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Sex Sells: How Advertising Agencies' Commodification of Image Affects Older Women in Advertising

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Sex Sells: How Advertising Agencies’ Commodification of Image Affects Older Women in Advertising

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

By Diane Fittipaldi

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

2014
Sex Sells: How Advertising Agencies’ Commodification of Image Affects Older Women in Advertising

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as meeting departmental criteria for graduating with honors in scope and quality.

We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand how advertising agency culture affects the long-term careers of women account executives as they age. The primary research questions were: 1) How do self-image and cultural stereotypes affect the decision to enter the advertising business; 2) How do women navigate the male-dominated culture of the ad agency; 3) What strategies do women use to get ahead in advertising; 4) How do women survive long term in a culture that favors youth? Qualitative data was collected via unstructured, one-on-one, in-depth interviews with a nationally sourced sample 15 female advertising account executives aged 40 years old to 61 years old. Critical theory and the uncovering of power dynamics served as the interpretive framework for both the inquiry and analysis of this study.

Participants reported being attracted to the field’s glamour. They understood the habitus and looked and acted the part in the dramaturgical presentation of self. In their early careers, women enjoyed the high-energy atmosphere and intense camaraderie they encountered in a total institution-like atmosphere. Getting ahead required the accumulation of social capital, which meant demonstrating the ability to diffuse sexual harassments and give up one’s personal life in service of the job. Here, accepting the myth that clients require around the clock attention reinforced hegemonic practices, which ultimately forced women to choose between career and family. Among those that continued in the profession, many reported identifying as tomboys in their youth. They felt comfortable in a man’s world and performed as ideal workers with immunity from family work. The advertising agencies represented in this study were steeped in patriarchy. Standpoint theory explains why most women accepted the industry’s patriarchy as given, unable to envision alternative ways of being.
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INTRODUCTION

Reflexive Statement

Popular culture in the United States has often romanticized the advertising industry with long running television series such as “Thirtysomething” (1987-1991) and more recently Mad Men (2007-current). Highly successful films add to this cultural context. The 2009 Sundance award-winning documentary Art and Copy comes to mind as well as the fictional screenplay What Women Want (2000). Through these cultural representations, the industry and the people in it take on hyper-stylized caricatures. Interestingly, these stereotypes are alive and well in the real world of advertising and my many years of experience in the industry stand as testimony to this fact. I find it odd that researchers, filmmakers and journalists have failed to take a critical look at this industry and its culture. The mythology of the advertising industry and the structural inequities that exist in agencies’ hiring practices and career advancement policies remain unexposed. I started my career in advertising at the age of twenty-two. I am now inching dangerously close to 60 years old and only recently decided to leave the industry for a career researching its culture and practices. I use the words “dangerously” because a historical look at the industry makes it clear that people my age, especially women, rarely remain employed in advertising over the long term.

Advertising started out as a young man’s business and has remained so over its more than 100 year history. The years have entrenched this young, male ethos as the status quo. The passage of time has normalized the situation to the point where workers accept the industry’s ageist and gender biased practices as not only acceptable but also justified and worth perpetuating. From the moment I entered this profession, I noticed an entry-level workforce of almost all women and executive leadership of almost all White men. I also noticed very few people over the age of 40 years old. During my long career I have worked for five different
agencies, some big and world renowned, others small and more boutique-like. These observations about gender and age held in each one. My colleagues joke about advertising being the only profession where no one ever attends a retirement party. It appears everyone leaves agency life well before retirement age. Yet, this phenomenon seems so normal to insiders, they fail to question it.

The hyper-stylized culture inside ad agencies goes beyond an obsession with youth. Insiders often describe it as “an appearance business.” For me, this has always rung true and in some ways it seems truer now than when I started. Successful ad agency people stay fit; they work out regularly and are never overweight. The women wear trendy clothes, style their hair in the latest fashion and always accessorize. Personally, I fell prey to these cultural dictates. I felt pressure to do so. I shopped for and bought youthful clothes that conformed to the unwritten dress code in the industry. From time to time, I cut my hair in extreme fashions and throughout my long career I wore shoes that hurt my feet.

As I climbed the corporate ladder and began interviewing candidates for entry-level jobs, I saw colleagues eliminate prospects because they didn’t “look the part.” It seems obvious to me that when an ad agency turns down a qualified job applicant because the person does not “look the part” this bias results in exclusion. None of my colleagues saw it this way. My management asked me to screen for more than just work experience and skills, they asked me to screen for “fit” and interestingly the markers of fit extended beyond looking the part. Candidates also needed to act the part. Stereotypically advertising people are “interesting” people who embody creativity, engage in interesting hobbies, stay on top of pop culture and adopt new technologies before anyone else. In this context, looking the part as well as acting the part can take on an ageist and many times gender-biased point of view. As a result, advertising agencies remain
closed clubs reserved for an elite few. The status quo goes unchallenged by outside thinking or a diversity of voices.

Research confirms that the advertising industry has failed to make significant strides in diversifying its workforce. While many industries found ways to combat the structural issues and hiring policies that prevent diversity, advertising agency leaders continue to reproduce a White, male-dominated, youthful workforce that perpetuates the stereotypes depicted in pop culture. As a result, the mystique continues with entry reserved for a select group that fits the mold. Unfortunately, very few researchers have taken a critical look at ad agency culture and the select few who have conducted research in this area have all been men. A female point of view is missing. Additionally, the few existing studies focus their attention on the creative department within the ad agency, the place where art directors, copywriters and designers work. I was a member of the account management department. Unlike the creative team, I worked directly with the clients, figured out their needs, developed a strategy or plan, and then liaised with the creative team to develop the ads. To this point, no one has studied the working experiences of account managers like me.

From my own vantage point, I see branding as one of the likely culprits responsible for the exclusionary nature of advertising agency culture. In my experience, ad agencies pay close attention to their own brand and hone it carefully. This takes many forms. They cultivate their image by winning prestigious awards. They spend large amounts of money on their impressive office spaces to showcase their creativity. Over my years in the industry I witnessed agencies applying these same branding principles to the way they screened, selected and promoted their workers. To get hired, fit in and succeed in this environment, advertising agency personnel develop and maintain personas that fit their agency’s brand. They learn to conform to the youthful, highly stylized nature of the business as a way to cultivate their careers. Women learn
to “get along with the guys” to prove they can hold their own in a competitive situation. They put in long hours and travel for days and sometimes weeks on client assignments. As a result they rely on others to keep their homes clean and put their children to bed. Women see these sacrifices as necessary, as part of the job. After all, the women who went before them faced these same challenges and managed them the same way. Women in this situation struggle to imagine an alternative way of being.

During the whole of my career I was never quite confident that I sufficiently looked and acted the part, but from the beginning I felt pressure to try. The older I got the more I dialed up “the look” to compensate for age and the more I made it a point to read up on trends to stay current. I played this part during my early career to gain access and continued to play it as a matter of self-preservation. I felt I needed to exemplify the archetypal ad executive to protect myself from being placed at the top of the list of those likely to get laid off. Clients routinely leave one advertising agency for another and when this happens, agencies shed workers to compensate for lost profits. Experienced workers often earn higher salaries making them an even more likely target for cost savings. Even worse, the last two economic downturns, which have been particularly deep, have created additional instability in the industry and increased the likelihood of layoffs among older women.

The purpose of this study was not only to understand how ad agency culture affects the long-term careers of women as they age but also to understand how it affects the women themselves. I focused this study on female account managers over the age of 40 years old because until now, researchers have overlooked them as a cohort worth studying. Informed by critical theory, I intended for this research to uncover the power dynamics sewn into the fabric of ad agency culture and I hoped to reveal the injustices that older women suffer as a result. The grounded theory I developed may help women question what lies beneath their experiences and
may prompt them to demand structural changes to an industry that marginalizes their experiences and subjugates their contributions.

**Summary**

My life long interest in advertising along with my many years of first hand experience in the business, led me to this study. But I conducted this study out of more than self-interest. Firstly and most importantly, the research community has neglected to study this phenomenon. By examining the impact of the youth-obsessed, male-dominated ad agency culture on the careers of older women in advertising, this study contributes to a new line of inquiry. Secondly, my research gave a voice to an unstudied population on issues of critical importance to them. By engaging in this research, participants had a chance to question their treatment and to view their experiences in a new light. Lastly, up to this point, only male researchers have studied the advertising industry in any depth and as a result a female point of view has been sorely lacking.

**Definition of Terms**

As is the case in many professions, people in advertising have developed their own jargon and use a host of terms that have nuanced meaning within the industry. Terms used in this study include:

*Account Executive.* An employee of an advertising agency that acts as the liaison between the client and other members of the agency. The account executive is responsible for the client relationship and runs the day-to-day business of the client’s account. The term “account executive” is often interchangeable with “A/E,” “account manager,” “account supervisor” or “account director.”
Art Director. An employee of the creative department of an advertising agency who is responsible for the visual communication of campaigns regardless of medium (television, print, etc.).

Copywriter. An employee of the creative department of an advertising agency who is responsible for the written communication of campaigns regardless of medium (television, radio, print, etc.).

Creative Director. A leader within the creative department. Creative directors are responsible for the quality of the department’s work and often manage the creative process, as well as the teams of people who develop advertising ideas.

Creative Hot Shop. Top tier agencies that have received notoriety for their breakthrough ideas, transcendent creativity, innovation and award-winning campaigns.

Designer. An employee of the creative department responsible for developing a variety of types of graphics such as logos, package designs, and websites.

Digital Advertising. Refers to communication disseminated through electronic means over the Worldwide Web.

The Creatives. The collective members of the creative department, encompassing art directors, copywriters, designers and others.

Traditional Advertising Agencies. Agencies that have failed to modernize and adapt to the digital age and that typically focus on television and print advertising as the mainstay of their business.

Traditional Advertising. Advertising modes popularized before the digital age, typically refers to television, print and radio.
CHAPTER ONE:
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This review of scholarly literature places this study in the context of the body of research related to the field of advertising as well literature related to self-presentation, workplace discrimination, feminism and social theory. The intersection of these lines of inquiry sheds light on the importance of age, gender and physical appearance among the workforce in the advertising industry. Due to the complexity of these various topics, the literature review that follows divides along several lines. First, a chronological review of the advertising industry provides a historical look at the field, covering topics of how it began and the various stages of development leading up to the current day. Next, research which focuses on issues of self-presentation, the bureaucratic nature of corporate organizations and workplace discrimination, show how the personnel practices of advertising agencies fit in to the larger field of organizational theory. Last, the analytical literature offers a feminist and social theory lens for understanding the dynamics within the advertising industry.

Historical Review of the Advertising Industry

The Early Years – Turn of the Century to World War II

Before the industry boom of the early 20th century, clients worked directly with newspapers and magazines to place advertisements. Advertising agencies as stand alone businesses did not exist. The onset of the industrial age and inception of mass production changed this dynamic. Ad agencies arose as independent enterprises that specialized in developing these ads. From the beginning the profession suffered from a huckster image (Frank, 1997; Lears, 1994; Smulyan, 2007). To legitimize the profession, agencies characterized their
work as contributing to the prosperity of the nation. Agency executives rationalized that by telling consumers about new products and services, ad agencies and the ads they created served a social good (Lears, 1994; Marchand, 1985). By 1912, agency leaders claimed that their organizations’ creativity formed the spark that ignited demand and helped foster the economic growth of the nation. Pushing this rationale further and in an effort to bolster their image as “social engineers” (Lears, 1994, p. 233) agencies took steps to solidify their position alongside other highly regarded professionals. Agency CEOs likened the relationship between client and ad agency as similar to that of the lawyer/client relationship or doctor/patient relationship. They advised clients to place their implicit trust in their ad agency’s capable hands. Going beyond rhetoric to action, agencies started to recruit young men from the Ivy League colleges. The CEOs also began serving on corporate boards of directors as a way to raise their profile and cultivate their image (Marchand, 1985). In doing so, the industry and the executives that ran it began the practice of managing the industry’s reputation. They accomplished this by carefully selecting staff members who fit the mold and then by channeling their activities inside and outside of work, a theme repeated to this day.

These early years hold particular significance related to agency hiring practices. In these privately held autocratic organizations, agency executives created their companies in their own image. Prominent White men of a relatively young age dominated the agency business then as they still do today. Women comprised less than 3% of the agency staffers (Lears, 1994). Patriarchy formed the basis of agency life. The literature refers to these men as “benevolent dictators” (Cummings, 1984, p. ix) a demanding set of rulers who controlled agency life from the top down. These men hand picked key personnel and personally groomed and mentored their successors.
Importantly, we see early evidence in the 1920s and 1930s of the industry’s obsession with youth. Agency insiders claimed that agencies were “no place for anyone over 35” (Marchand, 1985, p. 45), a remarkably young cut off even by today’s standards. These insiders talked about young people as more energetic, adaptable, and with superior knowledge of the newest lifestyles and conventions. A mythology we see invoked in current times just as it was back then.

In an effort to maintain their creative spark, agency executives attempted to mold their workplaces in ways that resisted the bureaucratization that characterized most industries in the pre-World War II era. Typically, organizations in this era emphasized efficiency over all else, striving for passionless or “dehumanized” (Weber, 1948, p.216) workers to streamline workflow and maximize productivity. Successful companies during this time were “oriented toward and assumed to be capable of suppressing irrationality, personality and emotionality” (Kanter, 1977, p. 22). In contrast, many of the benevolent dictators developed atmospheres where members of the creative department (the creatives) could thrive, atmospheres marked by unrestraint (Cummings, 1984). These early agency leaders subscribed to the human relations model of organizational theory made prominent by Mayo (1960), which acknowledged that workers’ sentiments and emotions enhanced rather than detracted from productivity within organizations. As agencies vacillated between bureaucratic efficiency and creative freedom, Lears (1994) noted that copywriters attached themselves to cultures that embodied freedom because they felt this environment allowed them to more fully practice their craft. In these early days, creatives found their job content and their workplace atmosphere to embody risk and adventure, two cultural aspects, which continue to define ad agencies to this day (Marchand, 1985).
World War II to 1960

The economic recession prior to World War II and the continuing economic struggles during the war put downward pressure on demand for consumer products. For the first time, advertising agencies lost business and laid-off workers (Lears, 1994). However, by 1945 demand for consumer goods rose and the economy boomed. In response, the need for advertising services surged. The industry resumed its expansion both in terms of the number of agencies as well as job growth, adding 34% more advertising jobs between 1954 and 1958, the most robust increase of any time in the history of the census of service industries (see Figure 1.1). This period also witnessed the rise of a handful of powerful firms headquartered in New York City commonly called the “Big Four” (Fox, 1984, p. 174). These agencies, J. Walter Thomson, BBDO, Young & Rubicam and McCann-Erickson remain giants in the industry today. Often the subject of press articles and frequently featured in the mainstream news magazines of the time, these agencies become known as the “invisible wizards of Madison Avenue, where power and glory seemed to converge” (McDonough, 2008, p.6).

Figure 1.1. Growth in advertising jobs (United States Census Bureau, census of service industries).
Before World War II, the business leaders of the advertising industry broke conventions and took risks; they forged new paths by rejecting bureaucratic organizational structures. In the post war era this changed dramatically and the industry shifted to embrace the formal rationality identified by Max Weber (1922) many years before. This period suppressed the industry’s uniqueness and the value it once placed on individual creativity. Lears (1994) called it the period of “containment of carnival” (p. 135). After the war, the industry ushered in the use of market research to identify formulas for developing successful print ads. Roser Reeves (1961), the chairman of Ted Bates & Company, one of the notable ad agencies of the time, developed a prescriptive system, which he required all copywriters to follow. He then created a Copy Lab where consumers reacted to the agency’s selling messages. Afterward, the lab produced graphs, which charted the ads’ ability to produce brand name recall and persuasion (Frank, 1997). Similarly, David Ogilvy, the president of Ogilvy & Mather, another important ad agency of the time, offered a different set of strict guidelines and rules for creating effective advertising. Ogilvy’s methods provided step-by-step formulas for creating strong advertising and offered an even stricter code than Reeves’ (Frank, 1997). At the time, art directors and copywriters bristled at the lack of freedom, a simmering pot waiting to boil over.

As ad agencies like Ogilvy & Mather and Ted Bates & Company sprung up to meet the post war demands for advertising services, the media and pop culture’s interest in the industry accelerated. For example, in 1947, *Fortune* magazine published a full exposé on J. Walter Thompson (Frank, 1997). An archival search of the *New York Times* during the period between 1950 and 1960 resulted in 813 articles or mentions of J. Walter Thompson, 763 for McCann-Erickson, 354 for Ted Bates & Company, 214 for Ogilvy & Mather, 143 for BBDO and 66 for Young & Rubicam. The ad industry’s notoriety extended beyond the news media. During this time advertising agencies and their employees also served as the setting for best selling fiction
SEX SELLS

and Hollywood films. Between 1946 and 1960, advertising insiders wrote and published at least 23 novels set in advertising agencies, among them six topped the New York Times best seller’s list and several of them became Book-of-the-Month Club selections (Frank, 1997; Smulyan, 2007). These books and their film adaptations showed how ad agencies worked and helped influence society’s acceptance of the profession. As a result, awareness of the advertising industry entered the popular lexicon taking center stage with The Hucksters, which achieved the fourth best selling book in 1946 and The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit, which ranked as the fifth best selling book in 1955 and which reached further acclaim as a screenplay starring Gregory Peck (Smulyan, 2007). Most of these works depicted the drab existence of agency life during this period of hyper rationality, scientific methods, and bureaucratic drudgery. Agency insiders authored the majority of these works, reinforcing the credibility of these novels among the reading and viewing public.

As the 1950s came to a close, advertising agency employees frustrated by bureaucracy needed a change. Novels set in the industry during this period and written by agency insiders shifted gears and began to depict admen as rebels seeking relief from the conformity crisis. According to Smulyan (2007) the characters in these novels served as “canaries in the mineshaft” (p.148) for what lie ahead. Even David Ogilvy saw the sea change coming. The ads produced under his scientific method failed to achieve the expected results. Ogilvy proactively began looking for a new type of creativity. He felt young, talented people might provide the much-needed antidote and he searched for new blood among “nonconformists, dissenters and rebels” (Ogilvy as quoted in Frank, 1997, p.47).

The Creative Revolution – 1960 to 1990

Up to this time, copywriters dominated the creative process. However, the advent of television created an emphasis on visuals, giving art directors a more prominent role (Fox, 1984).
Television spurred a creative revolution in the industry. Bill Bernbach of the successful agency, Doyle, Dane & Bernbach led the way with two organizational innovations, which other agencies soon copied. First, Bernbach eliminated the rules and research fixation that governed the period before 1960 believing these restrictions stifled the creative process. Second, he reorganized the workflow and redefined the creative process by pairing copywriters with art directors in partnerships that sometimes lasted the length of one’s career (Frank, 1997; Fox, 1984). During this period, “art dethroned science” (Frank, 1997, p. 58). Creative teams established their own reputations and often sold themselves to various ad agencies as duos for hire or conversely, they broke off and started their own shops (Fox, 1984). During the creative revolution, agencies developed official creative departments, which took on a central role in agency culture, sometimes considered the lifeblood of the agency (Nixon, 2003).

As the importance of creative teams rose, vestiges of Weberian (1922) bureaucracy once again diminished in favor of Mayo’s (1960) human relations model, which emphasized underlying social structures and the importance of teams. According to Kanter (1971) by the 1960s human relations theory infiltrated the executive suite of most American companies in the form of sensitivity training to teach management “about relationships so as to master, not unleash, emotional factors counter-productive to the organizations” (p. 24). As businesses in the 1960s alternated between these organizational philosophies, the advertising industry embraced the tenets of human relations theory. Ad agencies during this time became known for their organizational openness and freedom. George Lois, an influential and now famous art director of the agency known as Doyle Dane Bernbach remembered the culture of the ad agency fondly saying, “we worked late because it was painful to leave its carefree atmosphere” (Lois as quoted in Frank, 1997, p. 82). The new organizational structure proved valuable. Doyle Dane Bernbach created a breakthrough ad campaign for Volkswagen, which not only received industry
accolades and awards but which also generated attention among consumers, lifting the advertising industry to a new level of excitement and respect among the general public, especially the young people of the time (Cummings, 1984; Frank, 1997; Fox, 1984).

As a result, during the creative revolution the status of the creatives rose within the ranks at advertising agencies (Fox, 1984). The elevation of these creative teams profoundly shifted the professional ethos within these firms and fundamentally changed their cultures resulting in a much looser atmosphere that to this day distinguishes ad agencies from other types of businesses (Fox, 1984). As the outside world experienced an upheaval in music, literature, movies and youth culture, ad agencies embraced the counterculture of the 1960s and brought it inside their organizations. Agencies became places of antiestablishment. The gray flannel suit fell by the wayside, replaced by a look that included long hair, blue jeans, beads, wild patterns and loud colors (Frank, 1997). Fox (1984) wrote of clients taken on tours of the ad agency offices to “see the miniskirts and jeans, smell the incense and other suspicious odors, as though to prove how daring and au courant the shop was” (p. 270). This discourse became so popular that in 1969, Newsweek ran a cover story entitled “Advertising’s Creative Explosion.” The article painted a vivid picture of ad agency life, its freedoms, modes of dress and resemblance to the counterculture of the 1960s (Frank, 1997). As the popular press from Newsweek to Fortune to the Fort Worth Press (Frank, 1997) reported on this phenomenon, ad agency workers earned a reputation for being hip. The public came to embrace them as “the coolest guy on the commuter train, turned on to the latest youth culture, rock music, and drug influenced effects” (Frank, 1997, p.114).

With the creative revolution, the men that headed up the creative department (creative directors) gained a newfound freedom to hire their own people (Fox, 2003). This meant that men hired men, perpetuating the male domination in advertising with only a gradual acceptance of
women in agency life. In 1967, one of the more progressive agencies on Madison Avenue in New York City promoted six women to vice president. These women stood among 100 male colleagues of the same rank in that same agency during this time (Fox, 1984). They served as tokens and nothing more (Fox, 1984; Kanter, 1977). A case in point is Mary Wells who in 1963 left her high-ranking position at a well-known New York ad shop to start her own agency. The agency’s work attracted international attention and Wells served as a poster child for women in advertising. She quickly became “the industry’s most glamorous figure, marrying the head of one of her client companies and attracting the attention of society columnists nationwide as she jetted between the hangouts of the world’s wealthy” (Frank, 1997, p. 124). During this time, *Fortune* magazine published a feature article on Wells and her agency. She earned her place as a favorite of the New York press. She also appeared on a popular daytime television talk show, *The Mike Douglas Show* (Lawrence, 2002). This notoriety served as a burden that cut two ways. Wells proved that women could earn their place in the limelight but at the same time her fame falsely signaled to the benevolent dictators that the ad industry needed no further reforms (Fox, 1984).

By the mid-1970s representation of women in the professional ranks within the industry grew to 57% (Fox, 1984). Yet, this increase represented an accomplishment of numbers only; women continued to be passed up for high honors and top management positions. For example, to this day, the American Advertising Federation has 144 people in its hall of fame, only eight are women. Likewise, between 1975 and 1997 the Art Director’s Club of New York inducted 102 people into its hall of fame; only six were women (Advertising Age Encyclopedia, 2003). Women who achieve top ranking positions in hierarchical organizations such as the ad agencies of the time, tended to be females in the biological sense but socially they took on roles more akin to males, meaning they had little or no responsibility for household matters or they entrusted
those responsibilities to hired help (Acker, 1990; Williams, 2000). In order for workers to
ascend the corporate ladder, they need to adhere to the “ideal worker norm” (Williams, 2000, p.
1). This norm assumed the workers toil tirelessly and dedicate themselves fully to the job. For
women in advertising as in other professions this means working full time not part time,
willingly accepting overtime hours, traveling as required by the job and rarely taking time off for
responsibilities at home, including child rearing. As a result, while the advertising industry saw
a marked change in the number of women in entry level and mid-level positions, women were
passed up for promotion to higher ranks. Men continued to control ad agencies from the top
down, instilling and perpetuating the ideal worker norms as requisites for success.

The Digital Revolution – 1990s to Today

Scholarly literature reveals very little about the inside workings of American ad agencies
during the digital revolution. Sean Nixon (2003) and Mats Alversson (2001) provided the only
in-depth studies, however their research took place in Europe and may or may not bear a
relationship to the way the industry works in the United States. The analysis that follows is
based on the work of these scholars.

The digital age thrust the ad industry into a revolution not seen since the 1960s. As the
importance of television advertising declined and the importance of digital media rose, the
pairing of art directors and copywriters became less important if not irrelevant. Nixon (2003)
characterized it as a switch “from a relay to a scrum” (p. 50). The creative director continued to
lead the department, typically as a charismatic leader, heading up organic work teams comprised
of a variety of individuals with a range of talents rather than presiding over art director and
copywriter duos, as was previously the case. According to Weber (1922), charismatic leaders
often disrupt the bureaucratic status quo allowing truly new and revolutionary forces to prevail.
The old linear, more rational workflow of copywriter/art director pairs disappeared in favor of a
new way of working. Charismatic leadership made this change possible. Kanter (1977) asserted that leaders in bureaucracies use reorganizations as opportunities to increase their power base. As routine operating methods fall away and new ones take their place, uncertainty ensues. This uncertainty makes workers dependent on central authority figures, in this case the creative directors, who used their power to reward those who embraced change and punished those who resisted (Nixon 2003). Kanter (1977) went on to say that charismatic leaders compound their power further reinforcing what has already been observed in the advertising industry as the clout wielded by the creatives in general but more specifically male creative directors.

