers look on at the risk of being labeled spoilsports. A review of the words these Swedish women creatives chose to be descriptors for those practicing creative in Sweden supports what the limited number of women have already told us: The contributions women creatives make are largely invisible and block “all but a few women from career advancement” (Meyerson and Fletcher 2000, 128).

Moreover, these Swedish women creatives, with an average of 22.3 years of experience, have articulated an organizational culture within Swedish creative departments that reflects the organizational culture within American and British creative departments. This, despite the fact that Sweden is viewed to be the most egalitarian country in the world (Rothstein 2012), with cultural and social values rooted in social justice. As one of the women said, Swedish advertising creative “women feel alienated; they don’t really feel like they belong.” Although the women interviewed here perceived the discrimination and marginalization they experience to be “a subtle thing,” it is also a real thing. It’s time to consider that these experiences, like the experiences of their counterparts in the United States and Britain, are likely to be part of systemic organizational gender bias deeply rooted in advertising creative culture and exported around the world.
CLOSING THE BORDERS TO GENDER BIAS EXPORTATION

This study points to a system of gender bias in advertising creative departments in Sweden that parallels findings from studies in the United States. Despite being the first study to explore the experiences and perceptions of Swedish women creatives, this work has limitations. First, interviewing creative directors provided only the perspectives of women in creative management. Second, Skype interviews may have limited the intimacy and possibly truncated the depth of the women’s responses. Third, it is always a disadvantage to conduct interviews in a nonnative language. Finally, ten participants are a small dataset, albeit an insightful one. The words of these Swedish women creatives open fresh understandings, including suggestions for change in terms of what Swedish women creatives can do for themselves and what advertising powerbrokers can do for Swedish women creatives.

In terms of what women can do for themselves, the women in this study saw senior Swedish women creatives as being a “source of power” for junior creative women. In other words, woman-to-woman mentoring is viewed as paramount to enabling women’s success in advertising creative departments. Senior women can help junior women, guiding them through the complexities of Jamieson’s (1995) gender double bind. The women also spoke of simple things the more junior Swedish women creatives can do for themselves. One woman said, “Show off more.” “Claim more space,” another urged. Yet another advised, “Speak slowly and men will listen more.” These strategies speak to a fundamental tenant of both cultural and organizational feminism: making oneself more visible and pushing back against regulatory fit (Higgins 1997). Another woman urged, “never think that you are a girl; you are someone within a team.” This directly confronts gender-biased language that sexualizes and infantilizes women (Duschinsky 2013). It encourages junior women creatives to break down the hierarchal social order that men use to maintain their status and privilege (Tannen 1990). Finally, one woman counseled: “Do it your way. Don’t be afraid.”

Still, changing gendered behaviors does not change the system or its culture. Every woman in this study spoke of the importance of powerbrokers at the top facilitating change, suggesting CEOs could make the biggest difference for Swedish women working in creative. CEOs must offer women equal opportunities, create environments with more open attitudes, create pay equity, and simply hire more women because, as one woman said, “When you start to have more equal [numbers of women] ... something happens.” Lewis (2014) speaks of organizational inequities that render women invisible, whereas Ibarra, Ely, and Kolb (2013) suggest that when women see other women in positions of power, the often-invisible barriers women face begin to come down. The Swedish women creatives also spoke of making agency
CEOs accountable for change, including making men accountable for their unconscious biases. It is time for men and women creatives to account for the ways that advertising’s masculine “cult of creativity” is reinforced and perpetuated as normal and ideal.

If, as I believe, we are exporting the US culture of misogyny in the advertising industry’s idealized myth of the creative department around the world, then we are also exporting our racism, homophobia, ageism, and ableism. More cross-cultural studies can enhance our understanding of how advertising culture is shared globally.

REFERENCES


