

**The Sixeteers**

***GENDER REPRESENTATION IN ADVERTISING: THE CASES OF  
AMERICAN APPAREL AND CALVIN KLEIN***

**Members of the group**

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All group members equally contributed to the structuration of the main idea the project revolves around, and then worked singularly to provide a deeper and more personal interpretation to the subcategories it is articulated in. Each member also contributed to a constant peer evaluation and designing the presentations and the final output, a web page.

**Outline**

This research examines the portrayal of women and men in advertising campaigns by the fashion brands Calvin Klein and American Apparel's in a three-decade timespan (1990-2020), focusing on how these brands shape gender images and reflect or reinforce societal norms and the influence of the Beijing Conference (1995) - particularly referring to Strategic Objective J2. A simple and short review of the actual marketing campaigns of both brands will also be provided. Through an analysis of selected campaigns, we investigate key issues including gender representation through bodily depiction, the disparities in images crafted for each gender, and the roles of aesthetic inequality and gender-related stereotypes. This study also addresses the broader problems of discrimination, cultural sexualization, and aesthetic bias, aiming to uncover the underlying factors that contribute to gender inequality in high-profile fashion advertising.

**Goal and target**

Our final objective is to propose a set of good practices and examples to promote a critical and responsible approach to analysing and observing marketing campaigns and advertising commercials involving body representation of both men and women, in order to encourage a more aware and gender-sensitive approach. By analyzing Calvin Klein and American Apparel's evolution in terms of body representation in commercials, we hope to raise awareness between our peers and train future communicators to adopt a more mindful visual and linguistic approach to gender and body related issues, as well as uprooting

stereotypes and biased representations of women and men, to promote a more inclusive and neutral future market and mediascape.

### **Methodology**

This is a qualitative study based on the analysis of 12 advertising campaigns from two fashion brands. The research sample will consist of selected ads and campaigns from brands American Apparel and Calvin Klein produced between the years 1990-2000, 2000-2010 and 2010-2020, featuring both women and men. This means that the research sample will be non-random and purposive, allowing for the creation of a sample close to being representative.

The study will be based on classic feminist literature, providing an effective perspective on stereotypes about women, which also extend to the media space.

### **Challenges and limits**

The portrayal of women and men in advertising presents a wide range of challenges and limits, in addition to the message the brands are trying to convey. Over the past three decades (before and after the introduction of the Beijing Platform) brands like Calvin Klein and American Apparel, as we already have introduced, offer us a valuable lens through which we can examine how gender roles are being perceived, created, reinforced and questioned.

The challenges that both the brands and every other advertisement company face can be understood through several aspects like the sexualisation of men and women, the male gaze, global and social influence, cultural sensitivity and social responsibility. Possible limits could vary between interpretative bias, due (not only, but also) to cultural context.

As we know, advertising campaigns are often tailored to specific cultural contexts, and what seems stereotypical in one country may not be viewed the same way elsewhere, limiting the generalizability of findings on a global scale. This research will be done by six students, from four different countries and cultures. Coming from different parts of the world gives us the opportunity to use our background and understanding of advertisement, resulting in a diverse and subjective interpretation of gender representation in advertising.

### **References and resources**

It is established that consumer's values and thinking processes can be influenced by the media. Amongst those values are the ideal body types that are shown in the media. Gender Stereotypes are still prevalent in today's societies and have the ability to operate on a subconscious level, while media plays a crucial role in cementing those roles through advertisements.

In order to carry out this research, we plan on consulting various sources and materials, divided into three different categories: bibliography - feminist literature -, sitography - academic papers, TEDx and web images -, and feminist filmography.