The newly reorganized creative process resulted in an atmosphere of intense and artificially induced competition (Nixon, 2003). Creative directors routinely pitted their people against one another, critiquing their work in a group setting while peers watched on. Nixon (2003) maintained that this dynamic, which uses intimidation and public ridicule as a motivator, is decidedly male and particularly difficult for women, which further exacerbated the already entrenched gender bias in the industry. According to Frank (1997) the 1990s played host to outrageous workplace behavior, which he characterized as “commonplace” (p. 53) much of it also considered male and aggressive. For example, Wieden and Kennedy, a Portland, Oregon agency known for its Nike advertising, erected a basketball court in their office so agency employees could let off steam and rejuvenate their creativity (Frank, 1997). Agency trade publications and, to some extent, the popular press reported on these workplace antics, popularizing their existence and perpetuating the mythology surrounding agency culture as an anything goes atmosphere (Frank, 1997).

Nixon (2003) held out little hope for improvements in the agency gender imbalance or the in the agency gender bias. He characterized it as “intractable” (p. 96) referencing British trade industry data, which states “80% of all creative teams are all-male” (p. 117). In the United
States, these data are not routinely collected by trade or industry organizations. However, one American study found that women feel the gender bias has indeed gotten worse over this period because they believe attention to the issue has waned under the false assumption that strides have been made (Gregory, 2009). In fact, Kat Gordon (2014) researched the topic and discovered that in the United States, only 3% of all creative directors are female. She launched a conference in 2012 to bring attention to the issue and encouraged structural changes within the industry to address the disparity.

As the art director/copywriter team moved toward obsolescence, the definition of what constituted creativity shifted (Nixon, 2003). In most ad agencies today, some creatives see creativity as the ability to take an established idea and twist it in new ways, resulting in an unexpected or surprising outcome. Others feel creativity means wholly new inventions that have never been tried before without basis in prior work. Most importantly, the youngest members of agencies embrace creativity as “newness” whereas the older members subscribe to the “with a twist” definition (Nixon, 2003). As creative directors came to accept and even favor the definition of creativity as “newness,” the already entrenched tendency toward valorizing youth received additional reinforcement and another boost. As one of Nixon’s (2003) interviewees stated, “Young people in the business tend to think more 360 degrees than older people. The older people tend to think, TV commercials, press ads, radio ads, which is very blinkered. It’s difficult to teach an old dog new tricks” (p. 87). The advertising industry romanticized and prioritized youth from the onset but it is Nixon’s (2003) theory that the digital age accentuated the age bias. Because Nixon’s work focused on the creatives within the British ad industry, the question remains open as to how the digital age may have changed the American advertising profession and whether these changes extend to roles outside of the creative department.
Having taken this historical look at the evolution of the advertising industry and having uncovered themes of ageism and gender bias, I will now turn to a selection of topical literature which will help explain the slow progress agencies have made in combating discriminatory practices and workforce diversification. I will first look at the literature that explains the advertising industry’s fixation on image and show how this results in a homogeneous workforce. I will then review Kantor’s (1977) theory of homosocial reproduction and conclude by reviewing of the literature on workplace discrimination before moving on to a review of theoretical literature.

**Self-Presentation, Image and Identity of Ad Agency Personnel**

The advertising industry’s fixation on image finds roots in the ambiguous nature of the business. The definition of what constitutes good advertising rests in subjective judgment; as a result agencies find it necessary to unseat the notion that anyone can produce great ads. This makes it necessary for agencies to rely on image as a way to establish professional authority. In the absence of tangible measures of success, image and perceptions become surrogates (Alversson, 1994; Alversson, 2001). The literature identifies three elements that comprise the way ad agencies and their personnel present themselves. The first component concerns the way the members of the organization dress (Alversson, 1994; Alversson, 2001; Keenen, 2001; Nixon, 2003). The second expands beyond one’s clothes and takes into account the entirety of one’s appearance or what is known as “looking the part” (Kanter, 1977, p. 47). Lastly discourse plays a role. Specifically, in ad agencies this means the language and rhetoric used internally, rhetoric, which typically disparages clients behind their backs (Alversson, 1994). I will now take a brief look at each of these three components before turning to the remaining body of topical literature related to this field of inquiry.
First, when it comes to the social construction of self-image, dress plays a pivotal part because clothes mediate the way we view ourselves (Keenen, 2001). Clothes also offer others cues as to what group we belong to, what role we play, and what strata or social position we occupy (Keenen, 2001). Under these conditions, the clothes one wears act as currency in power relations and provide a way for workers to display the marketing and branding strategies of the companies they work for (Keenen, 2001; Pettinger, 2004; Warhurst & Nickson, 2009; Warhurst, van der Broek, Hall, & Nickson, 2009; Williams & Connell, 2010). Many ad agency workers consciously select what they wear in an attempt to distance themselves from less creative workers in other professions (Alversson, 2001). One of Nixon’s (2003) interviewees put it this way, “when you are selling creativity, your dress and attire need to reflect creativity” (p. 145).

Secondly, beyond dress and clothing, companies admittedly seek out workers with an overall appearance that reinforces the firm’s brand image, thereby providing the firm with a competitive edge in the marketplace (Warhurst, van der Broek, Hall, & Nickson, 2009). Warhurst & Nickson (2009) researched this phenomenon resulting in a theory they called aesthetic labor. They observed how organizations commoditized workers’ overall corporeality in an attempt to enhance the corporation’s image; seeking more than just attractive workers and instead seeking out workers who had the “right look” (p. 387). Williams & Connell (2010) argued that aesthetic labor is both subjective and discriminatory, however they also pointed out that United States labor laws favor employers on this matter offering workers little in the way of recourse for what some consider to be appearance discrimination. According to aesthetic labor theory, employers increasingly look for and hire ready-made brand ambassadors who embody the corporate image, workers who live the brand, “know its cultural meanings and match the lifestyle associated with it” (Williams & Connell, 2010, p.354). Under these conditions, employers consider their workers to be just one of many marketing tools at their disposal.
Managers cease to regard workers as human subjects and instead treat them as objects to be manipulated for corporate gain. Within the image-driven, youth-obsessed, hyper-creative world of advertising agencies, aesthetic labor theory fits naturally although to this point all aesthetic labor research has been conducted only in the context of the fashion retailing industry. In fact, aesthetic labor theory not only logically extends to ad agencies’ hiring practices it also logically extends to mobility decisions. While none of these aesthetic labor practices show up in formal policies and corporate regulations, managers in corporations commonly apply an informal code where looking the part and being the “right sort of person” (Kanter, 1977, p. 48) provides added benefits, helping qualified people to get ahead faster and possibly even covering up or substituting for the inadequacies of lesser qualified individuals. Looking the part is just another way to bestow privilege on those who fit the mold and resemble those in power (Kanter, 1977).

Discourse comprises the third component of self-presentation. Discourse within the context of the ad agency primarily encompasses language and themes of talk. The most prevalent themes focus on the privately voiced, disparaging comments ad agency workers use to describe their clients (Alversson, 1994; Nixon, 2003). This discourse includes differences of opinion as to what constitutes good advertising, clients’ unwillingness to take risks, clients’ inability to distinguish between a big idea and a small one, and the agency’s intolerance for clients’ continuous insistence that client-derived ideas rank on par with the agency’s ideas (Alversson, 1994; Nixon, 2003). Within the agency, this type of discourse serves to identify the in-group from the out-group. Those who engage in this type of client bashing can count themselves among the insiders while those who do not are destined to remain outside the circle of privilege (Moore, 1962).
Homosocial Reproduction and Institutionalized Workplace Discrimination

Homosocial Reproduction

In a long-term, in-depth study of an American corporate giant, Kanter (1977) developed an organizational theory focused on the bureaucratic functioning of corporations. After the creative revolution of the 1960s, ad agencies began to resist the machine-like bureaucratic structures that Kanter studied. However, agencies remain hierarchical organizations with a pyramidal management configuration, which suggests that her theory applies nonetheless (see Figure 1.2). A little historical context helps explain why. In the mid-20th century, a human relations model of organizational theory, which emphasized the importance of a more socialized workforce began to question Max Weber’s (1922) theories, which emphasized the importance of rational, machine-like bureaucratic organizations (Mayo, 1960). Despite the shift in emphasis away from a scientific management style in favor of one that emphasized the human aspects behind the machine, very little changed when it came to beliefs about how top managers should operate. Here Kanter (1977) used the term “masculine ethic” (p. 23) to describe the basis for her management theory which she witnessed as firmly entrenched in her case study and which continues to dominate most corporations today. The masculine ethic privileges a non-emotional, impersonal, tough-minded style of decision-making. This idealized image of the consummate organizational leader perpetuates itself via a phenomenon Kanter (1977) called “homosocial reproduction” (p.48), evidence of which Nixon (2003) and Alversson (1994, 2001) reveal in their studies of advertising agencies.

Kanter (1977) asserted that social similarity is the basis for hiring decisions causing managers to replicate themselves – “men who manage, reproduce themselves” (p. 48). Once inside the organization, managers make mobility decisions based on social conformity, which further perpetuates this reproduction. Consciously or not, corporate decision makers use social
criteria as stand-ins for performance measures resulting in organizational subcultures and exclusive inner circles closed to those who are different (Coverdill & Finlay, 1998; Kanter, 1977). In her case study, Kanter observed that physical attractiveness, athleticism, professional dress, the ability to joke with colleagues and a good sense of humor became norms for selection. Further, she observed that the importance of conformity and social similarity escalated in organizations with a high degree of uncertainty. Such is the case in the winner-take-all new business pitches common in the advertising industry where the importance of looking and acting the part goes up (Alversson, 1994; Kanter, 1977). Kanter maintained that it is “the uncertainty quotient in managerial work that causes management to become so socially restricting, to develop tight inner circles excluding social strangers, to keep control in the hands of socially homogeneous peers” (p. 49). The instability of the advertising world stands as an example of this type of high-risk, high-stakes atmosphere. This, compounded by the nebulousness of what constitutes creativity (Alversson, 1994), makes social conformity, which in this case means young, male and stylish, prerequisites for success within advertising circles.

**Institutionalized Workplace Discrimination**

Although many industries have diversified their workforces over the last 100 years, the advertising agency business remains male dominated and youth obsessed (Gregory, 2009; Nixon, 2003; Nixon & Crewe, 2004). Both of these issues deserve a closer looker. I first review the available literature that helps explain the gender imbalance and then move on to age discrimination.

Organizational theory suggests that a gendered substructure lies beneath every hierarchical organization (Acker, 1990; Smith, 1977; Williams, 2000). This substructure assumes that professional occupations, such as those found in the advertising industry, are occupied by workers who prioritize their careers above all else and who have no outside
responsible to distract them from progressing up the ladder. The typical organizational chart of an advertising agency takes the shape of a pyramid or triangle with many rows of entry-level boxes at the bottom, fewer manager positions or boxes in the middle and an elite few executives at the top (see Figure 1.2). Ascension from one level to the next requires an ideal worker “defined as someone with immunity from family work” (Williams, 2000, p. 24). When this hypothetical ideal worker experiences too many distractions or obligations outside the confines of the job, their superiors no longer regard them as committed and dedicated, which curtails their upward mobility. Nine months of pregnancy along with any time taken for maternity leave put women at an automatic disadvantage. As a woman attempts to maintain ideal worker status while balancing family obligations, conflicts naturally arise. As Acker (1990) put it, “the closest the disembodied worker doing the abstract job comes to a real worker is the male worker whose life centers on his full-time, life-long job, while his wife or another woman takes care of his personal needs and his children” (p. 149). While the organizational flowchart appears to include a series of gender-neutral open positions, this hierarchical structure assumes mobility only for those who prioritize work over family and need not deal with the conflicts of trying to accomplish both. Advertising agencies take many organizational forms. The most common, the commercial bureaucracy, includes large-scale private-sector agencies with hierarchical structures, well-defined job descriptions and formal systems of command and control (Scase & Davis, 2000). Given this structure, upward mobility within most advertising agencies depends on ideal worker performance, a condition which helps to explain the industry’s male dominance particularly at the highest levels of organizational power.
Age discrimination in corporations, including ad agencies also needs to be examined.

Age is a social construction and in our society all connotations associated with getting older are negative and result in unequal treatment (Cruikshank, 2013; Hazan, 1994; Vincent, 1995). Except for plastic surgery and a few other cosmetic procedures, the aging human body accurately marks our years, allowing for instantaneous judgments and immediate othering (Calasanti & Slevin, 2001, Hazan, 1994; Krekula, 2009; Vincent, 1995). Workplaces serve as embedded microcosms of our larger society and it logically follows that the othering of age so prevalent in larger society, naturally takes place at work. Importantly, studies show that ageism worsens in organizations where the importance of image takes over or in businesses where employees interact with the public (Roscigno, Mong, Bryon, & Tester, 2007). Image-consciousness and interfacing with the public occur routinely in the advertising industry particularly for the account
managers who serve as ambassadors for their agencies and who regularly work directly with clients.

Aging women in the workforce, particularly in the advertising industry face a unique challenge. Over time, informal precepts regarding gender and age have defined societal norms and expectations for how older women should dress and the way they should wear their hair (Colasanti & Slevin, 2001). Much of this stems from the value men place on women’s role in reproduction and their overall attractiveness as sexual objects, which leads us to believe that “an old woman in a mini skirt is appearing sexual beyond her fertile years” (Colasanti & Slevin, 2001, p. 24). This makes it difficult for older women in professional life and particularly in the advertising industry to dress for success and compete under the strain of the youth orientation characterized by most ad agencies. As age takes on these gendered characteristics, women experience unique societal pressures to conform to a youthful body type and overall youthful image lest they be cast out at work (Roscigno, Mong, Bryon, & Tester, 2007). Once displaced, older workers stay unemployed for longer and when they get rehired, they commonly lose market value, take pay cuts or end up accepting part time work just to get reemployed (McMullin & Burger, 2001). As is the case with other forms of oppression and discrimination, America has institutionalized ageism making it so common that we normalize this bias in our daily attitudes and behavior. Although age discrimination has become all but invisible, the research of Roscigno, et al. provided women with a chance to name it and tell their stories.

I will now turn to analytical bodies of literature and apply feminist theory, tomboy theory, and the theories of Bruce Lincoln, Erving Goffman and Pierre Bourdieu to help explain the dynamics that underlie the way the advertising industry operates. First, I will review feminist theory and look at how patriarchy relates to the advertising industry. Along similar lines, I will then look at tomboyism and the line of inquiry that relates masculinity in girls and women with
success in male-dominated cultures. I will then review discourse theory and the work of Bruce Lincoln (1986, 1989, 1994, 2012). Lincoln’s work shows how industrial mythology gains authority in organizations such as advertising agencies. Next, I will review Erving Goffman’s (1959a, 1959b, 1961, 1967) ideas on dramaturgy and his use of the stage play metaphor to describe social interactions. In addition, I will look at Goffman’s concept of the total institution to see how this body of inquiry applies to the world of advertising. Lastly, I will review Pierre Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984, 2000) practice theory with its concept of habitus to explain how ad agency culture has perpetuated itself over the longer term.

Review of Analytical Literature

Feminist Theory

A feminist lens provides an important method for analyzing the dynamics within most advertising agencies. Feminist theory and its evolution over the past 50 years help explain not only how ad agencies came to be male dominated, but also why this phenomenon continues. Two areas of feminist inquiry offer useful insights. First, as we saw from the review of the early literature on the history of advertising agencies, these firms started out as patriarchal organizations, headed by benevolent dictators with the majority of these firms remaining that way today (Cummings, 1984). Early feminist theory asserted that the insidiousness of patriarchy, which starts within the family unit, structurally underlies nearly all institutions, including the modern corporation (Bryson, 1999; hooks, 1984; Howie & Tauchert, 2004; Smith, 1987). Secondly, because most ad agencies hire and maintain a predominantly young workforce the current generation’s assumptions and attitude toward feminism affect whether or not they feel compelled to continue to fight for an agenda of gender equality. From the start, the media demonized early feminists and even now the media continue to portray feminism in unflattering ways; as a result, many of today’s youth distance themselves from feminism and the feminist
agenda (Pozner, 2003). I will now look at both of these areas of analysis starting with the hegemonic nature of patriarchy.

Radical feminist theory took a critical look at females’ early socialization within the male dominated, authoritarian structure of the family (Bryson, 1999; hooks, 1984; Howie & Tauchert, 2004). This structure concentrates all power and control at the top under the father’s command. Due to this early socialization within this setting and because women find this same structure recreated in nearly all American institutions such as government, law enforcement, education, religious institutions and business, women accept patriarchy as natural, so natural in fact, that most of our society fails to recognize its existence. Here, authority is based purely on the assertion that the male in charge deserves reverence for no other reason than his maleness as evidence by “classic pronouncements of paternal authority in extremis: ‘because I said so.’ And ‘because I’m your father, that’s why’” (Lincoln, 1994, p. 5, emphasis in the original). As a result, women passively accept male domination without question (Bryson, 1999; Daly, 1973; hooks, 1984; Smith, 1987). Just as importantly, the perpetuation of patriarchy persists because men possess a vested interest in its continuation. Lorde (1984) described it this way, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change” (p. 112).

Although this terminology may lead to the conclusion that men constitute the enemy, a structural feminist point of view states that the issue stems not from individual actions but from structural systems of institutionalized male dominance and hierarchical authoritarianism that need to be examined critically, questioned and eradicated (hooks, 1985; Smith, 1987).

Because most social institutions come to us via a male history – developed by men, studied by men, analyzed by men, written about by men - the standpoint from which all humans view the world is decidedly male, so much so that women as well as men consider this point of
view as neutral and objective. Smith (1987) developed standpoint theory to explain that due to this male-privileged history, women unknowingly accept the male standpoint as their own and therefore consider it to be gender neutral and universal. For example, the term “mankind” as used to represent all of humanity compared to the term “womankind,” which relates only to the female condition. As a result, women understand their world through a male-dominated point of view, which most women accept as legitimate; and, although they also experience the world as they live it or from their own point of view, they often suppress their lived experiences and inner feelings in favor of the masculine worldview.

Adding to this line of analysis, Bryson (1999) brought to our attention the multitude of cultural symbols and rituals that women encounter in daily life, symbols that seem harmless but which perpetuate male domination and power. For example, in an advertising industry study conducted by Gregory (2009), researchers observed what they called “male homosociability” (p. 325) defined as modes of communication and socializing such as male networking, male bonding and male banter, which occur in both planned and spontaneous instances. Gregory used the term “locker room” (p.327) to describe this type of ritualized socialization where men exchange information, conduct business, engage in deal making, cement relationships and establish loyalties, all to the exclusion of women. This type of locker room behavior is prevalent in ad agency culture, so much so that it has become normalized. As a result, women have learned to adapt their behavior to these norms in an attempt to fit in and as matter of survival. Smith (2005) called this the bifurcation of consciousness, where oppressed persons learn to play by the rules of the game, which in the case of advertising culture, reflects the male point of view and subjugates the female point of view. According to Appelrouth and Desfor-Edles (2011), “women in male-dominated professions (e.g., law enforcement, construction) acclimate themselves to sexist and even misogynistic talk about the female body that is a normal part of their everyday work
environment. Not only do they learn to ignore the banter; indeed, they might even chime in” (p. 563). This scenario plays out frequently in ad agencies and has from the beginning.

While organizations such as ad agencies appear to adhere to gender-neutral and strict standards of objectivity for evaluating workers’ performance, behind the seeming professionalism of such operations “is concealed a male subtext” (Smith 1990). This situation stems from the fact that the male authority figures in organizations determine the ruling concepts. They decide who gets ahead and what constitutes acceptable behavior. Historically in ad agencies, the benevolent dictators (Cummings, 1984) determined the relations of ruling. They established a now entrenched male ethos that reinforces the ruling apparatus through the power of both long-standing modes of discourse as well as bureaucratic institutional structures (Smith, 1990).

The review of the scholarly literature on advertising agencies also sheds light on the youth orientation within the industry. Because young men and women under the age of thirty constitute such a large proportion of the ad agency workforce, their perspective on gender equality and their feelings about the feminist debate may provide insights into why male domination within the industry remains unchallenged. Feminist beliefs take shape in relation to situational factors, especially in relation to place and time (Heywood and Drake, 2004). Due to the progress made by the feminists of the 1970s and 1980s, or what is often referred to as the second wave of feminism, today’s young women enjoy far more educational and economic equality than the generation that went before them (Spencer, 2004). Many of today’s young people, women and men alike, believe feminism has accomplished its goals and the struggle for equality is over; the battle has been won (Gorton, 2004). According to Haywood & Drake (2004) while gender inequality within business continues to pervade higher levels of management, we cannot say the same for workers at the lower end of the pay range, workers
making $25,000 - $30,000. Haywood and Drake (2004) used United States Census Bureau data and statistics from the United States Labor Department to show that “gender-based wage and education gaps are closing especially in younger age groups, and this relative gender equality has shaped third wave perspectives” (p. 14). In this case, third wave refers to the post-baby boom generation of feminism, and while both men and women of this generation enjoy relative equality in terms of education and wages, their overall economic health remains poor. Today as in the past, well-educated, entry-level workers enjoy very little earning or purchasing power and these conditions show little sign of improvement. Under these circumstances, women see no need for gender-based solidarity and, in fact, they more readily relate to men in their own generation who suffer the same economic hardships they do rather than relating to the more established and economically comfortable women in the generation ahead of them (Haywood & Drake, 2004; Spencer, 2004).

Adding to this perception of relative equality, women of the current generation often feel repelled by the rhetoric and discourse of the second wave feminists due, in no small part, to the unflattering way the male-dominated media portrayed feminists and feminism from the start (Garrison, 2004; Pozner, 2003). In her critique, Pozner accused the media of manufacturing and perpetuating stereotypes that stigmatized feminists through images of strident, militant, angry women who more often than not were lesbians. After years of this uncomplimentary portrayal the current generation of women distance themselves from feminism if not reject feminist ideals outright. Women in the third wave want “the benefits of feminism without running the risk of being associated with the criticisms of feminism” (Gorton, 2004; p.155). Under these circumstances and with this as the context, many young women employed in ad agencies today may fail to see, let alone question, the sexist, male-dominated environment in which they work. As a result, the climate established in the early days of the industry continues largely intact. Or
as Garrison (2004) describes it, the house remains the same “except to allow a few people in, who previously were confined to the periphery” (p. 28).

**Tomboy Theory**

Large minorities of women recall being tomboys in their girlhood (Hyde, Rosenberg, & Behrman 1977; Phillips, Psych & Over 1995). In this context, the term “tomboy” refers to young females who exhibit “rough and tumble play, intense energy expenditure, and a preference for stereotypically boys’ toys and male playmates” (Ehrhardt & Baker, 1974; Money & Ehrhardt, 1972; as quoted in Devor, 1989, p.14). Most tomboys place importance on attracting attention from their fathers or other male role models in part because they find they earn respect and admiration for displaying characteristics, behaviors, and skills typically associated with boys (Carr, 1989; Devor, 1989). Tomboys often claim to have been very close to their fathers, participating in activities often reserved for fathers and sons such as fishing, playing sports, watching sports, and even doing home repairs (Carr, 1989). Interestingly, birth order and presence of male siblings affects tomboy behavior in several ways. First, tomboy girls with older brothers tend to show more tenacity, confidence and competitiveness than tomboy girls without brothers. Secondly, tomboy girls with older brothers tend to rate highly for interest in entrepreneurial occupations when compared to non-tomboy girls (Sutton-Smith & Rosenberg, 1970).

As tomboys grow into adulthood, they often choose careers in male-dominated fields (Sandberg, Ehrhardt, Mellins, Ince & Meyer-Bahlburg, 1987). This phenomenon is even more common for tomboy women who grew up with older brothers (Sutton-Smith & Rosenberg, 1970). As adults, women who grew up as tomboys exhibit not only career confidence but they also tend to exhibit traits and characteristics associated with career success, many of these traits are often associated with a masculine leadership styles such as independence, aggression,
competitiveness and self-reliance (Hilgenkamp & Livingston, 2002). Women in male-dominated careers demonstrate a comfort level operating in a man’s world and in fact many of them report having men among their ten closest friends (Tangri, 1972). As we have seen from the work of Appelrouth and Desfor-Edles (2011), women working in male-dominated professions often draw on their masculinity and use masculine behaviors to fit in and succeed. Growing up as tomboys, having older brothers and having a father-and-son-like relationship with one’s father are all factors that impact female success in male-dominated fields. With so few female leaders in the advertising field, the question remains open as to whether and how tomboy theory applies. For women to succeed in climbing the corporate ladder in advertising, they need to not only feel comfortable operating in a man’s world but they also need to obtain the respect and admiration of the men in charge. Research shows tomboys excel along both of these lines. With the relatively small amount of research conducted on tomboys generally and with the even fewer number of studies looking at the link between tomboyism and female career choices, the time is right for this line of inquiry to delve into the question of how tomboyism affects success for women who choose to make their living in male-dominated careers.

**Authority, Myth and Bruce Lincoln**

Discourse theory asserts that language has the power to shape and construct reality (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001). The work of Bruce Lincoln (1994) looks deeply at how authoritative speech not only commands attention and shapes beliefs and behavior but it also looks at how this type of speech bestows power on the speaker. Authoritative speakers command the respect and trust of those who listen, yielding more that mere persuasion. The results are “automatic, unquestioning obedience” (p. 4) which quells any dissention or debate. While Lincoln’s work often looked at historical figures such as kings and warriors who used discourse to ascend into power, the theory applies nicely to the authoritarian rule of most modern
corporations, including advertising. Often times, as with the benevolent dictators and titans of
the early advertising industry, the speaker’s executive position privileges his pronouncements in
a way that merits unquestioned acceptance. With this acceptance go reverence, trust and docility
to the point of submissiveness on the part of the audience. In the advertising industry, the male
chief executive almost always holds this type of authority and enjoys such broad acceptance by
both the women and men around him that his authority is absolute. Even more importantly, the
hierarchical organizational structure of most agencies reinforces this authority in a self-policing
way. Agency executives sit at the top of a pyramid with the next smallest layer of management
just below. The majority of the workers sit at the bottom managing the day-to-day creation and
production of ads. Lincoln (1986) maintained that if the workers at the bottom begin to question
the authority or assertions of the man at the top, the mid-level loyal lieutenants will support their
commander, extinguishing any dissention and restoring the leader’s authority. There is a “taken-
for-granted rightness” (Lincoln, 2012, p. 56) about the man at the top, a sacred authority. In the
advertising world, this type of autocratic leadership results in women accepting the cultural
norms set by these leaders. Typically this includes unequal working conditions and the need to
endure sexual harassment without complaint or dissention.

Discourse theory also draws heavily on the concept of myth. For Lincoln (2012), myths
are narratives that result in the belief of “timeless truths and deep traditions, popular sentiment
and the collective unconscious” (p. 54). The most authoritative myths have unknown origins;
their power is derived from the belief that they have stood the test of time. Myths are social in
nature, typically describing how peoples, societies and institutions originated (Lincoln, 1986).
As such, myths establish cultural norms, frequently seating falsehoods as truths. When members
of a society accept these truths, they often fall victim to exploitation and oppression without even
knowing it. In this way, myth serves to indoctrinate.
The advertising business is rife with myth. The historical review of the literature revealed time-honored, deep-rooted beliefs that ad agency work is “no place for anyone over 35” (Marchand, 1985, p. 45). This myth dates back to the earliest days before the advertising industry fully took shape and this widely accepted sentiment remains in force and goes unquestioned to this day. According to this myth, young people have the energy to endure the hard work and long hours required to succeed in the field. Young people are tuned in to the latest developments in both popular culture and technology. The youth myth enjoys great authority within the industry with most workers accepting this authority as always having been the case.

Similarly, the advertising industry maintains the myth of glamour and excitement, two qualities rarely associated with most corporate cultures. During the creative revolution, news accounts about the agency industry, popular culture references and the discourse of the time served to reinforce the myth that ad agencies were centers of creativity, embracing a counter culture where anything goes (Frank, 1997). Lincoln (2012) suggested that frequent repetition allows myth to gain broad acceptance and legitimacy. From the period of the 1960s through the digital revolution in the late 1990s, the media’s portrayal of the advertising industry served to perpetuate the “anything goes myth,” a myth that enjoys broad acceptance today. This myth serves to ensure a steady stream of talented and eager candidates to fill open positions in an industry typified by long hours, hard work, relatively low pay at entry and mid levels, and gender inequality. In this context we see one of myth’s most insidious qualities at work. Myths frequently and very effectively seek to delude, or mystify. In so doing, myths succeed in preserving and perpetuating oppressive conditions and exploitive patterns.

Myths represent ideology (Lincoln, 1986). So long as members of the society accept the representations of the ideology, the status quo remains intact and the society achieves a certain
level of homogeneity brought on by these unified beliefs. However, regardless of the degree of homogeneity within a society, subgroups exist (Lincoln, 1989). For example, myths within the advertising industry perpetuate the allure of the field, attracting an exceptionally creative workforce, a largely homogeneous group. To the extent that various subgroups within an advertising agency, perhaps groups of women, experience lesser privileges, perks or benefits, the potential for division along subgroup lines exists. Lincoln calls this cleavage. If resentment and discontent builds due to the unequal way management treats different subgroups, management risks loss of hierarchical control. Only when myths remain persuasive will the status quo survive (Lincoln, 1989).

When the experiences of individual members of any given society differ sharply from the myth, two consequences follow. First the myth loses credibility and persuasiveness. Secondly, those leaders who espouse the myth stand to lose authority (Lincoln, 1986). As Lincoln put it, “Critique flourishes in the gap between idealized images and lived realities” (p. 56). In advertising agencies when women experience unequal treatment or if older women begin to feel disenfranchised by a culture that valorizes youth, they lose their sense of belonging. In the research conducted by Alversson (1994) and Nixon (2003) we saw how belief or disbelief in the prevailing discourse can serve to divide the group. In their work, Alversson and Nixon showed how the typical agency discourse that demonizes clients as unreasonable tyrants divides agency workers into two groups - those who participate in the discourse, the in group, and those who do not, the out group. In cases like this, integration suffers and the homogeneity of the body as a whole begins to fall apart. Under these circumstances, only when dissenters formulate their own persuasive discourse, the potential for change arises (Lincoln, 1989). To date, the advertising industry remains male-dominated. Diversification of the workforce in terms of gender, race and
age remains illusive. It will take subgroups to develop an alternative and highly persuasive discourse in order for meaningful changes take place.

**Dramaturgy, The Total Institution and Erving Goffman**

Sociologist Erving Goffman subscribed to the symbolic interactionism tradition which stipulates that human agents construct their definition of self not only through interacting with others but also by placing themselves in the role of the other and seeing themselves as others see them (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Two specific and related works by Goffman prove useful when analyzing the cultural and social dynamics present in the advertising industry. First, in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959b) Goffman examined the metaphor of the stage play and advanced a theory based on dramaturgy, which connects easily to the image-orientation witnessed in most ad agencies. Secondly, Goffman (1961) explored the dynamics present in what he called total institutions such as mental institutions and prisons where all aspects of life occur within the confines of the organization and relationships with the outside world remain cut off. Unlike prisons and mental institutions, the workers in ad agencies freely come and go; however, the agencies they work for mold and influence their identities in ways similar to what Goffman observed in total institutions. In the paragraphs that follow, I will explore both of these analytical frameworks and apply them to life within advertising agencies.

According to Goffman (1959b) society and our participation within it constitute a dramaturgical setting in which “everyone everywhere is to some extent playing a role – it is in these roles that we know each other and know ourselves” (p. 19). This theory included the belief that through the course of everyday self-presentation, individuals express themselves in calculated ways in order to give off specific impressions and elicit specific responses from those around them, much as an actor does in a performance on stage offering his portrayal for the benefit of others. Within this context, an individual may portray herself sincerely, meaning she
genuinely believes the impression she gives off, or she may be a poser, or as Goffman (1959b) put it, “a cynic” (p. 18) who does not believe her own act. He went on to assert that this phenomenon can most commonly be seen in service industries, such as advertising, where clients need to feel confident they are in the hands of experts. Eliciting this confidence is a function of looking and acting the part. As has been discussed, advertising agency personnel often take on highly stylized personas, identities that serve to convince themselves and others of their natural fit within the industry. Here, aesthetic labor theory (Warhurst, van der Broek, Hall, & Nickson, 2009) connects nicely with Goffman’s idea of persuasively looking and acting the part.

The stage play metaphor defined the “front” (Goffman, 1959b, p.22) as the place where individuals carry out their performance and where they make and sustain the impressions they want the audience to take away. Typically in the context of an industry such as advertising, clients constitute the audience. But, a different application of Goffman’s theory and one with particular relevance to this study might suggest that within the ad agency itself, upper management constitute the audience with agency personnel working hard to convincingly perform the role of the stereotypical creative ad agency worker in the hope of achieving upward mobility within the organization. When an agency worker offers a compelling and believable performance, looking and acting the part perfectly, the audience, in this case upper management, responds with applause in the form of career advancement. According to Goffman (1959b) the area where the performance takes place is typically a highly bounded region such as an ad agency office. Continuing the metaphor, one additional component to consider is the “setting” (Goffman, 1959b, p. 22), which in the ad agency context includes the elaborate offices and highly stylized décor of most agencies. Lastly, Goffman (1959b) went on to refine the definition of the front to specifically include what he called the “personal front” (p. 24). The personal front included stimuli or clues that serve as signs or markers of a convincing performance.
Goffman identified appearance and manner as elements of the personal front. The performance is only compelling and convincing when all the aspects of the front – setting, appearance and manner – are consistent and coherent, resulting in what Goffman called an “idealized performance” (p.37).

In another aspect of his theory, Goffman (1959b) discussed the concept of “sacred compatibility” (p. 46) a condition in which the performer possesses the ideal qualifications for the role. When this occurs, the fit between actor and role matches perfectly, so much so that the performer presents the impression of effortlessly mastering the role. In the workplace, Goffman (1959b) identified the lack of learning curve for individuals in this situation and he specifically called out executives who “often project and air of competency and general grasp of the situation, blinding themselves and others to the fact that they hold their jobs partly because they look like executives” (p. 47). Here once again, Goffman’s theory connects neatly with the concept of aesthetic labor where looking the part goes a long way to convincing the audience of the effectiveness of the performer (Warhurst & Nickson, 2009; Williams & Connell, 2010).

These ideas also relate to symbolic interactionism approach to identity theory, which considers the relationship between individual identity and society as reciprocal (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Stryker (1980) contended that when individuals play the roles they play, they contribute patterns of behavior. These patterns, when pooled with other performers on the same stage, shape the social structure. Here, the system reinforces itself. Advertising agency workers with sacred compatibility, those who self-identify as creative and enter the business looking and acting the part, reinforce the cultural norms we associate with the industry, norms such as a youthful workforce, a male dominated workforce and a workforce of well-dressed, fashionable workers who adapt easily to the latest trends.
Just as the front provides the location where the performance takes place, backstage provides the area where performers separate and insulate themselves from the audience, a place where they let their guard down and dispense with illusion (Goffman, 1959b). When backstage, performers can step out of character and relinquish their preoccupation with impression management because here they are safely out of the watchful eye of the audience. Within the context of the advertising agency, if we continue to define the audience as upper management, one obvious dividing line between the front and the back regions for ordinary workers is the separation between work and home. Once safely out of the office, advertising personnel, especially older workers can set aside the need to look and act younger than their years. They can attend to domestic issues and family obligations without fear that the audience will question their organizational fit or their loyalty. Although Goffman’s (1959b) dramaturgical perspective offers many congruencies that help explain the inner workings of the advertising industry so too does one of his later theories. I turn now to Goffman’s (1961) theory of the total institution to review its relevance to the advertising industry.

According to Goffman (1961), all institutions have “encompassing tendencies” (p. 4). Total institutions, however, encompass all aspects of one’s activities, day and night. In total institutions, the place of work and the place of residence meld into one domain. Here the participants come together in a collective identity or what Goffman called “a batch” (p. 4). In a set of studies of prisons, mental institutions, military compounds and other such total institutions, Goffman observed that upon entry, an inmate loses his original individual sense of self in favor of an institutionally mandated collective sense of self. The institution, in many cases, quite literally strips away the original identity – the institution replaces civilian clothes with institutionally issued ones, it mandates hairstyle and other physical attributes to conform to standards set by the institution. As a result, inmates experience dispossession, defacement,
mortification and a transformation of identity. Total institutions cause further identity transformation by imposing rituals and circumstances in which “reputation can be gained or lost” (Harre, 1979). In this context, Goffman (1959a) went on to formulate the concept of the moral career, a concept closely linked with the gain and loss of honor and respect as well as the building of character. One aspect of this type of character building is what Goffman (1967) called “gameness” (p. 218), which refers to the individual’s tenacity or ability to persevere in the face of setbacks or exhaustion. These situations carry an element of social judgment. In ad agencies, the workers are consistently put to the test with work that exceeds the 40-hour per week norm and overtime that involves working on the weekend. In these situations, fatigue and the inability to persevere result in the loss of honor and social standing. Ad agency personnel compete with one another to put in the most hours, wearing this as a badge of honor to demonstrate their commitment, prove their worth and enhance their moral careers.

For workers in the advertising industry, the intensity of the workplace culture, the long hours and the focus on image and youth may conspire to emit an experience similar to that of the total institution, one where workers deny their true identities in favor of ones that conform to the institution’s standards. As Nixon (2003) observed, ad agency workers not only put in long hours but also the workday often stretches into one’s personal time when, as a matter of weekly routine, entire departments go straight from the office to a nearby pub or restaurant to continue to socialize with one’s peers and superiors. Under these circumstances the total institution surrounds multiple facets of one’s life, not just during work hours but outside of work hours, not just inside the physical walls of the office but outside them as well.

Goffman (1961) described the relationship between inmates and the staff in total institutions, a relationship characterized by the staff’s complete and absolute social control over the inmates. Staff members stand in constant judgment, withholding and dispensing privileges
as a way to maintain authority and mold behavior. In this regard, Goffman (1961) likened total institutions to “finishing schools” (p. 41) where the officials in charge continuously refine the actions of inmates until they achieve total conformity. Again, it logically follows that the charismatic leaders who run the creatively-driven ad agencies which formed the basis of this literature review, use the same forms of judgments, rewards and punishments for the purpose of keeping their workers “on brand” thereby enhancing the image and competitive edge of the agency. In its simplest form, the theoretical concepts of the total institution demonstrate the destructive power of authority, a concept that is all too easily applied to the advertising industry.

**Habitus, Social Capital and Pierre Bourdieu**

Social theory traditionally grounds itself in one of two camps, structuralism (objectivist) or constructivism (subjectivist). Bourdieu (1977) bridged the two through practice theory by asserting that one organizing scheme brings the two together in a unified system of interdependence. At the macro level, Bourdieu (1984) named “the field” (p. xxi) as the structure the actors inhabit. Fields have their own logic, regulations and rituals, which guide or control the way activities take place within them.

For the purposes of this literature review and analysis, the field is the advertising industry. At the micro level, actors or agents behave in ways that create conditions and construct personal meaning. However, for Bourdieu (1992) there exists an additional level, a meso level called habitus where the macro and micro interact. Bourdieu (1984) named the habitus as the socialized norms, the internalized understanding of how one should act. One picks up this understanding from observing and living in the field. The habitus guides the thinking and behavior of the actors in an intuitive way, which allows them to react without deliberation. It is like a fish in water where the fish is unaware the water exists (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Another way to think about habitus stems from the idea that the field deposits itself in actors in
lasting dispositions and in propensities or tendencies to think, feel and act in ways that are compatible with the field (Wacquant, L., 2005).

In the context of the advertising industry, the habitus is the way advertising agency personnel understand the codes of the industry. The habitus guides the way they think about age and gender. It guides the way they dress and the way they express themselves. However, Bourdieu (1977) went beyond a strict objectivist approach here and asserted that the habitus shapes but does not determine the way actors behave. Individual agents do not act blindly and instead use their free will to influence and re-shape the field. This in turn changes the habitus. The two forces engage in a mutual, interdependent dance. Based on this concept Bourdieu gives us hope that the gender imbalances and ageist attitudes so prevalent in today’s advertising industry will change as individual agents bravely imagine a different paradigm and act in ways that re-shape the advertising field.

In relation to the advertising industry and its continual disregard for diversity, one aspect of habitus rises to the top. As Bourdieu (1977) asserted, habitus forms when the cultural values of the field insinuate themselves so deeply within agents that agents fail to understand how things might be otherwise. The cultural norms of the field, or the habitus become second nature. However, this also means that when that nature takes on insidious characteristics, the resulting distasteful or unethical practices will likely continue without question or challenge. Symbolic violence, a term used by Bourdieu (2000) to describe this type of domination, comes from what he called misrecognition. Specifically, Bourdieu (2000) defined symbolic violence as “the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (p. 167). For example, women in advertising frequently experience sexual harassment and other indignities (Nixon, 2003) and yet often times they accept these types of situations as normal and fail to see them as symbolically violent. In this part of Bourdieu’s (2000) theory he contended that the
gender imbalances and the culture of sexual harassment that exist within organizations like advertising agencies continue because women misrecognize the situation. Instead of outrage, they accept the circumstances as the way of the world. As a result, women comply with and actually perpetuate the domination levied against them, which explains why the advertising industry has failed to make meaningful progress. Another related tenant of this theory is doxa (Bourdieu, 1994), which means the ways agents accept ideological rules and cultural norms even when this acceptance causes suffering. Here, underlying assumptions of power remain taken for granted and find their way into the habitus as common sense. Bourdieu (1994) wrote, “I have discovered a lot of suffering which had been hidden by this smooth working of habitus. It helps people adjust, but it causes internalized contradictions” (p. 277).

Lastly, Bourdieu (1984) extended the idea of capital beyond its economic definition and outlined three additional forms of capital, which perpetuate domination and hierarchy: cultural capital, social capital and symbolic capital. Specifically, Bourdieu (1984) asserted that someone with cultural capital possesses the knowledge of how to behave and the knowledge of what works or does not work within certain contexts. Agents amass cultural capital through experience, which provides the agent with the advantage of feeling comfortable and familiar within her/his contextual setting. An agent in possession of a significant amount of cultural capital can succeed more readily than someone with a different set of knowledge stemming from an unrelated culture or set of experiences. Bourdieu’s theory in Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste (1984) linked cultural capital with social position. He stated that cultural capital grows most readily from two sources, the family, in which “total early, imperceptible learning” (p.66) is insinuated into the children “from the earliest days of life” (p. 66) and from formal education. These two build on each other forming deep and long lasting effects but they also hold very different powers. Cultural capital produced during one’s upbringing offers the
important advantage of instilling greater self-confidence, a gift that Bourdieu (1984) maintained, “families hand down to their offspring as if it were a family heirloom (p. 66).

The concept of cultural capital has two applications within the context of the advertising profession. The first concerns the importance of the family in defining the social acceptability of the profession. After World War II when advertising agencies served as popular settings for best selling fiction and blockbuster movies and into the creative revolution of the 1960s as the news media extensively covered the creativity and glamour of the industry, a new generation, the baby boom generation, learned to revere or reject the profession depending on their families’ taste. Baby boomers understanding of the advertising field came through their parents’ eyes and they accepted or rejected the profession depending based on how it reflected on their family’s social standing. Here, Bourdieu’s (1984) theory that “taste classifies and classifies the classifier” (p. 6) shows how choosing a career in advertising reflects on one’s personal identity as well as one’s social standing. The second application of this theory stems from the significant employment growth enjoyed by the advertising industry in the second half of the 20th century. Growing up in a family where one or more parents worked in the advertising industry or having social connections to someone in the industry results in a unique advantage afforded by the accumulation of cultural capital. Under these conditions, the offspring or social connections enjoy a special type of inside knowledge not available to others, They learn about the way the industry works and how to behave in it, giving them distinct benefits over someone who comes to the industry without this type of insider knowledge.

Bourdieu (1984) defined the next form of capital, social capital, as resources available only to group members. Forms of social capital include the influence and support that comes from professional networks. Here, an entry-level worker attempting to break into the advertising field might leverage a personal connection to get an interview. Lastly, Bourdieu (1984) used the
term symbolic capital to describe advantages, which stem from honors, awards or other forms of symbolic recognition. For example, an advertising executive may win an industry award such as a CLIO award, the industry’s most prestigious honor, and use that award as leverage to attain a promotion or a job offer from a competing agency. The important aspect of capital, whether economic, cultural, social or symbolic, is its essential role in perpetuating dominant social structures. When an agent trades in their capital to gain advantage over others, the desirability and demand for that type of capital increases, propagating the system that created it in the first place. As a result, the interplay between the field and habitus change very slowly and sometimes almost imperceptibly.

**Summary**

Although the theories of Lincoln (1986, 1989), Goffman (1959b, 1961) and Bourdieu (1977, 1984) individually and independently relate well to the highly stylized, culturally saturated nature of the advertising industry, these theories also mesh together and work in concert to explain how the industry reproduces itself year after year, decade after decade in a system that privileges both youth and men. Bourdieu (1992) described three societal operating levels. First, he described the macro level, which in the context of this study pertains to the field of advertising. Second, he identified an intermediate level, which encompasses the socialized norms, embedded codes and internalized understanding of how one should act in the advertising field. He called this level the habitus. And last, he identified the micro level where individual agency, behavior and presentation of self takes place. Here, in the micro level, Bourdieu and Goffman find linkage. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman (1959b) used the stage play metaphor to explain that “everyone everywhere is to some extent playing a role” (p.19). In the course of daily life, individuals express themselves in calculated ways to give off specific impressions. At this level in the context of the culture of advertising agencies, looking
the part and acting the part come together in a total presentation of self. In order to be successful within the field of advertising, workers need to have sacred compatibility, possessing the perfect fit for the role. They wear the right costume, have the right style and give off a charismatic stage presence for an audience that rewards the performance with praise and applause. They learn their lines, understand their stage cues and act the part convincingly. For advertising workers, more than in most industries, looking the part, dressing the part and engaging in the proper discourse matters. Here industry mythology lives persuades workers of both genders to accept a locker room mentality complete with its male bonding and back-and-forth banter define the ethos of the industry. When workers, male or female, portray themselves decisively on this stage, they are in synch with the habitus.

Importantly, all social institutions possess a history. The field, the habitus and self-presentation live within a historical context. The advertising field developed more than 100 years ago at the hands of a small roster of industry titans, all men, who shaped the industry in their own image from the top down. They hired men, promoted men, valorized youth and engaged in homosocial reproduction (Kanter, 1977), a practice that continues to this day. As a result, the advertising habitus privileges a male worldview and male behavior. According to Smith’s (1977) standpoint theory, the advertising industry has come to accept this male worldview as universal and legitimate, so much so, that women regard this standpoint as justifiably normal. In the world of advertising, employees need to attain ideal worker status to move up, which means demonstrating total dedication to their agency with no outside distractions to undermine their progress. Williams (2000) described the ideal worker as someone with “immunity from family work” (p. 24). As a result, women fall short. Because these norms have been entrenched from the beginning and accepted over more than a century, women fail to recognize their subjugation. Bourdieu (1977) called this type of domination symbolic violence,
referring to the unjust aspects of habitus that situate themselves so deeply within individuals that they fail to see a more just viewpoint as an alternative.

Figure 1.3 depicts my interpretation of how the theories of Lincoln, Bourdieu, Goffman and Smith work together. In the center of the diagram, a single framework integrates Bourdieu’s concept of field and habitus with Goffman’s theory of self-presentation and Lincoln’s discourse theory. A feminist subtext surrounds this framework, offering an explanation for why the industry struggles with inclusion and diversity.

Figure 1.3. Schematic representation of the integration of the theoretical frameworks of Bourdieu, Goffman, Lincoln and Smith.
CHAPTER TWO:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

At the heart of it, this study aimed to understand how ad agency culture affects the long-term careers of women as they age. Creswell (2013) recommended developing one overarching or central research question and then formulating several sub-questions to manage the complexity of such an expansive topic. I developed four secondary questions, which focused on the role agency culture plays at various stages of a woman’s career. These questions were: 1) How do self-image and cultural stereotypes affect the decision to enter the advertising business? 2) How do women navigate the male-dominated culture of the ad agency? 3) What strategies do women use to get ahead in advertising? 4) How do women survive long term in a culture that favors youth? According to Creswell (2013), when a researcher frames her study by asking “how” or “why,” a qualitative research approach is in order. As a result, I designed this research as a qualitative study intended to dig into these research questions and develop theory supported by the data. In this chapter, I review the interpretive framework that shaped my assumptions as a researcher and informed this qualitative study. I then make my case for a grounded theory approach followed by a detailed explanation of my data collection methods and my mode of analysis. Next, I explore several ethical considerations associated with my study followed by a discussion of data integrity and study limitations. I conclude by introducing my fifteen participants, offering a brief demographic and psychographic profile of each.

Interpretive Framework

In qualitative studies, the researcher serves as the main instrument of data collection as well as the principle instrument of data analysis (Merriam, 2009). As a researcher, I brought my whole self to this study including a series of assumptions, expectations and beliefs that oriented
my thinking. According to Patton (2002) the interpretive framework or theoretical underpinnings of any inquiry not only focuses the research but also provides a lens through which the researcher interprets her findings. In my research, critical theory framed both my inquiry and analysis. Patton (2002) claimed that critical theory is one of the most influential interpretive frameworks because it “focuses on how injustice and subjugation shape people’s experiences and understandings of the world” (p. 130). The central assumption in critical research focuses on power dynamics as the basis for all social relationships (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). While most research paradigms try to understand the phenomenon being studied, critical inquiry goes beyond the need to uncover “the what” and “the why” of a situation and continues on “to critique and challenge, to transform and empower” (Mirriam, 2009, p.34).

Throughout this study, I examined who held power and how these power brokers used their authority. I tried to identify hegemonic organizational structures that reinforced these power dynamics. I found myself questioning why my participants justified and accepted the lopsided relations present at their ad agencies. As these situations arose, I relied on the critical research paradigm to guide my thinking and my actions. I established a collaborative and reciprocal relationship with my participants from the onset, one of mutual respect. When participants related stories of unequal power relations, I gently asked whose interests were being served and worked with my participants to imagine alternative interpretations. “Whereas traditional researchers cling to the guardrails of neutrality, critical researchers frequently announce their partisanship in the struggle for a better world” (Kincheloe, McLaren & Steinberg, 2011, p. 164).

Grounded Theory

With the critical research framework as a backdrop I looked for ways to structure my study. A review of the scholarly literature on the topic turned up minimal research regarding
women, ageism, or lookism within the advertising industry. By definition, I needed to conduct an exploratory study. Marshall and Rossman (2011) recommend exploratory studies under three conditions, all of which existed on my topic: 1) to investigate little understood phenomenon; 2) to identify or discover important categories of meaning; 3) to generate hypotheses for further research.

In approaching the question of how to design my research, I considered the relationship between research and theory as modeled by Snow, Morrill and Anderson (2003) who discussed three styles for consideration. The first two styles, theoretical extension and theoretical refinement take into account existing theory and seek to build on it to one degree or another. The third style, theoretical discovery, fit my research best because of the lack of previous research done on women in advertising and the resulting gap in theory development.

The questions that form the basis of my study - questions regarding the process women go through as they navigate the ageist and sexist workplace and the strategies they use to get promoted and survive long term in the industry – are process-oriented questions that seek to explain events. In grounded theory, researchers develop a set of explanatory concepts induced from the data and build from the ground up (Maxwell, 2005). But going one level deeper, I used an approach that Charmaz (2006) called constructivist grounded theory, which relied on my experience in the advertising industry and located me at the center of assembling the data and interpreting the information I collected. Constructivist grounded theory allowed me to place meaning on the statements made by my participants. In the final analysis, this interpretation is mine and it reflects my experience as well as the experience of my participants. As Charmaz stated “the analysis results from the researcher’s involvement at every point in the research process” (p. 148). Grounded theory required me to investigate initial concepts to the point of saturation. I used a dialectic approach. I collected data in the field and then reflected on it,
formulated potential hypotheses regarding power and hierarchy and the relationship these concepts had to age, gender and image. I coded each interview as I went along. When I then returned to the field for the next interview I changed the questions I asked based on emerging themes or codes. I continued this way until I felt I had reached a well-thought out and plausible explanation of my participants’ experiences.

**Data Collection Methods**

I chose individual interviews as my data collection method for several reasons. First, grounded theory studies typically use interviews as the primary mode of data collection because researcher/participant dialogue enhances theory building (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, Patton (2002) advised interviews when needing to uncover thoughts, feelings and intentions. In order to build grounded theory on the effects of advertising agency culture on the long-term careers of women, I needed to uncover personal experiences and hear women’s stories first hand. Lastly, interviews allowed me to probe deeply, ask follow up questions for clarification, co-develop hunches with my participants and collect feedback from them on emerging hypotheses.

According to Creswell (2013), “the hallmark of good qualitative research is the report of multiple perspectives that range over an entire spectrum” (p. 151). Grounded theory requires the researcher to collect data from many participants and to return to the field often in order to achieve topic saturation and data validity (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 3013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Maxwell, 2005). To that end, I conducted 15 interviews. In addition, I collected a wide variety of perspectives in terms of sites (agencies), geography and age. For example, collectively, my participants worked in 26 different ad agencies. During their careers, each participant worked in at least two agencies with many of them experiencing three or four. These agencies were located throughout the United States, representing seven of our country’s largest cities from coast to coast. The age range among the participants spanned from 40 years old to 56
years old. I purposely sought out a wide variety of experiences among my participants believing my study would be “more conceptually dense and potentially more useful if it had been ‘grounded’ in widely varying instances of the phenomenon” (Merriam, 2009, p.78).

In pursuing an exploratory, grounded theory study, I used an unstructured interview format. I kept a list of themes to explore but refrained from asking standardized questions (see Appendix B for the initial discussion guide). I let each interview take shape based on the arc of each participant’s career path without a predetermined order to my line of inquiry. The informality and flexibility of this approach allowed me to learn as I went along. As I transcribed each interview, I developed new concepts for exploration and formulated fresh questions for use in subsequent interviews. In addition to the question/answer format of the typical interview, I conducted a card sorting exercise (Appendix C) among eight participants. I designed this exercise to prompt discussion about stereotypes among female advertising agency workers.

Out of the 15 interviews, I met face-to-face with 11 of my participants. We met in quiet locations such as the participants’ offices, conference rooms, homes, or my office. These settings were conducive to private conversations and enhanced the sound quality of the recorded conversations. I conducted the remaining four interviews over the phone. I recorded these interviews as well. All interviews lasted at least one hour with nine interviews extending beyond 90 minutes.

**Modes of Analysis**

Across the 15 interviews I collected 382 pages of data, single-spaced. The process of interpreting the data and developing theory from it followed a non-linear pattern. “Interpretation is a complex and dynamic craft, with as much creative artistry as technical exactitude. It requires an abundance of patience, plodding, fortitude and discipline” (Crabtree & Miller, 1999, p.128). My analytical process combined the technical coding aspects familiar to grounded theory along
with the more intuitive or artful process of immersion/crystallization (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). This immersion/crystallization process took place while transcribing the interviews.

Transcribing the data myself afforded me an opportunity to relive each interview and reflect not only on what each participant said but also on how she said it. Here “the phases of organizing, connecting, corroborating/legitimating are collapsed into an extended period of immersion in the texts, out of which interpretations are crystalized” (Crabtree & Miller, 1999, p. 135). I began to develop hunches on the spot, making notes of my reflections along the way.

I gave each participant an original transcript, allowing her to edit it and provide final approval. After this, I began formal coding, which occurred in three waves. First, I used open or initial coding and gave a name or label to each segment of data (Charmaz, 2006). This process moved quickly. This initial process resulted in 57 codes. See Table 2.1 for an alphabetical listing of these codes.
Table 2.1 Initial codes presented alphabetically.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes A-H</th>
<th>Codes I-Pe</th>
<th>Codes PI-Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A little gray hair in the room</td>
<td>Immunity from socializing</td>
<td>Playing the game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic labor</td>
<td>Importance of socializing</td>
<td>Self esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age discrimination</td>
<td>Indoctrination</td>
<td>Self identifying as a creative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency culture – energy</td>
<td>Judging appearance</td>
<td>Succeeding against the odds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency culture – new biz</td>
<td>Kilimanjaro effect</td>
<td>Token woman at the top</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency losing its edge</td>
<td>Knowing an insider</td>
<td>Tomboy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banding against the client</td>
<td>Leadership team gender count</td>
<td>Trap door in the floor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients expect agency as expert</td>
<td>Life stage</td>
<td>Using femininity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competing with women</td>
<td>Like attracts like</td>
<td>Wearing trendy clothes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conforming to age norms</td>
<td>Long hours</td>
<td>Where is this all going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costing too much</td>
<td>Long term survival</td>
<td>Why industry is youth obsessed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative agency – male ethos</td>
<td>Losing one’s edge</td>
<td>Willing to give up personal life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crossing an invisible boundary</td>
<td>Matching account person to client</td>
<td>Winning over the creatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture of sexual harassment</td>
<td>Matching account person to agency</td>
<td>Witching hour</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family planning</td>
<td>Making it work</td>
<td>Wives that don’t work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling a connection</td>
<td>Mobility</td>
<td>Work hard, play hard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting along with the guys</td>
<td>Needing older workers</td>
<td>Working at staying current</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having the right look</td>
<td>Opting out</td>
<td>Working extra hard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring outsiders</td>
<td>Personality traits and success criteria</td>
<td>Young at heart youthful of mind</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The second wave involved focused coding to determine which codes “make the most analytic sense” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57). I developed my focused codes using two criteria. First, I looked for codes that related most directly to my research questions. Secondly, I selected codes with the thickest description and richest detail. This exercise resulted in a new list of 15 focused codes. In analyzing the focused codes, three overarching themes emerged. In scrutinizing these themes further, I noticed a relation between them and my participants’ career stage. For example, the first theme included elements of appearance and style such as “having the right look” and “aesthetic labor.” These themes tended to be relate to early career or entry into the field. The second theme focused on the tension and stress brought on by unequal male/female relationships. This included such topics as sexual harassment and getting along in a male-dominated culture. These themes related directly to career mobility. The last area centered on the political aspects of the job, which some women called “playing the game.” Here codes such as “importance of socializing,” and “willing to give up personal life” emerged as strategies related to long-term survival. See Table 2.2 for a list of focused codes.

Table 2.2 Focused codes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Looks/Style (Entry/Early Career)</th>
<th>Male/Female Work Relationships (Career Mobility)</th>
<th>Playing the Game (Long Term Career Survival)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic Labor</td>
<td>Creative Agency Male Ethos</td>
<td>Importance of Socializing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having the Right Look</td>
<td>Culture of Sexual Harassment</td>
<td>Long Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like Attracts Like</td>
<td>Getting Along With the Guys</td>
<td>Playing the Game</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wearing Trendy Clothes</td>
<td>Tomboy</td>
<td>Willing to Give Up Personal Life</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Wives That Don't Work</td>
<td>Work Hard Play Hard</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Working at Staying Current</td>
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</table>
After completing the focused coding exercise, I performed one last wave of analysis described by Charmaz (2006) as axial coding. While, axial coding often involves preset coding categories as prescribed by researchers such as Strauss and Corbin (1990), I chose to customize the process to fit the conceptual framework of my study. Because I retained 39 codes of varying degrees of importance, I needed a way to synthesize the data into a coherent whole. I looked for relationships between codes and integrated them into patterns related to the arc of my participants’ career paths. This arc, not coincidentally, related directly to the four questions this study sought to answer: 1) how do self-image and cultural stereotypes affect the decision to enter the advertising business; 2) how do women navigate the male-dominated culture of the ad agency; 3) what strategies do women use to get ahead in advertising; 4) how do women survive long term in a culture that favors youth? See Table 2.3.

Table 2.3 Axial codes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Entering the Business</th>
<th>Navigating Male Dominated Culture</th>
<th>Getting Ahead</th>
<th>Long Term Survival</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic Labor</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Like attracts like</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Judging appearance</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Crossing invisible boundaries</td>
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<tr>
<td>Having the right look</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Wearing trendy clothes</td>
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<td>• Kilimanjaro</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Personality traits</td>
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<td>Life Stage</td>
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<td>Agency Mythology</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Indoctrination</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Long hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Work hard play hard</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Importance of socializing</td>
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<td>• Clients expect agency as experts</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Agency culture-energy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Creative Agency Male Ethos</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Indoctrination</td>
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<td>• Importance of socializing</td>
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<td>• Wives that don’t work</td>
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<td>Culture of Sexual Harassment</td>
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<td>• Getting along with the guys</td>
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<td>• Tomboy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Token Woman At The Top</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mobility Strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Playing the game</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Making it work</td>
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<td>• Long hours</td>
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<td>• Wives that don’t work</td>
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<td>Working Extra Hard</td>
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<td>Willing to Give Up Personal Life</td>
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<td>• Family planning</td>
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<td>Witching Hour</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opting Out</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long Term Survival – Succeeding Against the Odds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Willing to work extra hard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immunity from Socializing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working at Staying Current – Losing One’s Edge</td>
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<td>• Young at heart youthful in mind</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age Discrimination</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Trap door in the floor</td>
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<tr>
<td>• A little gray hair in the room</td>
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<tr>
<td>Where is This All Going</td>
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In terms of the actual coding process, I marked passages in each transcript relating to each code. I then extracted the verbatims, filed them in coded bundles and pinned the bundles to a bulletin board where I moved them around in relational patterns. This process served two purposes. First, bundles of codes with the most verbatims were thicker and the heft identified topics that drew the most feedback and contained the richest stories. This also signaled saturation and provided focus for theory building. Thinner bundles turned out to be helpful in a supporting role or were deemed unimportant altogether. Second, this mapping technique helped me develop linkages and relationships between concepts. As I added interviews I also added codes. I rearranged the bundles on the bulletin board and refined relationships along the way. Overall the exercise gave structure to my findings and by the end of the 15 interviews, the study had taken shape both literally and figuratively.

**Ethical Considerations**

I collected data from 15 women, all of them White, all of them college educated, many of them with master’s degrees. Each participant achieved both career and financial success in the field of advertising. Despite participants’ attainment of power and privilege, considerations of ethics and exploitation remained on the forefront throughout data collection, data analysis and reporting. My participants revealed many personal details about themselves, their families and the people they worked with. Many of them provided me with explicit accounts of sexual harassment. The advertising business is tight-knit and gossip laden. Each participant took a risk in telling her story and as a result I took measured steps to guard privacy.

First, I made multiple written and verbal assurances of confidentiality. This started during recruiting and continued throughout the process. Recruiting emails introduced the study but affirmed the use of pseudonyms, identity protection and data security. I contacted 23 women; eight of them declined participation. The consent form listed the potential risks of
joining the study and outlined the steps I would take to safeguard participants’ identities. Each participant received the form in advance to allow her ample time to read and digest it. At the start of each interview, I reiterated my promise to protect the participant’s identity and asked each to provide me with a pseudonym of her choosing. Some selected a name; others asked me to do it for them. I personally transcribed all interviews, eliminating third party exposure. During transcription I used pseudonyms and deleted all identifiers mentioned during the interview. This typically included the names of ad agencies, clients, coworkers, cities, landmark buildings and universities. Each participant received a written transcript and was asked to edit it for approval. Three women edited their transcripts, one extensively. I stored transcripts and audio recordings in a password protected cloud storage account. I changed passwords several times during the data collection, analysis and reporting periods.

Data Integrity and Limitations

In qualitative research the concept of validity refers to whether the data is credible (Maxwell, 2005, Merriam, 2009) or authentic (Creswell, 2013). Regardless of the term used, the concept of validity needs to be considered in the context of the critical interpretive framework used in this research. “Within the newly emerging patterns of inquiry, approaches to validity must reach beyond the obfuscating claims of objectivity used by positivism to skirt the role played by researcher values in human science” (Lather, 1986, p.66). In designing my study, I recognized that my years of experience in advertising along with my personal experiences with age bias, gender issues and obsession with self-presentation constituted an asset rather than a liability. Similarly, my experience in the University of St. Thomas’ doctoral program honed my critical thinking skills, a lens used throughout this research.
Lather (1986) maintained that striving to eliminate or neutralize the researcher and her background from the study only serves to perpetuate the mystification in most social science research which further serves to “legitimate privilege based on class, race and gender” (p. 64). Due to my stated commitment to critical inquiry and my intention that this research be used to empower and transform, I approached data integrity in a way that aligns with this research paradigm rather than fights against it (Le Grange & Beets, 2005). Lather (1991), suggested critical researchers employ catalytic validity, which means working with the data to spark or catalyze social change. Catalytic validity is achieved in several ways. First, catalytic validity requires triangulation. I interviewed a wide variety of participants from different parts of the country whose experiences came from a wide range of advertising agencies. Second, after each interview, I reflected on the data and used subsequent interviews to collect participant feedback on ideas advanced in earlier interviews. Third, when I found negative cases, I discussed them with participants, sometimes finding grounds for casting aside ideas, other times finding the opposite. This member-checking strategy helped me adjust my theory as I went along (Maxwell, 2005).

Lastly, while I triangulated the data across 15 women, 7 geographically dispersed cities and 26 advertising agencies much about this study is highly particularized. Only women over the age of 40 participated in my study, all of them highly accomplished account executives. Each of them established their careers in world-renowned advertising agencies. In grounded theory studies, the transferability of the findings comes “from scrutinizing numerous particulars” and making comparisons across highly detailed studies to generate formal theory (Charmaz, 2006, p. 180). Additionally, my participants provided rich description, thick with the intimate details of their on the job experiences. This type of data adds credibility and transferability by
providing the details others need to see themselves in the data and assess whether my findings apply more generally (Merriam, 2009).

Despite the many safeguards used to ensure data integrity, this study has a few limitations. First, while 15 women and 26 different advertising agencies represent a strong showing, there were several women at four particular agencies that I attempted but failed to include in this study. These four agencies include nationally recognized firms with award-winning results that also have reputations as “boys clubs.” Secondly, while this study included data from across the country, the west coast is under-represented. Lastly, I used convenience sampling followed by snowball sampling to recruit participants. This type of sampling sometimes limits the variation within the participant pool.

In summary, I built integrity into my study in several ways. First I used triangulation. Second I discussed my emerging thoughts on theory with my participants and invited them to help shape my thinking. Third, I looked for and reported on negative cases. The particularization of the research design along with the thick, rich data added to the credibility and transferability overall. I now turn to introducing my 15 participants. I start with an overview of the entire participant pool and then provide a brief narrative profile of each.

**Participant Overview**

Fifteen women participated in this study. In looking at their demography, several skews exist with the exception of age. In order to participate in this study, women needed to be at least 40 years old. Aside from this requirement, the age distribution spreads fairly evenly across categories. The opposite holds true for all other demographic classifications. All of the women in this study were White and all of them graduated from college. The majority of them grew up in upper class families; were married and had at least two children. See table 2.4 for a demographic summary.
Aside from these demographic categorizations, the women in this study worked at many different creatively-driven advertising agencies across the United States and contributed data to this study which spanned a wide range of experiences. The following offers a narrative description of these women (using pseudonyms), their backgrounds, and brief summaries of their career histories.

**Barbara**

Barbara is a 57-year old woman who worked in ad agencies in two major metropolitan areas. She is married and has one child who she gave birth to in her 20s, during the early stages
of her career. Unlike most women in this study, her career continued to thrive beyond the age of 50. She started her career in advertising approximately 25 years ago as an account executive. Barbara steadily moved up the ranks into roles of ever increasing responsibility. Eventually, Barbara held the highest-level executive position at two different high-profile agencies. She did not comment on how those jobs ended. News reports mentioned the mutuality of the decisions. Barbara believed the pivotal difference in her trajectory was having a sponsor. A man in the inner circle at her mid-career agency recognized her potential and championed her promotion to a key position, a position that gave her visibility beyond the four walls of the agency and changed the course of her career.

**Helen**

Helen is in her mid-forties. She is married with two children. She had her children in her mid-thirties after she established herself as an account supervisor at a well-known creative hot shop. With approximately 20 years of industry experience, Helen now works in a creatively driven agency as an Account Director, which is one level below top management. Once she had children, Helen worked hard to balance her career ambitions with family obligations. As a result and by choice, Helen has maintained a less than full time work schedule.

**Jane**

Jane is a highly accomplished woman who at the age of 40 has risen to the ranks of key executive leadership at a highly successful advertising agency. She currently serves as one of only two women on seven-person executive management team at a creative hot shop. She has spent her entire 18-year career in advertising, all of it in the account executive function. Over the course of her career, Jane has worked for both creatively driven advertising agencies as well as the more traditional ad agencies that have lost their edge in a competitive environment. Jane earned a Master’s degree prior to starting her career. She is married and has teenage children.
Joanne

Joanne has worked in the advertising industry for approximately 30 years and is now 52 years old. Early in her career, Joanne established herself with specialized skills in a narrow function within advertising. She believes having this expertise gave her leverage at several junctures along her career path. Joanne is married with children. In deciding to have a family, Joanne made a deliberate decision to change the direction of her career choosing to work in a small local shop that accommodated her demands for flexibility. She now runs her own consulting firm.

Leah

Leah is a 44-year old woman who worked as an advertising account executive, later moving into the human resources department as a recruiting manager. Her value in this research stems from her insider knowledge of how agencies assess talent and the criteria used to decide who to hire and who to promote. Leah is married and has children.

Louise

Over the course of her career, Louise has performed in a number of different functional roles at various agencies both as a freelancer and a permanent employee. The majority of her career has been in account management. She is 40 years old, has one child and is a divorced single mother. Importantly, Louise possessed specialized skills in a high-demand function within advertising, skills, which provided marketability and opportunity. When I met Louise she had recently left a highly creative agency due to management changes at the top.

Madigan

After nearly 15 years in the advertising business, Madigan took a position on the client side. She is now in her early 50s and is a vice president of marketing. During her approximately 20 years in the advertising business, Madigan worked at several agencies reaching the level of
vice president and group account director. Throughout these experiences she was a single mother with a young child at home. Like others in this study, Madigan obtained specialized skills in a narrow function within advertising, which she believed had a positive impact on her career.

Mary

Mary is 48 years old, has one child and grew her career during a time when she was a divorced single mother. She was an account executive at a variety of advertising agencies including one with a national reputation for its creativity and award winning work. Like others in this study, Mary possessed specialized skills in a high-demand function within advertising. Mary now works outside of the advertising industry in a director’s role on the client side.

Nancy

Nancy retired from advertising at the age of 55 and is now in her 60s making her the oldest woman in this study. Nancy earned an MBA from an Ivy League school, which catalyzed her advertising career. She is married and has two grown children. Nancy spent nearly 25 years at the same agency, a creatively driven shop in its day with a mandatory retirement age of 55. She reached the level of senior vice president. Nancy then went on to another agency for seven more years before retiring completely from the business.

Neve

Neve is 50 years old and is married with one teenage child. Over the course of her career, Neve has worked at five agencies traversing both coasts and points in between. Starting her career in account management, she eventually established herself as a brand strategist, a specialized role within the agency world requiring skills in qualitative research, particularly ethnography. She now runs her own business.
Olivia

Olivia is 47 years old, married and a mother. She started her career as an intern at a well-known agency and soon after changed agencies, landing at a renowned shop in the same city. She spent more than 10 years at that agency rising to the level of account director while at the same time taking on added responsibilities in human resource development. Her time spent developing talent provided an important perspective to this research. She now runs her own business.

Paula

Unlike others in this study, Paula built her career outside the advertising business. She was recruited to join a creative hot shop that was experiencing explosive growth, an agency looking for someone with a general marketing background to enhance their offering. She spent four years at the agency and provided a much valued outsider’s perspective to this study. Paula earned an MBA from a top school. She is in her early 50s, is single with no children and currently runs her own business.

Rhonda

At the age of 41, Rhonda is one of the youngest women in this study. She is married and has two children of preschool age. Rhonda started her career as a staff assistant, answering phones and getting coffee for one of the male executive directors at a creative hot shop. Over the last 20 years, she has changed agencies three times and worked diligently to move up the ranks with each move. She currently holds the position of account director at a well-known agency.

Shelly

Shelly earned an MBA from a top school and started her advertising career having been recruited by a large and well-known agency just before graduation. She is now 48 years old, married with two middle-school aged children. Over the course of her career, Shelly put in long
term stints at two agencies that differed widely in their corporate cultures, providing a valuable perspective for this study. She is now a senior vice president and is running a large account at an agency with offices around the world.

Susan

Susan comes from an “advertising family” with a father in the business. During the course of her 20 years in advertising she worked at two different high profile agencies in two different cities for nearly equal lengths of time. At the age of 51, Susan is single without children and now runs her own business, which takes her inside many of the nation’s hottest advertising agencies.
CHAPTER THREE:
MY STORY: LOCATING MYSELF IN THE RESEARCH

Contextual Background

I, like most women in this study, grew up in the 1960s and 1970s as Betty Friedan’s historic fight to include women in the workplace stood in marked contrast to the world I experienced at home and the world depicted in most television programming of the time. My mother did not work outside the home. In fact, my birth certificate included a box to record my father’s occupation, but no such box was available next to my mother’s name. Like the TV dads on the shows I watched growing up, my father left the house each morning to go to an office where all the men wore business suits with starched white shirts and neck ties. This scenario seemed normal to me. It mirrored what I saw among my neighbors. I also saw it play out time and again on the TV shows aired during my childhood. Popular shows during this time such as Leave it to Beaver and Father Knows Best reinforced a picture of upper middle class life where the workaday world and professional success meant the male head of household left for work in formal business attire with a briefcase under his arm to go to an office, only to sit behind a desk all day. The women stayed behind to run the household and raise the children. On the opposite side of the socioeconomic spectrum, pop culture depicted a working class world where Ralph Kramden and Ed Norton of the Honeymooners or Archie Bunker of All in the Family left the house in work boots carrying a lunch pail. Their wives stayed home to keep house.

As White middle and upper class women of my generation began to benefit from Betty Friedan’s fight, attending college and selecting a career in any of the professions previously reserved for men became more accepted and in my family, expected. As I thought through my choices I struggled to identify with or see myself in the business world depicted on television. The most common form of pop culture accessible to me during this time was television and the
popular shows of the day had only dabbled in portraying female characters as successful women who achieved professional advancement in a career track traditionally reserved for men. Only two television characters that come to mind include Sally Rogers, a female copywriter on *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, a popular television program of the 1960s, and Mary Richards, a television news producer on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, a popular television program of the 1970s. Interestingly, neither of these television characters was married. The offices they worked in offered a livelier and more creative atmosphere than what I imagined the typical business setting to be and having excelled in art and the humanities throughout my schooling, I had no interest in sitting at a desk all day. The TV office settings of Sally Rogers and Mary Richards appealed to me. During my formative years, only one television program, *Bewitched* portrayed life in an ad agency. Despite the fact that the show aired during the 1960s and early 1970s, it used the 1950s bureaucratic style ad agency and organizational structure rather than mirroring the creative revolution that was happening in contemporary times. Additionally, the program offered no female role models in positions of equality at the fictitious ad agency, McMann and Tate. As a result, the show’s setting failed to register with me as I thought about careers and office settings.

Like most women in my generation, pop culture offered a powerful frame of reference. The cultural context I grew up in colored my thinking and shaped my choices as I considered where I fit in and what my options were. Figure 3.1 offers a framework or societal taxonomy for understanding the cultural context of this formative time in my life and in the lives of the women in this study. I now turn to the details of my career history and how it led me to this study.
Introduction

In my 8th grade Language Arts class, our teacher assigned a book report giving us the freedom to select any non-fiction book in the library. I chose a book with a provocative title, *From Those Wonderful Folks Who Gave You Pearl Harbor* by Jerry Della Femina. I expected to read a book about the onset of World War II and instead I learned about the inner workings and mystique of the advertising industry. In this book I discovered the career of Mary Wells, who broke through the male dominated advertising world to become one of the first and most talented women creative directors in the industry, an accomplishment for which she was awarded induction into the Advertising Hall of Fame. In this book, I discovered a real world profession that pop culture and television programs only hinted at. It opened my eyes and broadened my
SEX SELLS

From this early age, and like so many other women who participated in this study, I found myself attracted to the allure of the field, an attraction that has lasted a lifetime.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will present the story of my career. I review how I came to work in the advertising field and recount the various twists and turns my career took as the years progressed. I cover themes related to looking and acting the part, gender bias and ultimately the ageism I encountered as I matured in the industry. In covering these milestones, I discuss the reasons for pursuing my doctoral degree, decisions that led to this research and my interest in this line of inquiry. I begin by describing the events that led to my early career in advertising, starting with my undergraduate studies in graphic design.

**Early Career: A Game of Hopscotch**

**Starting Out**

Throughout my formative years, I considered myself to be a creative person. Teachers always praised me for my artistic talent and throughout high school I took as many electives in art as possible. I attended college in 1974 and chose to study graphic design with the intention of becoming a creative director in an advertising agency just as Mary Wells had done more than a decade earlier. In 1978, I received a bachelor’s degree in fine art from a large public university in northeast Ohio. After graduation I found a job working as an intern in the creative department of a mid-sized ad agency in Akron, assisting art directors with typesetting and mounting layouts for presentation. Most of my workmates were also young, in fact I remember almost no one over the age of 40 years old. Everyone I worked with had an intangible quality, a certain swagger and a look that matched what I imagined a person in an ad agency to look like. I tried to mimic the look in an attempt to fit in and be accepted.

The creative team, a staff of all men, wore casual clothes in an era when all other professionals wore suits and ties to work every day. In contrast, my colleagues wore black
denim jeans with black T-shirts. They wore their hair long and paced the floor as they brainstormed campaign ideas all the while playing darts in the hallway to get their creative juices flowing. Loud music played on high-end stereo equipment. I watched in amazement.

In those early years, I came to two realizations. First, while I had attained a modest level of skill via education and on-the-job training, I was not what some might call a natural talent. In a competitive field filled with young gifted copywriters and art directors, I fared somewhere in the middle with an acceptable level of skill but not enough artistic talent to be considered for the best assignments. Secondly, I earned a little more than minimum wage and saw little room for relief when looking ahead at those a few years my senior. I had always been an accomplished student and with encouragement from my family I applied for and was accepted to the Masters of Business Administration program at the University of Michigan. I intended to learn the business side of advertising and perhaps run my own firm someday.

The graduate school experience opened my eyes to the world of business. I focused my studies on marketing, excelling naturally in a field akin to the one I left behind. Professors noticed my abilities and when a large multinational Fortune 100 consumer goods company came to campus to recruit for entry-level positions, my professors steered the hiring company my way. They invited me to interview and visit their corporate headquarters. Always expecting to find an ad agency job rather than a corporate position, I accepted the offer to interview on a lark because I considered myself to be “agency” not client. I felt I had a service gene, an innate ability to assist others achieve their goals. Moreover, I dreaded the idea of a static position working on the same products or issues day-in and day-out with little variety. I also feared I might wither in a bureaucratic culture where formal business attire ruled the day. Just the same, out of little more than curiosity, I accepted the interview and subsequently to my surprise received an offer. I accepted it knowing I could make the leap back to the agency side if desired or start my own
firm as originally intended. Upon accepting the position, I moved halfway across the country to a new adventure that turned out to be a mistake.

My client-side years lasted nearly a decade. I missed the agency side but during my time in the large corporation, I became acculturized to believe that strong leaders established their careers on the client side, where they made important decisions regarding revenue growth, profit and loss. Agency personnel on the other hand, as service leaders, lacked this type of acumen and were therefore lesser. I came to accept this way of thinking, which during this 10-year period tabled any thoughts of switching back to agency work. Still, I found the best part of my corporate job to be the days when I worked closely with my ad agency. I missed the agency business and decided to do something about it. Fortunately, I had established roots in this new city and had developed a strong professional network to draw on or as Bourdieu (1977) termed it, social capital, which helped me immensely as I plotted my exit from corporate life.

**Right Skills, Wrong Look**

What I found surprised me. On two separate occasions, during the course of setting up networking luncheons with agency people, my lunch companion questioned my ability to make the transition from the corporate side to agency side based on my appearance. In the first instance, I met with a woman from the Anderson agency (a pseudonym), a well-known agency with a stellar reputation for highly creative work. She looked across the table from me and said flatly, “I don’t think Anderson is right for you, you don’t look like the ‘Anderson’ type.” On the second occasion, an ad agency recruiter looking to fill an account executive position at a creative hot shop, declined to present me for the position based on the outfit I chose to wear to lunch. Apparently the dress I had on, a simple A-line style made of silk with a monochromatic stripe, failed to meet the high fashion standards this agency was known for. I felt embarrassed and insulted. My education, work experience, and my track record for success more than prepared
me for these positions. Unfortunately, I lacked the fish in water understanding of the habitus and as a result, I failed to look the part, which presented an insurmountable barrier, at least at these two agencies.

Through diligence, I eventually found my way back to the agency side. A small local office of an internationally acclaimed ad agency won an account and needed someone with a packaged goods background. I fit the bill. Most industry insiders considered the agency to be a corporate-like, traditional, strategy-driven shop rather than a creatively driven firm. Perhaps this nuance afforded me access whereas I failed to make the necessary first impression at the more creatively driven agencies in town. Regardless, I gained a foothold, which put me in good stead for years to come.

Throughout my time at this ad agency, once again I noticed very few people over the age of 40. The president of the agency, a middle-aged White man, led a management team of five or six direct reports, all men save for one woman, the head of the media department. I guessed most of them to be 40 years old or so with no one else at the agency seeming to be close to that age. The same held true among my clients. For the most part, they were young men in their late 20s and early 30s. I remember only one woman at the client company, a marketing manager who lasted only a short time. I made a mental note of these age and gender counts but paid little attention beyond that because I was still in my 30s and age-wise I seemed to fit right in.

Almost everyone at the agency worked long hours, often through the dinner hour. We traveled to client meetings weekly and several times a year we took clients to Los Angeles for television commercial shoots. These shoots lasted a week or more. At the time, I had two elementary school-aged children. I remember missing school plays and parent-teacher conferences due to travel and work demands. Fortunately for me, I had a somewhat unique situation at home; my husband had a more flexible job making it easier for me to split my time.
between work and home. He traveled infrequently if at all and for the most part, my career took top billing over his.

**Mid-Career: Specialized Skills Spell Success**

Midway through my career, a well-known, award-winning specialty agency recruited me to head up their local office. The firm, headquartered on the East Coast, specialized in consumer promotion marketing, a high-demand area of expertise. My client-side experience helped me gain the necessary skills in this area. The agency had secured a large account in my city. As a condition of their contract, the client required them to establish a satellite office to make it easier to service the client day-to-day. They hired me to run the office. I had responsibility for 10 employees and managed the entire operation of the office. By this time I was 43. I felt the position offered me several career advantages. First, the position gave me a step up in responsibility, title, stature, and pay. It also allowed me to fully develop a specialized skill, which I felt provided me with a marketable advantage. Third, I felt the agency potentially provided me a place I could grow old in the business. Based on previous observation, I believed only those in top management survived past 40 years old in this up-or-out business. The owners of the firm offered assurances of growing the local office beyond its initial size. They painted a three-year picture of growing the office and hiring a staff of 100 or more. I bought the dream and signed on.

Unfortunately for me, several issues hit at once and the dream turned into a nightmare. First, the home office acquired two companies, which instantly added capabilities in the field of digital marketing, an up-and-coming field with high potential. Fraught with issues, these acquisitions quickly became disasters leaving the agency in debt. Secondly, a large corporation acquired my only client before the home office had a chance to build and diversify the local office. The acquiring company made it clear they would release our agency from our contract
once the sale went through. Last, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 plunged the country into recession making it impossible for my small office to deliver on the promise of client diversification and rapid growth. Just three years after taking the position, our office closed and I was left standing without a chair when the music stopped. I was now 46 years old.

I saw a job posting on a web site for one of the most well known advertising agencies in the city. This agency had a reputation for doing breakthrough work and for hiring the best and most creative people. They had just moved to new offices in the heart of downtown. A nationally renowned architect designed the agency’s new office space and the agency enjoyed much press coverage as a result. I submitted my resume. Soon after, I received a call from the Human Resource Director who asked me to come in for an interview. I felt thrilled and confident in my ability but at the same time I felt intimidated by the agency’s reputation for selectivity and exclusivity. Given my experiences years before and knowing how important it is to look the part, I wondered if I was glamorous enough for this agency. Did I have the right image? The right clothes? Was I too old?

I made an appointment with my hair stylist, a woman who had cut my hair for many years and whom I trusted implicitly. I told her the circumstances and asked her to make me over to look younger and more stylish. She cut my hair within an inch of my head in a “Halle Berry” style haircut that made me look younger than my 46 years. I went shopping at a high-end boutique and bought an all-black outfit that included new shoes, a new purse, a sleek dress and a short-cropped black jacket. People in the industry used to joke that one could pick advertising people out of a crowd because they always wore black. I studied for the interview and prepared answers to anticipated questions.

I entered the agency on one of the top floors of a downtown skyscraper. Rock music played loudly in the lobby. The décor included ultra modern furniture and naturally polished
wood floors. The human resource director took me on a tour of the agency, which had an open floor plan, very few offices and many common spaces where people milled about. In one area stood an indoor basketball court. I was overwhelmed. The space seemed over the top to me and I felt out of place, even in my new costume. Everyone looked much younger than I. Everyone I met wore the latest fashions and seemed so relaxed. I was a wreck, feeling old, unattractive and like a fish out of water or what Bourdieu (1977) might consider to be a mismatch between the habitus of the agency and me. The human resource director escorted me into a moody and dimly lit conference room where the agency’s work hung on the walls. Two men, dressed in black, came in, took seats and asked me questions about my work history. An hour passed quickly, after the interview they escorted me out. I never heard from any of them again. I later found out they hired a much younger man.

This first foray into job searching at the age of 46 concerned me. I not only feared age would be a factor but I also firmly believed it to be so. I felt resentful because all my background and training prepared me for a senior position in the advertising industry. Yet, I worried about my prospects of finding a job where my age prevented me from fully “looking the part.” In this context, I decided to pursue this doctoral degree. I wanted a back up plan for the long term. In the advertising world age represented a liability. I guessed the opposite to be true in academia. People always told me I would make a great teacher, I come from a teaching family and with many years of advertising experience plus a doctoral degree in education, I figured the combination would qualify me for a teaching post at the university level long after I turned 50.

After the office closed, I continued to look for a new job in the industry while freelancing here and there to make ends meet. Fortunately for me, I had honed skills in two specialized areas, consumer promotion and consumer packaged goods. Both provided me with marketable
advantages. Soon after, I leveraged a networking contact and received an interviewed for a
freelance account executive position in a medium-sized digital marketing firm. I had very little
experience in digital marketing, but the hiring agency assured me they would train me. My
packaged goods background trumped the need for digital skills, at least in this early stage of
digital marketing. They hired me and I began a four-month contract as a freelancer. The agency
felt like a good fit in many ways. Culturally, I blended right in despite being older than most of
the staff. The agency had a reputation for being smart and strategic rather than flashy, what one
colleague described to me as “sensible shoes” versus spike heels.

The hiring director at the digital firm, Martha (a pseudonym) a woman a few years older
than I, liked me. She received positive feedback on my work, witnessed my leadership skills
first hand and felt I easily fit in with other staff members. She told me later that she had
approached her boss, the president of the agency, to bring me on full time. He purportedly said I
didn’t “look the part” and “wasn’t the fit they were looking for.” The statement confirmed my
suspicion that the agency business can be shallow with a greater emphasis on style than
substance. I took “fit” to be a veiled remark about my age. I began to believe that “looking the
part” referred to more than just having the latest hair style, and wearing the latest fashions. I
now firmly believed it had an age component to it. Without knowing the theory behind it, what I
was experiencing was a mismatch between the agency’s habitus and me, something that
apparently ran deeper that clothing, hair style and even age, something that could not be faked or
foiled.

In a serendipitous twist of fate just four weeks before my freelance contract ended, the
president of the firm resigned. In his wake, Martha ascended to his position and now had the
authority to offer me a permanent position, which she did. I considered Martha to be a kindred
spirit. She too worked hard and turned in strong business results but like me, she looked more
mainstream. She dressed more conservatively than most agency women. She had a family and spent her free time with them rather than participating in all the stereotypically glamorous activities advertising people were supposed to do in their spare time like climbing mountains and traveling to wine country. As long as she remained in power, I felt protected. For six years the agency grew rapidly because of the high demand for digital marketing services. I continued to grow in my job. I received a promotion and my job scope and authority grew. I was now in charge of the entire account team, a group of eight or nine people. I also maintained responsibility for the largest account at the agency. I logged 45-50 billable hours each week with my executive and administrative responsibilities on top of that. I was 54 years old.

Late Career: Sex Sells

In her role as managing director of our agency, Martha routinely met with clients to assess the agency’s performance. As digital advertising and social media marketing began to take off, our clients told Martha they wanted to see more thought leadership on new digital techniques and said they were relying on the agency to bring cutting edge ideas. Given my age, I felt threatened by these comments. Throughout my time at this agency, I made it a point to stay current on trends and experiment with new media. Yet I also knew that my clients and my staff were much younger than I was, a dynamic I could do nothing about. I called it the “mom” syndrome and it had to do with age. Clients do not like a “mother hen” leader, they like a youthful, energetic cheerleader who blazes trails. The age bias component of this always bothered me. The “mom syndrome” carries with it an assumption that an older woman cannot possibly know what is coming before it gets here because like the stereotypical mother, she is out of step and behind the times. Martha’s comments set the stage for what happened next, a move that surprised even me.
Soon after the initial conversation, Martha approached me a second time and suggested I take a step back and relinquish my responsibilities for the largest account at the agency. She said I had been working so hard and putting in such long hours that she wanted to reward me with a respite and assign me to a smaller account. I saw right through this. She suggested I trade assignments with a woman 10 years younger. She was blonde and beautiful; she fit the mold and looked the part. I resisted. Finally Martha blurted, “Come on Diane. We all know sex sells.” Insulted, I decided to fight the situation rather than succumb to it. I believed criticisms about being on the cutting edge and understanding trends to be based in perception not reality. I began researching ageism in the workplace. I discovered what I was experiencing was not uncommon although none of my reading was specific to the advertising industry. I was and still am intrigued by the idea that our culture considers the advertising industry to be a glamour business where image influences the perception of skills and effectiveness. The seeds of my dissertation were sown with that one phrase, “sex sells.”

In the meantime, as a matter for survival, I felt I needed to exemplify an idealized or stylized ad agency persona. Once again, in a Goffman-like move, I performed this part as if in a play bringing my persona to life to prove that I belonged and fit in. I played this role as a matter of survival. I decided to invest in a fashion make over, or as Goffman might put it a new costume and stage make up. I went to a hair salon and dyed my hair to cover any gray and had the stylist cut my hair in a fashionable new style. I bought $1000 worth of new clothes at a store most commonly known for catering to young women. Still, within a month or two, under pressure from Martha, I relinquished control of the account and took the step back, all in an attempt to stay the course and hold on to my job. These actions proved prudent because shortly thereafter, another general ad agency acquired our firm. As a digital expert and as someone who
looked, acted and dressed much younger than my years, I made the transition unscathed whereas Martha and a few other administrators lost their jobs.

By this time and in truth, I lost my interest in continuing to fight the system. Every day felt uphill. The work seemed shallow rather than exciting. What I once thought glamorous seemed frivolous and unimportant. The long hours and continuous grind offered no reward except to keep me employed in a field I no longer relished. I asked myself, “is this what I want my body of work to be?” With my newfound critical thinking skills from the St. Thomas program came an ability to question the entire scenario and see the situation as socially constructed. I am now close to 59 years old and with mixed emotions have left the advertising business to focus on this research. I believe this line of inquiry holds countless possibilities for both theory building and application.

Summary

The arc of my career took an unusual path. I started out on the creative side, followed by a stint on the client side. Not until much later did things come full circle. Over the years, I witnessed a kind of “lookism” that prevented gatekeepers from giving me access to interviews at creative hot shops. With each passing year I gathered more evidence of what seemed to be an industry-wide bias favoring young, beautiful, fashionably dressed, physically fit workers. My observations, steeped in my own experiences, led me to this research and formed the basis of an emerging theory. In the next chapters I provide the stories of the 15 women who volunteered to be a part of this research. In order to participate, they needed to reach a minimum age of 40 years old. Many of their stories mirror mine and with the richness and depth of their experiences they offer even greater insights into what it is like to look and act the part as a female account executive in the advertising industry. I begin by looking at their early careers and what attracted them to the field in the first place.
CHAPTER FOUR:
ENTERING THE FIELD: LOOKING AND ACTING THE PART

Introduction

As an advertising agency insider, I observed that in order to get hired, fit in and get traction in one’s early career, ad agency personnel often conform to the youthful, highly stylized nature of the business. In this chapter, I explore a chronological path through the first stage of my participants’ advertising careers. Several distinct steps emerged during this stage. First, I review the answer to the question, what initially attracted participants to the field of advertising? Here I uncover themes of identity, fear of corporate bureaucracy and feelings of affiliation. Second, I review the entry process itself. I reveal the intricacies of having the right look, acting the right way and possessing the right personality traits including curiosity and passion. Third, I look at the early years that immediately follow a job offer. Here I describe what it is like for participants to work in a highly stylized environment that demands long hours and total commitment. This commitment includes expectations of attending after-hours social events and successfully traversing a male dominated culture that at times includes encounters with on-the-job sexual harassment. Despite some of the negative aspects of these early years, the job of an entry-level account executive offers a fascinating start to one’s career. I begin by taking an in-depth look at the reasons my participants selected a career in advertising.

Advertising is for Me

Thirteen of the 15 participants in this study entered the advertising business straight out of college. The remaining two entered advertising after working for several years in other occupations. Of the thirteen that entered advertising directly out of college, ten earned bachelor’s degrees, most commonly in journalism or communications, and three earned master’s degrees. Among the women with master’s degrees, the first earned her bachelor’s degree, went
directly on for her masters and then initiated her own job search after graduation. The final two participants, Shelly and Nancy, earned MBAs from top universities. Prior to graduation, world-renowned ad agencies sought out these women, recruited them and subsequently offered them jobs.

Of the entire pool of participants, only two women entered the advertising business having worked elsewhere rather than starting straight out of college. Leah began her career at a Fortune 50 company and remained there for three years before joining her first ad agency at the age of 24. Similarly, Paula established her career on the client side and joined her first, and only, agency after 12 years of client-side experience. When Paula decided to explore a career in advertising, she set out to land a mid-level position, assuming her 12 years of experience prepared her for something other than entry level. To her surprise, she discovered resistance. She recalled, “Every single agency I spoke to wanted me to start out as [an] assistant account executive. They all had a bias towards ‘if you haven’t been here then clearly you can’t start at the higher level,’ which at the time made me almost walk away.” In my own career, I experienced this same resistance and while there are exceptions, it appears most candidates enter the field of advertising after graduating with a bachelor’s degree. See Table 4.1 for an overview of participant’s education and work experience prior to joining an advertising agency.
Table 4.1 Participant education and work history prior to advertising

<table>
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<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Joined Ad Agency Directly Out of College</th>
<th>Joined Ad Agency With Work Experience</th>
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<td>Years of Prior Work Experience</td>
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In discussing their attraction to advertising only one participant, Olivia, touched on elements of job content as part of her interest in the field. All the others selected advertising for reasons of cultural fit. Four themes emerged regarding cultural fit. The first theme is identifying one’s self as creative. Secondly, advertising jobs are chosen for what they are not, i.e., not a boring corporate job. Third, the ad agency environment, meaning the physical office space and the sensory experience within the office, offers an exciting working atmosphere. Lastly, the agency business is filled with like-minded people, offering a candidate a chance to be among kindred spirits. I will now look at each of these themes in more depth.

**Advertising is for Creative People. Business is for Stiffs**

Self-identifying as creative is first among several reasons for choosing advertising. The data on this theme is robust with unanimous agreement among participants. Job candidates often feel they lack the talent to be hired in the creative department as an art director or copywriter, but at the same time they consider themselves to be creative and believe ad agency work provides an outlet for their creativity. Believing one’s self to be creative stemmed from labels assigned by others. For example, some participants recalled being called creative because they wore trendy
clothes or because they generally defied convention in the way they carried themselves. This identity as a creative person provides just one aspect of advertising identity that makes advertising attractive. Just as important is identifying with the freedom and unstructured nature of the business. For example, Susan called herself a “free spirit” and chose advertising because she felt the culture accepted this aspect of her identity. In early adulthood, as women think about career options, advertising offers a unique match for those who consider themselves to be creative and independent. The data suggest these aspects of one’s identity as foundational for entry, forming a base-level prerequisite.

While a career in advertising seems like a creative outlet for those who identified with the ad agency culture, interest also stems from a desire to avoid a career path in a dry, bureaucratic environment. Under these circumstances, advertising offers an anti-corporate choice. Many women in this study feared the boredom that typifies most office work and they chafed at the idea of sitting at a desk all day. Mary not only thought of herself as creative but she also believed a position in a corporate environment would bore her:

I loved the creative side. I think I always had a pull to the creative side of things but have never been a “full blown” creative. I knew account management was a way for me to get into a creative industry without being a copywriter or designer, [and still] have my hands in the creative industry. Some of my friends were going into medical work or sales or business. To me, [advertising] felt like a career that was more fast-paced, changeable, [with] a different thing to do everyday. I wasn’t someone that could sit at a desk every day. So, I needed to be in a business and atmosphere that allowed me to change on a daily basis (Mary, 2012).

For many participants, the typical corporate atmosphere represented a culture of regulations, specifically around dress code. Some of the women in this study prided themselves on their wardrobe and they wanted an office environment where their trendy clothes would blend in rather than stand out. The typical corporation represented a place where women needed to dress conservatively and act conservatively as well. Based on this data, corporate life more aptly
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meets the needs of people who identify as structured and disciplined. For example, Paula told a story about an interview she had for a client side job, an interview that helped her better understand her own identity:

I remember going into . . . a corporation, I felt like a fish out of water. I wasn’t like them. They were all 20-year veterans of that corporation. They liked to come in at 8:30 and leave by 5PM. They didn’t want anything out of the box. I didn’t dress like them. I didn’t look like them. I felt completely out of my element. . . they were fun suckers. And, I realized something about myself at that time . . . that was my ah-ha moment (Paula, 2013).

Paula’s comments harken back to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) and the discussion of habitus and the metaphor of being a fish in water. Bourdieu (1977, 1984) asserted that habitus forms when the cultural values of the field, in this situation the bureaucratic corporation, insinuate themselves deeply within the workers. The habitus then guides the thinking and behavior of the workers in an intuitive way. They are like fish in water where the fish are unaware the water exists. Paula said she did not dress the way the corporate workers dressed and she didn’t look like them. Bourdieu maintained that theses types of cultural norms are not just observed, they are intuited, as was the case for Paula. She had a sense of the “water” or as Bourdieu would call it, the habitus, which presents itself as an unconscious, internalized understanding. Paula picked up on the habitus within the corporation she visited and instantly knew she did not fit. When she called herself a “fish out of water” she was describing the disconnection between the habitus and her sense of self.

In each of the examples given so far, women explored their identities and sought a career path that matched their sense of self. They looked for a habitus that reflected who they believed themselves to be. But, what emerged from these and other discussions demonstrated an interesting twist. Participants not only saw advertising as a good match because it brought out the positive side of their identities (I am creative), but they also saw advertising as an antidote for
who they felt they were not (I am not boring and structured). In either instance, there exists a romantic notion of what a career in advertising holds. When one’s identity mirrors this romantic notion, a profession in advertising seems like a natural choice.

**Culture and Atmosphere**

Nearly all participants agreed that advertising represented a culture and atmosphere that seemed fun and exciting. They held fanciful ideas of what ad agency life would be like. As the review of the scholarly literature uncovered, pop culture references, news exposes and television programming often romanticizes the unorthodox nature of ad agencies. For example, Rhonda specifically recalled the television program, *Thirtysomething* as her inspiration. The plot of the show focused on two characters that defected from a well-known advertising agency to start their own boutique shop in a renovated warehouse space in a trendy neighborhood in Philadelphia. Rhonda remembered the show fondly, specifically recalling details of the hip office environment and creative atmosphere of the ad agencies shown in the program. Among the rest of the participant pool, three had inside knowledge about ad agency culture because they had family members who worked in the industry. Regardless of how they formed their perceptions, all the women in this study believed ad agencies embodied the latest trends, were open to difference and exuded it at every turn. True to the taxonomy depicted in Figure 3.1, they described agencies as offering a creative office setting. They perceived agencies to be culture-driven and used adjectives like trend-focused, fast-paced, exciting, spontaneous and impulsive to describe the atmosphere. These ideas enticed them and they wanted to be a part of it. They expected no two days on the job to be the same and imagined rock music playing in the hallways. They wanted an environment, as Olivia put it that “kept me connected to the present day” and advertising fit the bill. Frequently they used the word “energy” to describe the environment, a word most participants repeated frequently throughout their interviews. In fact, the concept of energy
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pervaded this study and came up first in this context. Without a doubt, for a young woman in her 20s, an energetic environment offered a compelling option and among the many reasons for selecting a career in advertising, this reason strongly drove interest.

Like-Minded People

While the vast majority of participants held preconceived notions of what to expect from a career in advertising, Barbara stood out as someone who came to it by accident. Barbara finished college with a liberal arts background and did not know what profession to pursue. She used informational interviews to narrow her choices. After a meeting with ad agency personnel, she said she made an instant connection and recalled, “the first couple of people I met, I just really felt kind of like-minded with them. I just related to them.” Several other participants reported similar experiences. This concept of cultural fit and relatability, of being able to see yourself mirrored in those you work with, offers an insight into the tight knit, homogeneous nature of advertising agencies. This, along with the perceived energy, glamour and excitement of the advertising world, creates a situation where job candidates are willing to do anything to secure a position in the field. Sometimes this takes the form of accepting a position below one’s qualifications just to get a foot in the door. For example, despite her college education, Susan took a position as a secretary in the creative department of a well-known hot shop on the east coast. Rhonda mentioned an interview she had with an agency that had been awarded “agency of the year.” She felt so drawn to the agency that during the interview, she said, “I’ll do anything to work here. I’ll even scrub the toilets.” This same sense of enthusiasm, a sense that “I’ll do anything” came through in one other interview. Nancy received several job offers in her last semester before completing her MBA. Among these was a high-paying position in a large corporation and a lower paying position at a renowned ad agency. She recalled:
It was coming down between a large corporation and the ad agency and honestly, I looked at the reel of their commercials and the hair on my neck stood up and I said to myself, ‘you know what? Money isn’t that important to me. I want to be some place where I can be involved in stuff where the hair on the back of my neck stands up when the work is good.’ And it was about as simple as that (Nancy, 2013).

The women in this study sensed a fit and felt a connection to the advertising business. Through popular culture references, news coverage and first-hand knowledge gained via people in the field, they each picked up on the habitus of the advertising business. Again turning to the fish in water metaphor purported by Bourdieu and Wacquan (1972), they understood themselves to be fish and the habitus of the advertising field to be the water. They wanted to swim with the other like-minded fish in the same pool. Fields, such as advertising, have their own logic, regulations and rituals, which guide or control the habitus (Bourdieu, 1984). On an intuitive level, my participants understood the cultural values of the advertising field; the habitus became second nature just as Bourdieu (1977, 1984) theorized. This resulted in a measurable amount of social and cultural capital, two assets that Bourdieu (1984) considered helpful in determining one’s long-term success within a field. As we will see in the next section, possessing both forms of capital made a difference in getting access to the field, being granted an interview and receiving a job offer. I turn now to the initial part of the hiring process and examine the ways participants used their social and cultural capital to schedule job interviews.

**The Entry Process**

**Knowing an Insider**

After deciding on a career as an advertising account executive, entering the business requires a dedicated effort, which includes researching agencies and networking to find connections to insiders. With the exception of Shelly and Nancy, who were recruited prior to completing their MBAs, each of the other participants networked their way into the business. This process held true for their first job within the industry as well as for subsequent jobs. Using
one’s connections, or social capital, to gain access seems commonplace. The sequence typically starts by finding a friend in the business or a friend of a friend and then reaching out to that person to set up an informational interview. If the interviewer possesses enough clout, the informational interview often leads to either an internship or a job offer. Insider connections frequently include friends or college contacts such as alumni networks, connections Bourdieu (1977) included in his definition of social capital. For example, Helen attended a homecoming event where she met an alumna. She recalled the woman “had graduated probably 15 years prior. And she said that this agency was looking for some temporary help and I said ‘sounds great.’” Helen was offered the temporary position, which eventually became full time employment. Years later when Helen and her husband decided to move to a new city, she used a similar process to gain access. This time the sequence of events turned out to be more elaborate. Her brother-in-law practiced law in the new city and he spread the word of Helen’s need for advertising contacts by distributing an all company email within the law firm. Helen received several contacts this way. Ultimately, she landed a job offer at a hot shop in the new city through a college connection, another form of social capital. The six degrees of separation included her college roommate, the roommate’s mother, the mother’s tennis partner, and the tennis partner’s son.

Entry also comes via friends in the industry. These friends typically put in a good word, which assists the candidate in securing a job offer. Bourdieu (1984) considered these types of professional connections as social capital. Social capital constitutes a resource, which provides the asset holder with an advantage over others. Bourdieu linked the concept of social capital to both privilege and class domination because social capital and the resources and connections that constitute social capital are only bestowed on members of the in group and not others. The women in this study enjoyed this type of privilege and cashed in their social capital to gain
access to the field. Two notable examples are Olivia and Mary. Olivia had a friend who worked in the media department of a creatively-driven agency. She leveraged this contact and was granted an informational interview. On the day of the interview, the friend discovered that an internship opened up in another department. While in the lobby waiting for the informational interview, Olivia’s friend arranged for Olivia to also meet with the hiring manager of the internship. Olivia met with both people and was offered the internship. Interestingly, Olivia discounted the role her social capital played in this event, she downplayed the benefit of having an inside contact and instead described the event as “kind of the right place at the right time.”

Mary too possessed enough social capital to gain employment at her first agency. She had inside contacts at a very high profile creatively-driven shop. As she thought back on how she entered the agency, she said:

> I heard about [the job] through networking out of college. I heard about this opportunity and networked myself in. So, I came in on the words of a couple of other people who were already in the industry and I did not have to interview very much. Actually, I do not remember meeting with an HR [human resource] manager, nor do I remember going through the standard NDA [non-disclosure agreement] process or your typical HR process. I really kind of evolved into it (Mary, 2012).

**Like Attracts Like**

Rather than printing up and sending out scores of resumes, answering classified ads and pounding the pavement, entry-level workers at ad agencies typically use their social capital to gain access to what seems like a closed system. Knowing someone on the inside who can put in a good word or pull a string seems commonplace. Other times, notable agencies actively recruit for candidates on college campuses around the country, seeking out the cream of the crop. While Neve entered the industry by leveraging contacts, she recalled getting an offer at a top agency because the woman who was originally offered the position turned it down. This candidate came through what Neve called the agency’s “feeder program where they take people from good
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schools and see what they can do.” When asked about this, Neve insightfully commented on the country club nature of the process. She said, “they want the ‘I went to college with this person,’ ‘I can play tennis with this person,’ ‘I can have a beer with this person,’ ‘this person represents my agency well.’” Feeling socially comfortable with the candidates seemed to be a prerequisite. Olivia called it, “like attracts like.”

Organizational theory supports Olivia’s assertion that “like attracts like.” Kanter (1977) linked organizations’ quests for social conformity and homogeneity to the uncertainty that accompanies managerial work. Uncertainty, rapid change and the inability to use the past to predict the future permeate the advertising industry. Where will the next great advertising idea come from? How can we best calm the fears of an unhappy client? What insightful campaign idea will clinch the winner-takes-all new business pitch? Kanter maintained that, “a higher degree of uncertainty brings with it more drive for social similarity” (p. 49). She went on to assert that in the absence of organizational work experience, as is the case with entry level advertising account executives, hiring managers use social similarity as a yard stick to reduce uncertainty and enhance confidence in one’s ability to perform on the job. In other words, hiring managers unwittingly apply this logic: if this woman talks like me, went to the same school I went to, plays tennis in the same clubs I do, perhaps she will perform at this agency as I have. In a similar theoretical concept, Bourdieu (1984) referenced advertising as one of the newer professions and asserted that these types of businesses demonstrate ever-evolving hiring practices unlike older bureaucracies where the systems of recruitment are far more entrenched. As a result, In Distinctions: A Social Critique of the Judgments of Taste (1984) Bourdieu contended, “recruitment is generally done by co-option, that is, on the basis of connections and affinities of habitus” (p. 151). The result is a pool of entry-level candidates that talk alike and think alike. And, even more importantly, in the ad industry these candidates look alike.
Having the Right Look

While gaining access to the right people typically means leveraging personal contacts, candidates need to convert these informational interviews into job offers. This prospect concerned some participants because some of them worried their “look” might fail the test. Several participants called the advertising business an “appearance business” and through their friends and contacts they understood the stereotypes associated with the industry. Barbara articulated it this way:

It is one of the blessings and the curses of the advertising business. It is a very image-driven business. I’ve heard everything, year after year after year, consistently, about “you would never hire somebody who would show up in those shoes” kind of thing. Both men and women. [They’d say] “How could you be a good creative if you dressed that way?” or “How could you be a good creative if your hair looked that way?” or “I could never put that person in front of a client.” It is an image-driven business but it is also a client service-driven business and agency people can sometimes be [their own] worst enemy with terrible stereotyping (Barbara, 2013).

The data confirm the importance of appearance in the hiring process. According to the participants in this study, hiring managers sometimes reject job candidates due to the way they look or the way they dress. Some ad agency workers accept this without question. One participant, Neve, clearly understood the superficiality of it but nonetheless accepted it. She very matter-of-factly described it like this:

Sometimes people are actually overt about it. [Our agency president] would never hire people to work the front desk at the reception unless they were really cute. It was common knowledge at the agency. I think most of that happens when you hire somebody. It is just like they look the part or they look right. They give off a good impression. It is kind of cloaked in words like that. And again, this is an appearance business. You have five seconds to make the client think you know their business and all that stuff. So, I get it (Neve, 2013).

Female account executive candidates are aware of the importance of looking the part and they understand what this means. Goffman’s (1957) theory of dramaturgy posited that in everyday life, individuals present themselves in calculated ways intending to transmit a specific
impression and elicit a specific response. This portrayal includes what one says, the way one says it, what one wears and how one carries oneself. For example, when asked what they wore to their first interview, many women recalled not only every detail of what they wore but they also related the painstaking process of selecting their clothes for the occasion. Goffman’s (1959b) stage play metaphor considered the selection of costume, hairstyle and other props as part of the actor’s portrayal. Barbara summed it up this way:

I remember when I first started working in the late 80s, it is just a fact that women dressed in skirted suits that looked like male suits. I wore a floppy tie and a blouse and a jacket and a skirt. I look back and it is hilarious. Whereas, now businesswomen, many of them, are mini-fashionistas. They love talking about their shoes and their watches and their jewelry and their this and their that. I think you have to look the part. From the minute somebody comes in for the interview, I’ve heard way too many times, “well, that person, I just could never hire somebody who dressed like that (Barbara, 2013).

When asked to describe “the look,” participants constructed mental images of tall, blonde, well-dressed women with beautiful features and high cheekbones. Adjectives like young, hip, stylish and trendy almost always accompanied the description. These mental mannequins wore fashionable clothes in the latest styles. The understanding of what constituted fashionable divided the group. Fashion seemed to be a matter of taste and for some, like Neve, fashionable meant businesslike with a little flair. Others believed women need to select a distinctive style and then consistently select clothes and accessories within that style. Madigan described it this way:

I think [having the right look] means stylish and trendy. I mean advertising is an attractive business; there is just no doubt about it. You can be very SoHo. You can be very preppy. You can be very stylish. I don’t think it takes one particular look but you have ‘a look’ and you care about your look. There are very different types of looks in an agency. But there is always a “look” and people do care about their looks (Madigan, 2013).

In preparing for an interview, or in Goffman (1959b, 1961) might call the “audition,” the most successful candidates select costuming that emulates the hot shop. Astutely reading the
habitus allows a woman to select wardrobe and costuming that is in sync with the stage set of the hiring agency, making an instantly favorable impression on the interviewer, or casting director. Failure to do so results in instant rejection. For example, Paula recalled an incident at a hot shop where she worked, an incident also told to me by another participant who worked at the same agency. The incident achieved legendary status for those who worked there. Paula described it this way:

My boss was interviewing some young [account executive] and this woman showed up and she was dressed up in business attire but she had white shoes on. And I distinctly remember, him saying, “yeah, I don’t know about that one, she doesn’t look like us.” White shoes were bad, she didn’t have the sort of . . . well, “edge” is a tough word but kind of a creative looking edge to her (Paula, 2013).

While participants failed to agree on a single definition of what it means to be fashionable, one aspect of “the look” drew agreement. The “look” means thin. In fact, even Olivia, the one participant who consistently defended ad agencies’ culture as fair and balanced on issues of age and gender, said that weight was a big issue in the hot shop she worked for. She described all the people at the agency as athletic and fit. Neve agreed about the need to be fit and added that this attribute extended equally to men and women. She recalled her early days in the business saying:

When I was first starting out in the business it was OK to have a pot belly and be a man. Not when you are first hired but you could kind of grow into that and you’d be balding and things like that. But nowadays it is like you have to be fit, you’ve got to look young. If you are bald, you have to shave your head. Or most of the time you won’t get hired (Neve, 2013).

Throughout her career, Nancy prided herself on avoiding the trap of perpetuating “the look.” She maintained that she did not take part in the typical industry biases and instead carefully screened job candidates for intelligence over anything else. However, when it came to the topic of weight, she bravely admitted having difficulty remaining neutral. When asked about the importance of appearance in the interviewing process she said:
In terms of hiring a type that fits a culture, I would say that the only terrible bias that I have personally brought to interviewing is some feeling about a person’s weight. And, I think this may come back to your comment about energy. People don’t need to be thin or fashion svelte by any means, but if they are carrying an extra 20 pounds, I’ve seen relatively fewer overweight people be successful. I think it is harder to make a good impression on a client because of the perceived energy issue (Nancy, 2013).

Comments like this raise the question of whether a candidate’s looks overshadow her qualifications. The data suggest that when a candidate’s looks deviate drastically from the idealized norm set by the hiring agency, the candidate’s qualifications matter very little. While a female candidate who failed to look the part might get hired, data suggest she will pay for it down the road. On this point and after a long silence Barbara offered this comment: “Can they survive if they don’t look the part? It is going to be harder. It is just going to be harder, I think. Again, it’s not fair or smart but it is very, very hard in advertising to not look the part. Is it possible? There are always exceptions.” To some extent, Shelly agreed but she vacillated. Her hesitation seemed to be tied to her need to separate herself from an unfair practice. She said:

There are a lot of pretty people in advertising. Very few [ugly people]. I think it is just part of the culture. I don’t know. It’s just always what I’ve seen. You should be bringing fun, energy - all those things that clients may not find in their corporate environment. And I think wardrobe is part of that. It is part of the creativity. But, I would hope that looks don’t trump smarts. The best people have both. So, I don’t know. I think it depends on who you are asking. If it is a client, if it is the boss, if it is a manager. I don’t know. I can’t answer that. But for me, no, looks never trump smarts (Shelly, 2013).

As an exercise during my discussions with participants, I developed a card sort activity to better understand “the look.” Of the 15 participants in this study, 8 women participated in the activity. I presented a series of 15 photographs of women of different ages, sizes, and styles of dress (see Appendix C). I asked participant to select the photographs that most closely approximated “the look” (see Figure 4.2). I also asked them to sort the cards into two piles, “clients” and “agency.” Each photo was labeled with a fictional name, which facilitated our
discussion. For the majority of participants, Claire’s photo sparked an immediate response. Time and again, participants held Claire out as the consummate account executive. They had a similar feeling about Meg’s photo, although the response was somewhat milder because some felt Meg’s college-like book bag made her look too young (see Figure 4.2). Both photographs depict young, blonde, slender women in very casual but stylish clothes. In creative hot shops, casual dress is normalized, especially on days when clients are not visiting. In Goffmanesque terms, participants chose photos of advertising account executives that looked the part, members of a cast that looked as though they belonged on the same stage. The women in these photos, Claire and Meg, wore the right costume and carried themselves with the same comportment that participants believed befit the role. In contrast, the participants selected three different photos they felt looked like clients (see Figure 4.3). For example, participants believed Babette to be a client because she had gray hair, looked too old to work at an agency, wore a suit and carried a briefcase. Again applying Goffman (1959b), her costuming as well as the props she carried, such as her briefcase, defined the part she played on the corporate stage. Similarly, participants considered Connie to be a client because of her conservative look and the fact that she wore a suit, a costuming choice rarely seen in hot shops. Lastly, all participants agreed Jill was a client because her costume included a red suit paired with black stockings, a look the participants said violated all fashion sense, a faux pas that a cast member from an advertising agency would never make.
Figure 4.2 Photos deemed to be advertising agency account executives.

![Figure 4.2 Photos Deemed to be Advertising Agency Account Executives](image1)

Figure 4.3 Photos deemed to be clients.

![Figure 4.3 Photos Deemed to be Clients](image2)

As discussed in the review of the scholarly literature, emerging theory on aesthetic labor (Warhurst, van der Broek, Hall, & Nickson, 2009) asserts that in certain industries, such as high-end fashion retailers, employers seek out workers whose appearance matches the company’s brand image. When Paula described the situation where her boss commented that the white-shoed candidate “didn’t look like ‘us” we not only see aesthetic labor theory but we also see a mismatch
between Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984) concept of habitus and the everyday presentation of self that Goffman (1959b) described. Because client meetings, regardless of their location, constitute the front of the stage, agencies need their employees to stay in character. Account executives frequently travel with the client on work-related trips such as attending focus group research or presiding over television commercial shoots. Under these circumstances, the location of the stage shifts to a new venue but it continues to maintain its status as the front. Agencies need assurance their workers will maintain the right persona and represent the agency well. That means that once the agency employee leaves the creative ethos of the agency’s office space, the burden of maintaining the agency’s creative mystique shifts to the employee. Here, costuming, wardrobe and props such as shoes, purses and jewelry become more important when it comes to maintaining the agency’s creative stage presence. In Goffman-like terms, the show goes on the road.

**Acting the Part**

Aside from looking the part, job seekers need to act the part. The candidate’s behavior, lifestyle and personality traits carry just as much importance. In fact, acting the part sometimes supersedes looking the part. Three themes emerged from the data on this topic, first among them sociability. Next were traits of curiosity, meaning an unquenchable thirst for discovering the latest trends in pop culture. Last, hiring managers expect the candidate to express a passion for advertising above almost all else. I start by taking a look at sociability and describe why agencies consider conversational skills paramount.

**The lunchtime test.** In the course of investigating the entry process and what it takes for a candidate to convert the interview into a job offer, social skills top the list. While this seems logical given the rest of the data collected on this topic, two women (Jane and Madigan) indicated that an account executive’s daily tasks could be taught easily, whereas social skills seemed innate. None of the other women confirmed these thoughts, which may mean that these
beliefs are outliers or negative cases. When discussing a long list of interpersonal skills she looks for when hiring newcomers, Jane said, “everything else you can learn. It is not rocket science, advertising isn’t. It is so much more about people’s personality traits.” Madigan subscribed to a similar philosophy, one handed down to her from a former supervisor, “I had a boss once who said to me, ‘hire someone that you want to have lunch with, you can teach them everything else. You want to work with people you like and trust.’” Madigan’s comment bears witness to Kanter’s (1977) research on homosocial reproduction, which demonstrated that hiring managers often replicate themselves and that social similarity is commonly used as a basis for hiring decisions. What is more, agency hiring managers see a direct connection between possessing social skills and the ability to manage clients. Success with clients often hinges on the ability to cultivate relationships and make people feel comfortable. By extending this logic, it stands to reason that a certain amount of gregariousness, or as one participant put it, “witty rapport” helps when selling the client on the merits of the agency’s work. For example, Leah uses this lunchtime test in her post-agency career as a talent recruiter. She looks for candidates to display exceptionally strong social skills in order to get hired. She characterized it this way:

I look for a conversationalist. Someone that can really hold their own. For example, I had a candidate and on paper [she] looked great. I met her. She is solid as a rock but it is hard to make conversation with her. And, I think that is a lot of it. [For] a lot of my clients, their gauge is “Would I have lunch with this person?” If they don’t have social skills, they don’t get hired. [I ask myself], if I wasn’t interviewing them, would I want to go out to lunch with them? Not that they have to have the same interests. It is more [about] are they fun? Are they interested in the world? Are they excited about life? Are they interesting? Curious about life (Leah, 2012).

Curiosity. As mentioned in Leah’s comments above, the data suggest curiosity is an important trait in prospective candidates because it exemplifies acting the part. Here, curiosity means a thirst for new ideas, someone who seeks out new technologies and adopts them before others. Helen mentioned an article written in the trade journal, Ad Age, an article circulated by
her management team to inspire the account executives and enhance their performance. The article claimed that Einstein would have made a great account executive because of his curiosity. Leah expanded on this concept by explaining that curiosity in itself holds little value but when candidates exhibit an intense interest in exploring the world and a genuine excitement about life, she gives them credit for fitting the mold. She looks for students of pop culture with keen powers of observation who restlessly want to learn more and expand their thinking. Barbara, who is one of the few women in this study who succeeded in climbing the executive ladder to the top and who ultimately ran an agency office, used herself as an example: “I am one of those people when I get to the point where I feel bored, I need to put myself in a position where I am sort of uncomfortable again. I think it is because I like learning and am curious.”

There is a connection between having an inquisitive nature and youthfulness. These data suggest that “youth” equates to two important aspects of curiosity and acting the part. First, youth equates to energy and secondly, youth is tied to knowing the latest trends and being up on the most recent happenings in pop culture. According to the women in this study, being one step ahead in these areas is important because pop culture and celebrity icons often inspire advertising ideas. As a case in point, during data collection one participant listed the most popular Super Bowl ads elaborating on how each related to a current trend in pop culture. Leah drew a straight line between pop culture and youth, offering an interesting insight into why advertising demonizes age. She said:

I absolutely believe that there is something about our business, in general, people who are in this industry like change. They like trend. They like what’s current. They like what’s hot. And youth in our country is a lot of that. I do see that for sure. The people that I have seen [be successful] are curious about the world. They are excited about life and are observers of the public and culture at large (Leah, 2012).

Passion. The last element that thematically ties to acting the part is passion for advertising. Candidates need to prove they belong on the inside by studying advertising and
researching the latest campaigns. Using Goffman’s (1959b) metaphor of the stage play, this can again be equated to rehearsal. Candidates prepare for opening night by studying one’s lines and learning the part. Once they’ve mastered the role, they assume the part of the understudy in the hope of becoming a full time cast member. Through diligence and by living and breathing all things advertising, by learning the script, memorizing one’s lines and studying the craft, someone somewhere will reward this dedication by casting them in a starring role. Demonstrating passion for advertising makes a strong impression on interviewers and plays an important part in converting an audition into an invitation to join the cast. Interviewers specifically look for someone who really wants an advertising job; someone who has done their homework and can recite elements of the script from memory, especially lines from the latest advertising campaigns and trends in the industry. Candidates need to flatter their interviewer and express in no uncertain terms their willingness to do anything to get the part. Interviewers read this eagerness as passion and passion rates as a key attribute in acting the role. When discussing the importance of passion in a candidate, Neve jumped on the question. Unlike other participants, Neve held a more critical view of the advertising industry, rejecting some of the mystique as a trumped up mythology perpetuated by insiders to preserve their self-importance. Without a moment’s hesitation and with a bit of underlying sarcasm, when asked what it takes to get hired she said, “It takes real passion for advertising. People love when you are really passionate about advertising because your work is your passion. Your work is more exciting that anything else you are doing.” Agency insiders interpret this inseparability between the presentation of self and the animated expression of one’s passion for advertising as a testament of one’s worthiness for inclusion into what is often an exclusive club. In contrast nothing cuts a candidate’s chances quicker than showing up for an interview, even an informational interview, without rehearsing
the part and knowing one’s lines. For example, Shelly recently met with a candidate who seemed too casual about her interest in the profession. The session frustrated Shelly. She said:

I was looking for smarts and passion. Even today, I had people in my office saying, “I want to get into this business and I’ll do whatever it takes.” The ones that really are [just] sitting in front of me because, “well, my uncle said I should talk to you and this sounds like maybe this would be a cool place [to work].” So, [I look for] people who have really thought about it and [know] why they want to be here. And then, [I look for] well-spoken, confident [people] with a fun energy about them (Shelly, 2013).

One last dimension of passion came up and needs to be explored before concluding this theme. Leah used a series of adjectives to describe what she meant by passion. Taken separately and out of context, these words seem like intangible qualities, but when asked to describe what traits a passionate candidate needs to display, Leah’s eyes lit up, she leaned forward and grew animated. She said, “I think agencies are always looking for the ‘wow,’ the superstar, the rising star, the ‘boom,’ the ‘wow.’ You know, where they are like, ‘wow.’” In listening to this description, one might interpret the “boom” and the “wow” to be charisma. The ambiguity surrounding these qualities is akin to habitus and that is what makes it difficult to define. Unless there is a perfect match between the habitus and the job candidate, subtleties make it difficult to determine who fits and who does not. The data suggest that advertising is a nuanced business. Nothing exemplifies this point more than trying to describe what it means to embody the “wow.”

Ultimately, in interviewing for a job in advertising, candidates need to demonstrate a combination of intelligence, looking the part, and acting the part. If the candidate embodies these qualities, receiving an offer requires little else. Most account managers enter the business at a young age. They either naturally fit or easily mold their behavior and persona to match the habitus they will be working in. These workers become agency ambassadors. Knowingly or not, they exemplified the agencies they work for and become acculturated in the process. Jane
stripped away the niceties when discussing this aspect of agency life. She thought for a minute and then firmly stated that agencies blatantly look for and hire people who personify their brand:

I think it is consciously [done]. For a living we cast for print ads and commercials and web banners and microsites. It is all about casting. And because we don’t sell widgets or cereal or butter, we sell ideas, intellectual thoughts. That’s our widgets, our creativity. I feel it’s really important that the people that sell those ideas are consistent with what our overall brand is. I think it helps with the sell. The sell, and in large part much of creative, is taste. It is about [whether] someone has the same kind of taste in terms of what kind of haircut they have or what kind of clothes they wear.

I have seen account people who don’t look like what you think account people would look like. [They] struggle and it is not just about how they are dressed. It is how they talk. Are they formal or do they crack a joke? Can they talk about Downton Abbey or not? I think clients look to us as the people who have their finger on the pulse of what is going on.

If I interview someone out of college, even if they are young and dress super cool and I say “what is your favorite commercial on TV and they say, “you know, that’s a hard question. I don’t really watch TV.” I immediately put that person in the “no” pile (Jane, 2013).

In describing her role as a casting agent, Jane unwittingly drew a connection to Goffman (1959b) who used the metaphor of the stage play to explain the way our participation in society mimics dramaturgy. Goffman maintained that, “everyone everywhere is to some extent playing a role – it is in these roles that we know each other and know ourselves” (1959b, p. 19). The roles we play make up our social identity, which we act out on the stage of our every day lives. In advertising, the roles take on a hyper-stylized characteristic that seems more extreme than in other professions. “Looking the part” of an advertising account executive requires careful attention to costuming and wardrobe. Wearing white shoes to the audition might prove fatal. “Acting the part,” means learning and rehearsing your lines, studying the Super Bowl ads and then performing for the audience of prospective employers. When a job candidate performs her lines in an interview, when she acts the part, she works to establish the believability of the character she is playing. Through non-verbal communication, primarily signaled by the way she
looks and the props she carries, the candidate hopes to convince the interviewer (audience) of the authenticity of her performance. One might ask, what happens at the end of the performance when a candidate receives a job offer? What is day-to-day life like on the inside? I turn now to investigate the experiences of young women once they accepted positions as account executives in creatively driven ad agencies and begin by describing the early years.

**College Part Two**

After receiving a job offer and starting one’s career as an entry-level account executive in a creative hot shop, the position offers both excitement and a few surprises. The creative surroundings and the atmosphere at the agency bring energy and fulfill on preconceived notions. At the same time, the job comes with tradeoffs. Ad agency account executives work hard, put in long hours and sacrifice personal time. The culture requires careful maneuvering due to office politics and women experience the occasional brush with sexual harassment. I will now examine this complex set of experiences starting with the fun and excitement associated with learning the advertising business from the ground up.

When asked about those early days, each woman in this study grew animated and offered rich description about the thrills and excitement she felt. Participants found the pace exhilarating, the people interesting and the learning curve steep. They all remembered these early years as the time of their lives. The homogeneity in advertising agencies fosters the ability to make friends quickly. As a result, entry-level workers willingly blended their social lives with their work lives in a way that recalls the encompassing tendencies of the total institution as described by Goffman (1961). According to Goffman, all institutions have “encompassing tendencies” (p. 4). In total institutions these encompassing tendencies are taken to the extreme and one’s place of work and place of “play” meld into one. As this happens, a gradual
metamorphosis takes place where workers identities outside of work and inside of work also begin to meld, conforming to the institution’s standards. Goffman likened this to a finishing school where one’s actions and ideas undergo continual refinement until total conformity is reached. In total institutions, all aspects of one’s life occur within the confines of the organization and relationships with the outside world get cut off. In their early careers, the women in this study felt excited by the all-consuming atmosphere of their jobs. Several of the women in this study likened these years to the fun they had in college, one participant used the term “college part two” (Helen, 2012). They found themselves surrounded by people their own age, most of them single and all of them with similar backgrounds and interests. Joanne described it this way:

I was young and single and those were my friends. [We met] after work or [on] Friday night. [That was the] thing you did, and a lot of my friendships were there. And, it was a little bit like a collegiate party. When you are twenty-six years old and you are single. . and this is a job, but it is a blast. [It was] just a fun restart.

It was great because I came [to the agency] single. I met my husband there and got married a few years later. It was like being in college. It was fun. It was a lot of fun (Joanne, 2013).

The data suggest the fun and excitement of these early years have three components. First, the physical environment gives off a stimulation all its own. Second, within the agency, a thrilling counterculture exists. Last, the job requires long hours, which serve as a bonding experience, providing camaraderie and deep friendships. I will now look at each of these themes beginning with the description of the offices themselves and the experiences my participants reported as they worked in these highly creative and unusual workspaces.

**The Environment**

From their first interview to their final job offer, the women in this study spoke excitedly about the non-traditional office décor of the creative hot shops where they worked. While their
friends worked in bureaucratic offices sometimes called “cube farms,” participants enjoyed a completely different environment. In Goffman terms (1959b) this constitutes the elaborate stage sets designed for the likes of hit Broadway plays. These sets establish a mood. They determine the context of the play and they help the actors as well as the audience get into the right frame of mind for what is to come. For example, ad agencies always display their award winning work in the hallways, they have over-sized television monitors playing their commercials. These props help establish the mood. Rock music blares through speakers in the ceiling. Dramatic lighting establishes the atmosphere. Floor to ceiling windows offer breathtaking vistas of city skylines. For those agencies located in warehouse districts, high ceilings with exposed ductwork create a trendy look that study participants simply considered “creative.” Participants reported that their agencies had game rooms, pinball machines and rooftop patios. For Joanne, her first agency included a few quirky aspects that seemed contrived for the sake of imparting an image, but she found it amusing. As is common in the business, she described how her agency executives took prospective clients on a tour of the office as part of the wooing process. Here we see an excellent example of a Goffman-like stage set, a behind the scenes tour of the backstage conducted for honored guests from the audience. The entire event includes a carefully scripted performance put on for prospective clients. She put it this way:

It was everything that people professed advertising to be. There was a Ping-Pong table, there was the guy’s office that was just destroyed it was so messy. And he was part of the tour when they took people around. You know, ‘look at this creative person’ who can’t find a piece of paper because of this room.

They had a conference room that was themed and all the chairs were painted to the theme. It was festive all the time. [It showed] a sense of youthfulness and fun and this is where [clients] go to have a good time (Joanne, 2013).

Neve described a situation at her first ad agency where each season “like clockwork” (Neve, 2013) the agency changed the panels in the elevator to match the theme of the season.
For example, they re-clad the elevators in red and green during December. The changeover took place at night after everyone went home. When asked how the agency explained the ritual, she laughed and recalled the attitude the agency exhibited by saying, “They didn’t explain anything. They were Parsons (agency pseudonym)!” Antics like the one Neve mentioned and the overall allure of the office environment often compensate for other less attractive aspects about the job, including long hours, weekend work and low pay. Jane considered the appeal of the environment to be a form of non-monetary compensation:

So it’s what you do to attract young people because you can’t do it with salary. You sell lifestyle and culture that you cannot get in just about any industry. With all the trimmings of working at a place where you can bring your dog to work and have beer on Friday.

I sold culture to retain people too. I’d say, ‘oh, you don’t want to go to that agency, you’ll be giving up all this.’ And I do feel there is something people feel [when] they are in a creative environment that has less rigid rules and regulations. You feel the environment is trying to foster creativity (Jane, 2013).

**Counterculture**

In the early going, the appeal of agency life extends beyond the office’s physical environment. The day-to-day office lifestyle includes behavioral norms well outside the standards allowed by most corporations. The review of the scholarly literature revealed that many of these freedoms and countercultural behaviors started in the 1960s as part of the creative revolution, but some of these aspects of agency life exist today just as they did forty or fifty years ago. For example, alcohol consumption in and around the office happens on a regular basis through office-sponsored happy hours or while working after hours and on weekends. One participant described a regular Friday ritual where the office management provided happy hour delivered to your desk via an oversized tricycle towing a cooler of beer and wine. In this ritual, a driver pedals up and down the halls ringing the bell like an ice cream truck.
The countercultural behavior goes further than the consumption of alcohol. As they recalled their first agency jobs in the 1980s, several women described the culture as anything goes and even referenced the phrase “sex and drugs and rock and roll” from the lyrics of a 1970s song. The locus of this anything-goes behavior resides with the creative department. The data collected on the early years of participants’ careers reveal the frequent use of marijuana by copywriters and art directors. Participants joked about being in meetings with the creatives and getting high on second hand smoke. During this time in agency history, the art directors and copywriters freely admitted to drug use without repercussion. Based on participant accounts, open drug use seemed restricted to the creative department. None of the women in this study reported usage in other departments.

In addition to the behavioral aspects of the counterculture, all agency personnel wore casual clothes to work, including regularly wearing blue jeans. Agency workers from all departments frequent use colorful language and swear easily and openly. The agency vibe includes music playing in lobbies and private offices. The “energy” accurately describes the atmosphere of the creatively-driven agencies in this study. These elements of agency culture add to the attraction as illustrated by this statement from Jane, “where else could you go to work in jeans and drop F bombs and have beer at 4 o’clock every Friday? Not many jobs.” But, hard work accompanies this exciting atmosphere. All 15 participants commented on the long hours during those early years. They described these working conditions in a matter-of-fact tone without complaining. I now take a closer look at this aspect of the study and delve more deeply into participants’ recollections about the sacrifices they made.

**Working Long Hours**

In all cases and without any prompting during the interview, every women in this study volunteered comments about the long hours they put in, not just during the early days of their
careers but throughout their time at various hot shops. The term “worked my butt off” came up frequently. They believed they had no choice in the matter. Ad agency culture in creatively-driven shops not only requires long hours but also rewards workers for the effort. Working evenings and weekends demonstrates one’s commitment to her agency and by extension her career. At Nancy’s agency, “it was certainly cultural, that if you weren’t there working late, you probably weren’t serious [about your career].”

As participants described the long days that began before daylight and ended after sundown, they recalled typically putting in 60+ hours each week. As the stories mounted from one participant to the next, the totals went higher, almost mythically so. Putting in long hours serves as a badge of honor and a rite of passage. Most participants quoted 75-80 hour workweeks at different points in their careers. One participant claimed to work 100 hours on one particular occasion due to a new business pitch. New business pitches frequently require workweeks in excess of 60 hours. Among the participants, Nancy was one of the most businesslike in her demeanor, offering thoughtful, measured and controlled responses. However, she too quoted long workweeks and with her recollections came a believability that lent credibility to others’ responses. Nancy offered this explanation:

It was very much a late night culture. I mean you were there many, many nights where you would walk around at 7 o’clock at night and 40% of the floor would still be working. And somebody would order pizza or Chinese or Thai or something. It was because we were all pushing to get a project done and other times it was just because everybody was busy and stayed late.

That’s the only culture I ever really knew. You hear about other agencies where people kind of wrapped up and left at 5. I mean I worked 70 hours a week at the beginning and probably worked 50-60 hours a week throughout my entire career and a lot of that was on the road traveling and being with clients three or four days a week (Nancy, 2013).

The long hours and time pressures take on a kind of mythological quality. Putting in hours like this and pulling all-nighters brands agency workers as true agency inhabitants - people
who earned their place among others in the elite sector of ad agencies known as hot shops. According to Lincoln (1986), when members of a society accept myths as time-honored truths, there is a danger and often times a tendency for exploitation. In this way, myth serves to indoctrinate. While the application of Lincoln’s work will be explored more fully in the next chapter, suffice to say myth led the women in this study to believe their roles in client service required them to work extra hours in order to provide the highest level of service to their clients. These ideas and the expectations were handed down from on high. As a result they never questioned it or rebelled against it, they simply bought in.

In a similar vein, Williams (1990) asserted that during the career-building phase of one’s profession, promotion from entry level to the next level requires one to perform as an “ideal worker” (p. 56), a mythological norm developed during the early evolution of large corporations. An ideal worker is defined as someone with no distractions or obligations outside the confines of the job. The ideal worker displays a total commitment to one’s work and puts career ahead of self or family. Should one slack off and not demonstrate 100% dedication, her superiors regard her as uncommitted, which curtails upward mobility. We see the ideal worker norms firmly entrenched at these creatively-driven agencies. We also see the importance of enduring these long hours in building one’s moral career. As Goffman (1967) asserted in his description of the total institution, upper management stands in constant judgment looking for what Goffman called “gameness” (p. 218). Gameness refers one’s ability to rally and muster up tenacity in the face of exhaustion. Advertising executives look to see if their workers have the energy and fortitude to press on. If not, workers lose both stature and honor; and, their moral career backslides.
The women in this study who eventually went on to work at other agencies contrasted their time at the hot shops and pointed out the dramatic decrease in work hours after changing jobs. Shelly’s experience typifies this contrast:

I realized [it] when I left and came here. I’ll never forget. The first weekend I thought my Blackberry was broken because I wasn’t getting any emails. I’m like, “oh my God, it’s not working.” Because I was so used to getting emails 24/7. Then I started to think about it. And [it was] my boss, it was my manager, it was my team that felt they needed to constantly be connected [on weekends]. If somebody sent you an email you had to respond within two minutes. That is just the way you were trained.

And it is truly more agency people that are making those demands than clients. Yes, clients are demanding but I think they are much more respectful of office hours. When I start to work with [a client], I say “Oh, by the way, I’m home on Fridays to spend more time with my kids.” Every single [client] has always said to me, “good for you, that’s great” (Shelly, 2013).

Shelly’s comment calls into question the reason agencies subscribe to a code of long hours and weekend work. Typically, agency leaders cite client demands as the reason for the culture of long hours and around the clock connectivity to email, but Shelly’s experience re-casts this rhetoric in a new light. Instead it appears the ritual of working past closing time takes on a legendary quality, which unites workers behind a common belief, secures their loyalty and perpetuates the practice. Here again we see an element of Bruce Lincoln’s (1989) discourse theory, which will be explored more fully in the next chapter.

In talking about their long hours and extended workweeks, the participants in this study often used the phrase “work hard, play hard.” This phrase serves to indoctrinate agency personnel into the culture. The “work hard” portion of this phrase references the ethic needed to fit in at the agency. As it turns out, the “play hard” portion of this phrase serves the same purpose. After a late evening at the office, workers often congregate at a nearby bar for happy hour or a late dinner. Agency executives frequently attend these spontaneous events. As a result, workers not only feel pressure to attend, but also feel pressure to maintain their front of
the stage personas as their bosses, the audience, look on in judgment. I turn now to the importance of the “play hard” phenomenon and examine its role in agency culture and the careers of the participants in this study.

Be and Be Seen

Despite being new to agency life, female account executives recognize the importance of fostering as much time as possible on the front of the stage in the presence of senior executives who evaluate their every move. Opportunities for visibility come in two ways. The first takes place outside the office setting after work during happy hours, dinners and parties. This amounts to extending the boundaries of the front to other venues, such as bars, restaurants, office parties and awards shows. The phrase “work hard, play hard” holds several layers of meaning. The social side of these gatherings brings fun, excitement and energy. However, an alternative view reveals the feeling of obligation to participate for the sake of political posturing and job security. Helen provided this explanation describing the multifaceted parts of the “work hard, play hard” myth at the creative hot shop she worked for early in her career:

They had big parties. That was a time when there was a little bit more funding for that and they expected everyone to go. We would get all dressed up. And there was always someone in PR who would do a commentary on the clothing that people wore, à la a fashion show commentary. You kind of hoped you got mentioned.

It was an integral part of the culture. They would say “work hard, play hard.” And I was literally there day and night and so was everyone else. Most of the people didn’t have kids and we’d work until 8 and we’d go across the street for a drink to wrap up at the end of the week. We met a lot of our friends there and there were a lot of people. I think the socializing reinforced the people to become good friends with [each other] and other people at the agency.

It was a place to basically let off steam. These people became my friends, my work friends. All of a sudden you realize you are with people many hours a day, you work long hours and then people would go out and have a drink. One of the executives would say, “Happy hour today, we are all heading over.” And you would go and celebrate St. Paddy’s day or whatever (Helen, 2012).
When Helen describes working day and night and then turning the extra long work day into a social opportunity to unwind at a nearby bar, she is providing us with an example of how a total institution operates. Helen claims that socializing with work friends reinforced friendships. For the women in this study, during these early years of their careers, life inside of work and life outside of work merged together. Here individual identity began to melt away in favor of an institutionally collective identity or what Goffman (1961) called “batch” (p.4) identity. Helen and her friends assumed a singular identity as hard working agency account executives from one of the world’s top ad agencies. They not only came to represent the institution, they became the institution. For some of the women in this study the agency’s culture imposed an even fuller identity transformation. Some of them more fully embraced the agency dress code, selecting even trendier clothes, hairstyles and other markers of the total institution.

Because the “work hard play hard” aspect of ad agency culture offers many opportunities to mingle with supervisors, creatives and other power brokers, attending these events represents an opportunity to build social capital and enhance one’s career. Leah drew a direct line between attending agency happy hours and establishing oneself as a fast track employee. She said,

I really think that people who are more on the fast track in terms of being promoted are sometimes more involved in the intangibles or softer side of things. Like happy hours. [It is] important to the fabric of the culture. When I look at [those that get ahead], they’re visible. If you do a fabulous job and you are liked internally, that is a lot of it but you also make it known that you are socializing and networking internally. I think that helps people in our business. I think it does help your career to go to happy hours, to go to [agency award] ceremonies and to go to Ad Fed events. Hang out with your people – your peeps.

There are definitely senior people who are at the happy hours. You have everyone [there]. The senior leaders see it when the more junior people are out together. They [see it] as they are committed or they are passionate about the agency. Like, they want to be there because they are “into” this place (Leah, 2012).

Whether it is happy hour at the bar across the street or late nights in the office eating take out with the creatives, these events can be viewed as benign opportunities to build relationships
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and gain visibility. At the same time, one often feels obligated to attend. As women mature in their careers and begin having families, this sense of obligation worsens. Women struggled with the conflicting priorities of attending agency social events at the expense of family time. For example, Olivia said, “Once I had kids I was like ‘oh, I should go’ versus ‘I want to go.’” Madigan was a single mom. She claimed not to have gone to all the events but she did admit to trying to “show my face. It was wise for you to do it. I would go for one and then leave, just to show your face and go.”

As their careers progressed in their late 20s and early 30s, the majority of the women in this study got married. The same was true for their male coworkers at the agency. When asked about their male colleagues and superiors, the women in this study recalled the majority of these men had old-school marriages with wives that did not work outside the home. With someone at home to take care of family needs, the women in this study felt their male colleagues were freer to get a drink after work without disrupting things at home. This offers them a competitive advantage over women who by the later stages of their careers struggle to balance family and agency life. For women, not attending agency social events carries with it a very real downside because one gets left out of the bonding that takes place during these outings and misses the exchange of valuable information about clients and other business issues. Men build social and cultural capital at these events and women suffer the disadvantage. Neve described it this way, “you became gradually out of the loop. You don’t hear the information first hand, you don’t get the nuances, you don’t know what’s going on. It makes you less effective at your job and suddenly you are less effective than other people who work in your department.” Louise often chose not to attend and as she looked back on her decisions she lamented, “My kids were little and I didn’t partake. I would have had a longer career with [that agency] had I been a part of that scene.” Here we see an element of total institutions that Goffman (1961) considered the building
of a moral career. Women gained favor by attending these events, they lost favor by choosing their at-home families over their at-work families. This choice carried with it very real consequences; what is sometimes termed “moral career suicide.”

Working on new business pitches offers another way to gain visibility. These opportunities come by invitation only. Senior leaders personally select a team to see the pitch through from start to finish, which often lasts weeks if not months. The work comes on top of one’s day-to-day assignment because typical agency staffing models operate at full capacity. When a pitch comes along, workers need to balance the pitch on top of their regular full load, which means grueling long hours, and spending evenings and weekends at the office. Women described an atmosphere of working in the trenches, shoulder to shoulder with comrades. Bonds are formed. New business assignments offer a woman the chance to show her boss not only how smart she is but also how much fun she is to work with.

Invitations to work on new business mean exposure to the most senior people in the agency, people who have the power to make or break careers. Unfortunately, it also means managing a horrendous workload and sacrificing time with family and friends. Without exception, each woman in this study took on these challenges willingly. They felt flattered to be invited to pitch and they saw value in the bonding and relationship building that accompanied this type of work. Most importantly, they saw no choice in the matter because they wanted the reward that came with it.

Both of these methods of gaining visibility - agency happy hours and new business pitches - provide women with a chance to build a variety of forms of capital. They gain favor with power brokers, extended their support network and build their moral careers. In so doing, they accumulate social capital. In addition, during after hours meetings they pick up on insider information, which helps them build cultural capital. If a new business pitch converted to a win,
they gain symbolic capital, a type of capital Bourdieu (1984) identified to describe the advantages one accrues as a result of winning awards or other such public recognition. And finally, when all goes well, promotions and advancement result in gains in economic capital. Visibility is a critical component in the overall management of one’s moral career. I turn now to one of the aspects of participants’ early careers, which took them most of them by surprise. They found themselves immersed in a male dominated culture and an atmosphere of sexual harassment. For the women in this study, this topic often generated the most conversation and the richest data.

**Hanging with the Guys**

While all the 15 women who participated in this study established their careers at creativity-driven agencies, their experiences span seven geographically dispersed cities and 26 different advertising agencies. Despite this range and with only one exception, the presidents at all of these agencies were men. The one exception was an agency that only recently promoted a woman to the office of president. The inner circle leadership teams at all the agencies represented in this study were also male dominated, frequently with one token woman out of a committee of six or seven. When asked about these male dominated cultures, the women in this study offered many detailed accounts of sexual harassment. Especially in the early parts of their careers the women in this study felt they have no choice but to tolerate these situations. Tolerance is one of two strategies for coping with this type of behavior. The other strategy is to adopt masculine traits to make the men feel comfortable in the hope of gaining acceptance. I now look at both of these strategies beginning with tolerating harassment.

**Cowboys, Locker Rooms and Frat Houses**

The women in this study documented many accounts of sexual harassment. From their earliest days on the job, they revealed details of male supervisors telling them what to wear to
meetings, accounts of being pinched and manhandled, and being asked to go to strip clubs. They tolerated dirty jokes, discussions of hunting trips and sporting events all intended to keep them out of the conversation and isolate them on the sidelines. One participant, Barbara, believed the pervasive sexist attitudes stemmed from the male dominated creative departments, which held great power within these creatively-driven agencies. She characterized the creative departments as locker rooms and frat houses. She described a situation where a female academic wrote a complaint letter regarding one of the agency’s sexist advertisements. The creatives retaliated by sending her an inappropriate response with an inappropriate photograph, all with the tacit if not outright approval of agency top management. They thought they were being funny. The female academic was insulted by their response and went to the press to tell her story; the agency lost the account and suffered lingering negative publicity. Despite the situation, none of the creatives lost their jobs or received sanctions. As she finished her account, Barbara mentioned the female-led industry group called the “3% Conference”, so named because only three percent of the creative directors in the United States are women. She asserted that many creative departments have a “wild west cowboy” vibe that sets the tone for the entire agency. In looking back at her first agency and then scanning the current horizon she said, “The whole agency culture had become an extension of that male frat house, locker room creative department. And frankly you see the same thing at Jockstrap Agency [pseudonym for a current, high profile creative hot shop]. That is clearly a boy’s locker room, and an integral part of their success, but also a really tough place for women.”

Interestingly, two of the three youngest women in this study, women close to 40 years old who entered the business in the mid to late 1990s, look at episodes of harassment as nonthreatening. For example, in her interview, 44-year old Leah characterized sexual harassment as something that resided in the eye of the beholder. She felt most women made a big deal out of
nothing because most men mean no harm. She actually went so far as to claim that she did not believe in sexual harassment. Likewise, Jane who was 40 years old at the time of data collection recalled a situation where a very prominent male client, a chairman of a corporation, asked her why her husband “allowed” her to work instead of staying home with her children. He also requested that she wear flats rather than high heels because he did not want Jane to appear taller than he was.

Jane knew she could not complain or object. However, she did not seem to mind and said she saw no harm in her client’s request. She claimed, “I’ve had little situations like that and I laugh them off. To me they become stories.” In fact, at the beginning of the interview, Jane said, “I will go on the record as saying I’ve never felt like I’ve been subjected to any degree of sexism.” Because Jane and Leah are two of only three women in this study who were close to age 40 during data collection, it is difficult to conclude whether their attitude is pervasive among this cohort of young 40-year old female account executives, or if Jane and Leah are unrepresentative. As was seen in the review of the literature, attitudes about feminist issues are directly related to situational factors such as time and place (Heywood & Drake, 2004). For example, many women in Jane and Leah’s age group feel the progress made in the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s and 1980s cleared the way and accomplished the goal of equality. They feel the work is done (Gorton, 2004). What’s more, they have come to believe the negative stereotypes associated with the first wave of feminism and they want to distance themselves from these images of harsh, angry, militant women (Garrison, 2004; Pozner, 2003). As an illustration, Leah talked disparagingly about strident women who in her words “couldn’t take a joke.” The older women in this study felt very differently. They continued to harbor outrage at the indignities they suffered, the majority of which occurred early in their careers.
Although as we will see, they endured these indignities because they felt they could do nothing about it.

All of the women in this study mentioned episodes of sexual harassment endured in their early careers and some of them throughout their careers. They chose not to address it with their management because they believed whistle blowing would prove fruitless. As Susan put it:

It was an old boy’s network. It is [the] culture. It is hard to change culture. [And] you are especially not going to change [culture] when you have the founders [participating in harassment] day-to-day. And one voice can make progress but you are not going to change it. [The founders] are not going to change who they are, and they aren’t going to change their reward structure (Susan, 2013).

Importantly, each participant felt any attempts to complain or instigate change would stunt their careers at best and possibly end their careers altogether. Even in their early careers at the age of 23 or 24, they read the habitus and sensed the repercussions of speaking up. Joanne put it plainly:

All of the people in higher positions of power had the ability to say who they wanted on the business, and how you were going to get ahead, and how you were going to get promoted, to move up in the ranks, the business you worked on, how much you were able to handle – usually bigger accounts meant greater success. So you weren’t going to make trouble and not get that.

I was thick skinned. You had to not let things bug you. That is why I say I probably ignored some of the banter. I think that is how you got along. Even if you were offended by something you had to just not make a big offense. [If you did] you might not get invited to the next meeting.

I tolerated most of the talk and a lot of the banter and a lot of the inappropriate joking. I didn’t think there was anything I could do about it (Joanne, 2013).

Women feel they need to play along with the banter and inappropriate behavior or laughing it off when men tell off-color jokes or made lewd suggestions. If they fail to play along, their reputations suffer and they lose social capital. At times the sexist behavior even comes from top management. These circumstances reinforce the decision to tolerate rather than
speak up. Shelly’s attitude and strategy typified the choices made by other participants in this study. Interestingly she used the present tense rather than the past tense when she said:

I think being able to sit around with the guys and drink and listen to the stories about going to the strip clubs with clients [is expected]. I just play along with it. I just listen and laugh and never let on that I am offended or don’t appreciate the stories that they are telling because it’s the president [telling the story]. So you know if you want to keep moving and moving up, you’ve got to just play along with them (Shelly, 2013).

Leah, who now owns her own recruiting business, works with male agency executives who are filling open positions. She reported male hiring directors sometimes ask her to find female candidates that can tolerate the banter. Leah recalled one male agency hiring manager who rejected a female candidate for being too strident on matters of harassment. Leah paraphrased his remarks by saying:

“I just want to do my work and have fun and if we add so-and-so [a woman] to the team, it is going to be too serious and intense” (Leah, 2012 paraphrasing a client).

I don’t think he was trying to discriminate by not hiring a female leader. I think he just wanted it to be more fun and light hearted. The feedback I get from men is sometimes females can make the workplace more serious and heavy and emotional.

[They need] women that can hang with the guys, that don’t take themselves too seriously. [They have to] just laugh something off whereas some women [say], ”I need to see you in my office, this is unacceptable.” And I think for men, it is too much. [They are] like, “can’t anyone just have fun anymore or make a joke?”

I’ve seen some women diffuse it better in a light-hearted way. [But I also] see it with candidates where they are too serious or intense and it just can’t fly day-to-day (Leah, 2012).

Leah’s remarks directly reflect the work done by Appelrouth and Desfor-Edles (2011) who studied how women survive in a male-dominated workplace rife with banter and misogynistic talk. Their research documented how women navigate these situations by learning to ignore them and in some cases even participating in the banter as a way to gain acceptance and cope. As Bryson (1999) pointed out, women consider this type of sexist talk as part of normal behavior because they encounter it so frequently; when this happens male domination and power
go unchecked and are perpetuated. Smith (1990) took these theoretical precepts further. She asserted the situation is made worse due to the patriarchal nature of capitalism, meaning the male authority figures in organizations determine the relations of ruling. As Joanne and Susan pointed out, the founders and presidents of the agency held the reins, they determined who got promoted and who was going to move up in the ranks. Under these circumstances, women suppress their own version of their experiences in favor of the male version. Leah demonstrated this concept when she said she did not believe in sexual harassment. Exemplifying Smith’s (1977) standpoint theory, Leah fully accepted the male standpoint or worldview as universal, legitimate and normal.

**If You Can’t Beat Them, Join Them**

The second strategy used by women to succeed in a male dominated culture involves changing their behavior to better fit in and be accepted by their male superiors. In so doing, women amass what Bourdieu (1977) called social capital. Here, they earn the respect and favor of the men around them. As this continues they begin to bank up a type of currency that may be traded at a future time if need be. These masculine-oriented behaviors run the gamut of using rough language, showing an interest in sports, following the scores of the local sports teams, participating in sports themselves, engaging in banter and one-upmanship, and adopting habits like smoking and drinking. As one example, the women in this study understood the importance of not only listening to male coworkers’ stories but also they also recognized the social capital gained by being a good storyteller themselves. Under this strategy, they crafted their stories to focus on topics of male interest such as sports and politics rather than family or children.

Women often work at adopting and perfecting these behaviors. It is a strategic choice and one that while it requires practice comes somewhat naturally. For example, in her early days at a creative hot shop, Helen watched the women above her who excelled at the agency. She
mentioned one woman in particular who had a spitfire attitude, someone with spunk and wit who seemed to fit in particularly well. Helen said this woman taught her how to use curse words for effect. When asked what she learned from observing this woman, Helen commented, “truck driver language, the truck driver mouth. No nonsense. Jokey. Louder. That kind of ball buster. Just not afraid.” The women in this study agreed on the need for displaying these types of masculine traits and swearing seemed like an easy way to show one’s “masculinity.” Madigan described herself as having developed a “horrible mouth, F-bombing my boss” and Joanne called swearing a “leveler” when it came to fitting in with the men.

Women also use their knowledge of sports to gain acceptance. Sports acumen comes naturally to some, others deliberately work at staying abreast of the latest sports news, scores and team standings. Several women in this study genuinely liked sports and when conversation turned to teams and star athletes, they participated easily and contributed effortlessly. Others felt the need to study the sports pages in order to take part in elevator conversations or the chitchat that takes place prior to the start of a meeting. These were key opportunities to trade in one’s cultural capital with the men in power. Jane talked about it as morphing into “that guy at the bar that can talk football, talk sports.” She considered it an important skill that differentiated her from others and a skill she used to her advantage.

As female account executives enter the advertising business, they find themselves surrounded by a group of like-minded, same-aged men and women. This gender-blended cohort helps them establish camaraderie and build social capital. The atmosphere carries with it a thrill and a kind of excitement that makes the long hours and hard work worthwhile. As they look at the executives in power, they see primarily men. These men constitute the audience who judges their performance and determines their success or failure on the stage. Women experience a culture that subjects them to sexual harassment and rewards masculine behavior. As a result,
they use adaptive strategies to fit in and establish credibility. Goffman might consider this acting the part, that is, presenting one’s self on the front stage in a way that gains favor with the audience. A feminist approach looks at this situation through the lens of standpoint theory (Smith, 1977) that asserts the universality of the male point of view, subjugating the female experience and perpetuating patriarchy. And last, a Bourdieuan approach looks at this a situation from yet a third angle, but with a complementary approach that knits these concepts together. Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of practice considers the situation one of matching person to habitus. The hot shop ad agency habitus attracts the right fish that will thrive in the pond, a male-dominated pond with all its nuances and subtle behavior requirements. Here success depends on the hand-in-glove fit between the habitus and a woman who accepts male banter and can play along with it as a way to gain favor, fit in and accumulate social capital. In the early years, finding adaptive strategies and working to build social capital comes easily. The fun and excitement of being a part of a creative hot shop is reward enough. But this will not always be the case. As women begin to have families, the tension between work and home change the dynamic completely.

Summary

The women in this study felt an innate fit with the habitus of the advertising agency field. In contrast they felt the opposite way about a bureaucratic corporate job. They articulated these feelings in the same terms used by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), a fish in water, a fish out of water. In almost every case, they used their social capital to enter the business, leveraging personal contacts and network connections. Getting a job offer required a careful presentation of self, which meant both looking the part and acting the part. Once on the inside, the job and the agency environment more than lived up to expectations but also offered a few surprises. The job required long hours, weekend work and minimal time off for vacation, a condition that typified
the total institution and involved the development of a moral career. They developed strategies to succeed in a male dominated culture and side step sexual harassment. Despite this, the women in this study looked back on the initial years of their careers with great fondness.

As time passed, this study’s participants strove to advance their careers and move up the agency ranks. As they soon discovered, to accomplish this goal, they needed to do more than work hard and perform on the job. I now turn to the middle years of my participants’ careers and explore themes regarding career mobility and advancement.
CHAPTER FIVE:
MID-CAREER MOBILITY IN A CREATIVE HOT SHOP

Introduction

In the early stages of their careers, the women in this study recalled the thrill of working in an ad agency hot shop. The energy, deviant counterculture and intense camaraderie created a college-like atmosphere that offered both excitement and interest. In this chapter, I go beyond the initial career phase and explore what it takes to move up in a creative hot shop. Here, I uncover a complex web of four themes. When taken together, these themes demonstrate theories espoused by both Lincoln (1986) and Bourdieu (1977). Lincoln’s discourse theory explains the importance of myth and slogan that produce a sacred reality that serves to indoctrinate and secure the status quo. In terms of Bourdieu, we again see the importance of developing one’s social capital in the quest of advancement. Social capital in this context means leveraging the institutional relationships developed with the power brokers at the agency. In examining this theme I will first look at the social skills needed to win over the power brokers at the agency including “playing the game,” a phrase used by participants that referred to honing one’s political astuteness and working the system to one’s advantage. Second, I will look at tomboy identity and explore its role in career advancement. Advertising remains a male-dominated field, particularly among upper management. Many of the women in this study grew up as tomboys and carried that identity with them into their careers. Third, I cover the recurring theme of long hours and total dedication to the job, which takes on a new importance in these middle years. Last, the most successful women in this study received endorsement from male top managers who lobbied for them and helped them break through barriers. Here I explore the importance of having a champion while striving to get ahead. I start by taking an in-depth look at the social skills that women displayed in order to prove their worthiness for advancement.
Winning Friends and Influencing People

As a prerequisite for advancement, all advertising account executives, male or female, need to be intelligent, demonstrate leadership and possess strong business skills. This means having the ability to know what drives the client’s business. It also means being persuasive when recommending solutions. As the female participants in this study offered their thoughts about what it takes to get ahead in advertising, they considered these skills as givens. Using the male-skewing vernacular that they acquired during their years in advertising, they described these basic skills as “table stakes”, a reference to the entry fees in a poker game, and “greens fees,” a reference to the entry fees in a game of golf. Intelligence and business savvy form the basis for consideration for promotion, but these skills alone offer no guarantee of success. In order for women to get promoted beyond their entry-level account executive positions, they need to amass social capital. In essence, getting ahead involves more than just what one knows; it also involves who one knows and the strength of those relationships. Three components work together to establish one’s social capital within the field of advertising. First, the ability to “read people.” Secondly, the ability to win over key people, namely the creatives and the client. And lastly, the importance of getting along with the right people in top management or “playing the game.” I will now look at each of these in more depth.

Reading the Habitus

The first element in establishing one’s social capital stems from the ability to accurately read people and situations. This means analyzing what motivates people, identifying where the power dynamics lie and then using that knowledge to one’s advantage. Bourdieu (1984) linked the accumulation of capital with one’s social position. Specifically, he asserted that as one accumulates capital one’s standing within the group improves. This in turn works to increase one’s rank within the power structure or hierarchy. The women in this study accumulated social
capital by paying attention to nuance, analyzing these nuances and acting on them accordingly. Susan offers an excellent example of someone who held a sizeable amount of not only social capital but also cultural capital. Susan’s father was an advertising executive and she came to understand the industry at an early age through the stories she heard at home. This formed the basis of her cultural capital, the inside knowledge of how an ad agency works. But Susan also possessed a strong ability to assess social situations, which she believed came from her background as an athlete. In sports, she learned to size up players’ strengths and weaknesses after just a few plays. Armed with this knowledge, she moved team members to positions more suited to their skills to increase their motivation and performance. She transferred these same skills to the agency setting. Here she sized up her clients and determined the best way to relate to them in order to serve their needs. She described it this way:

It is planting seeds, it is figuring out who has the right role, understanding how the client wants to be motivated, understanding how the client is motivated. How the CEO operates. What is the CEO afraid of? It is the psychological game playing that is absolutely at the core of sports.

If you are a third basemen and you miss the ball three times, your confidence goes to hell. So, instead of leaving you at third, [I’d] take you to second [base] because there are fewer hits [there]. [I’d] put someone else on third...It is just reading people. And that is what team sports teach you (Susan, 2013).

By figuring out how a CEO wanted to be and is motivated, Susan gained important information, which helped her succeed. She called it reading people but in Bourdieuan terms she developed the social capital necessary to work effectively with her CEO.

Aside from reading people, one can also accumulate social capital by reading situations. This means understanding relationships and power dynamics. By combining the ability to read people with the ability to read situations, one can forge strong relationships. Madigan did just this with her clients. As a result, her clients trusted and respected her. She described it this way:
I think my clients really knew me and liked me. They never felt like they were getting sold [by] me. They knew I was looking out for their business. And then also as an account person, I knew when to stop pushing because I would always try to figure out what the politics of the client side was. I knew what the hot spots were and where to stop (Madigan, 2013).

**Winning Over Others**

Another important aspect of accumulating social capital accrues from the ability to win over and influence others within the agency, particularly members of the creative team. In creatively-driven agencies, the creative director, designers, art directors and copywriters often wield great power and their opinions about people and coworkers hold sway. Gaining the support and favor of the creative staff can change the course of one’s career. Conversely, losing their support can negatively affect one’s progress. When asked about the importance of winning over the creatives, Susan flatly credited the support she received from her creative team as critical to her success. She claimed, “I would not have advanced, I would not be who I am now without a very, very close relationship with my creative team.”

Winning over the creatives comes from supporting their work internally at the agency and selling their work externally to the client. When clients fail to accept the creatives’ work, creatives lose face and walk away with bruised egos. They often blame account people for failing to persuade the client to accept the work, a theme repeated frequently in the data. As a result, forging strong relationships with creatives is not only important but it also requires careful handling, finding the best way to frame constructive feedback to avoid wounding the creatives’ pride or suffer their wrath. Confrontations with the creative team can diminish social capital. Madigan offered these remarks regarding how she tried to manage her relationship with her creative team. Here we see how she couched her comments and tread lightly when it came to offering negative feedback:
[It is important to] understand how to manage creatives. Understanding how to be firm but also gentle. Not walking in and saying, “I don’t like that.” No creative [team member] cares what you like. [But] being able to say, “that’s really cool, but I’m not sure it’s on strategy, so can we talk about the strategy of [the work]?” [It is] just really [about] understanding how to handle your creatives with kid gloves. [Because] the creatives have fragile egos.

Look, sometimes I hate the creatives. They are prima donnas. And, [it is a] truly hard job being a creative. [But] if they don’t like you, they won’t do good work for you and they won’t do good work for the client (Madigan, 2013).

Aside from winning over the creatives, upward career mobility also depends on forging strong relationships with other powerful people at the agency. Joanne used the phrase “getting along with the right people” in answering the question, what does it take to get ahead as a woman in advertising? By the “right” people, she meant getting along with those at the agency who held any modicum of power. Sometimes this meant the creatives, sometimes this meant the new business team, but at other times it meant account executives in upper management who managed large, important pieces of business and who often personally selected their teams from among the rank and file. Most participants considered it important to develop strong relationships across the board. While they agreed that some people were more important than others, most believed that having detractors anywhere within the agency could affect one’s career mobility.

Playing the Game

Successfully reading people and building strong working relationships with them provides female account executives with the social capital needed to move up in the organization. But extending this to decoding and successfully navigating the power structure within the agency also assists women in climbing the agency ladder. Most women in this study called this “playing the game.” Shelly described it as, “knowing the right people to get close to, and how to play them.” It includes decoding management’s hot buttons and finding ways to use this knowledge to one’s advantage. It also means continuing to attend rituals such as after-hours social events even
if for a short time to show one’s face for a quick drink. Joanne considered playing the game to mean being on the right side of the men in upper management. She said:

> There are cliques in offices just like there are cliques in school. And [if you did not play the game] you wouldn’t get invited to the party. Because somebody at any point, could say, “I want this person on this account” or not. All the people in higher positions of power had the ability to say, not all the time, but often enough who they wanted on the business. And how you were going to get ahead. And how you were going to get promoted. [What] business you worked on. How much you were able to handle, [because] usually bigger accounts meant greater success. And [they] moved you up the ranks (Joanne, 2013).

If a woman ignores or chooses not to play the game, she risks career mobility and longevity. For example, Susan likened playing the game to possessing what she called “EQ” or emotional intelligence. She felt all agencies had an informal reward structure that flowed beneath everything else. She felt women need to possess EQ in order to uncover the informal reward structure and maintain a long, productive career. She summed it up this way, “You have to make a conscious choice whether you want to play that reward game or not. When you choose not to, that’s when you look for a new job.” Of all the respondents, Louise approached the subject of playing the game with the most angst. Despite her strong performance at one of her first ad agencies, she failed to play the game and it affected her career at that agency:

> I was ignoring the game. I take the responsibility. It didn’t seem important to me. This was my first agency experience so I was not even aware that there was a game going on. I was just there to do my job. It took me years and other jobs to figure out the game. It was very high school. Are you part of the cool kids’ club?

> At that time it took a lot of posturing, a lot of perception managing. And that was something that took me quite a few years to learn. Your actual intelligence or capability or skill isn’t the primary thing you are going to be judged on (Louise, 2013).

Louise’s sentiments demonstrate Bourdieu’s (1997, 1984) theory of practice. In her early days on the job, Louise had not yet figured out the habitus. Being able to read the cues and pick up on undercurrents had not yet become second nature to her. She failed to internalize the social norms of the field because she had not lived in the field long enough. Once she figured out the
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game, understood the habitus, she realized she needed to take the time to posture and manage
impressions in order to accumulate the social capital necessary to get promoted. Unfortunately
for Louise, by the time she figured it all out, she had already violated the norms of the game and
she paid for it dearly. I now turn to the third theme related to mid-career mobility, a theme
related to feeling comfortable working side-by-side with men as equals.

**Avoiding the Blah, Blah, Blah and Chirp, Chirp, Chirp**

The second theme in career mobility involves women’s personal identity and self-
perceptions. Five women in this study, or one-third of all participants, and those with the longest
most successful careers identified themselves as tomboys. These women claimed to feel very
comfortable in the company of men and conversely described difficulty connecting with other
women. They said they felt more engaged and interested in discussing something other than the
stereotypical domestic topics and frivolous gossip that some women embrace. For example,
Neve said she felt comfortable with her opinions, had an easy time of expressing herself to men
without fear or intimidation. She said she felt totally comfortable asserting, “here is what I
think” whereas other women seemed intimidated to do so. She went further to contend,

> When I am at parties, I go talk to the guys because I don’t want to hear about toilet
> training and stuff like that. I will often be the one in the room talking to the guys. I like
to talk about football. I like to talk about business. And the women that I know, that I
like, are like that too. They are not really feminine-y, girlie, women. They love [taking
on] the part of that bossy powerful woman. That is the way I am.

> I have no problem with boys’ clubs. I’m pretty good at them. I’m just naturally that
way. I’ve never really cared about gender. I am not one of those women who is always
like “chirp, chirp, chirp” (Neve, 2013).

Nancy described a nearly identical scenario. She often found herself to be the only
woman in the room at meetings or when traveling on business. She claimed to naturally fit in
with the men she worked with, without having to try hard to be accepted. She read the sports
pages because she liked sports. She put it this way:
There were tons and tons of meetings and trips when I was the only woman in the room. It was the way of the world. I was always totally comfortable. I read the sports pages because I love sports. I was very, very comfortable in a man’s world. I’m less comfortable in a woman’s world, which I discovered more as I retired. PTA meetings and crap where women are all ‘blah, blah, blah.’ They talk a lot. It is all about throwing these compliments to each other.

I just want[ed] to do a good job and be part of the team. And, I guess I fit in well and I don’t think I really ever had to try very hard to be accepted [by men] (Nancy, 2013).

Jane expressed similar sentiments:

I was a college athlete. My athletic background is like an equalizer [with men]. It was easy for me because I grew up a tomboy. It’s not like I’m being a complete chameleon. When I grew up, I had more friends that were boys than girls. So, it is very natural for me. In fact, I enjoy it. When I am with female clients, it is sometimes even harder for me to make a connection (Jane, 2013).

Two other women in this study considered themselves to be tomboys. They held this position within their families at an early age. Joanne grew up with a brother who was not only one of the boys but as she put it, “seemed like three.” He was her only sibling and he used her as his on-call opponent. She claimed her brother fostered in her a sense of male competitiveness. He trained her early to shoot a basketball and taught her how to engage in male banter, the back and forth one-liners and sarcastic comments that boys often engage in. This skill served her well as she climbed the corporate ladder. Likewise, Barbara grew up with four brothers. She said she spent a lot of time around men; it formed the basis of her upbringing and bred a fearlessness and stick-to-itiveness that she drew on throughout her career. She maintains these formative experiences helped her in “becoming better equipped to handle what is still a fairly male dominated business world.”

While these five women constitute a minority within this study (five out of 15 women), the fact that their careers moved quickly and they achieved the highest ranks at their agencies requires a brief look into tomboy theory. Hilgenkamp & Livingston (2002) found a statistical correlation between career confidence and adult women who identified as tomboys in their
youth. The authors found additional correlations to masculine leadership characteristics such as “independence, aggression, athleticism, competitiveness, self-reliance, making decisions easily, ambition, defending one’s own beliefs, willingness to take a stand, and having leadership abilities” (p. 748). These are some of the same characteristics that the five women in this study touted as keys to their career mobility. In addition, Neve and Nancy mentioned having a high degree of comfort working in and being a part of a man’s world. They, along with Jane, reported having many if not more male friends than female friends. Tangri (1972) found a correlation between women with these types of male relationships and female success in male-dominated careers. With Barbara and Joanne we also saw an interesting case of women who identified as tomboys and who also had older brothers at home. According to Sutton-Smith & Rosenberg (1970), tomboys who grew up with older brothers show a particularly high degree of tenacity, confidence and competitiveness. They found these traits to be even more pronounced among tomboy girls with just one sibling, an older brother. As evidence of this, Joanne grew up with just one older brother and she specifically mentioned his role in fostering her competitive spirit.

Men created the advertising industry and still maintain control over it today. As Smith (1987) asserted in her standpoint theory, this history privileges masculinity within the advertising industry. Women unknowingly accept the male standpoint as legitimate, gender-neutral and universal. Growing up as tomboys helped the five women in this study develop a natural form of masculinity, which helped them fit in and gain acceptance among their male coworkers and supervisors. It provided them with an additional form of social capital not available to others who did not grow up as tomboys. More research in this area is needed to more fully understand female success in the advertising field and its relationship to tomboy identity.
**Married to the Job**

After their entry level years of working hard and moving up in their agencies, the women in this study entered mid-career and at the same time entered a new phase in their personal lives. They put down roots and bought homes. Most of them got married and had children (see Table 5.1). At the same time, the demands of their jobs increased as they climbed the agency ladder. They participated in new business pitches and got promoted to larger accounts with complex challenges. They were assigned direct reports who required supervision and mentoring. They had responsibility for upper level client relationships, which required frequent travel. The pressures mounted and triggered difficult choices.

*Table 5.1.* Participant family status at mid-career.

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<th>Mid-Career (9-17 Years)</th>
<th>Change</th>
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<td>12</td>
<td>+9</td>
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<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>15</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Throughout their career trajectory, both in the early going and at mid-career, women accept their agencies’ party line or what Lincoln (1986, 1989, 2012) calls myth. For Lincoln (2012), when discourse results in beliefs that have the same authority as “timeless truths” (p.54),
the discourse possesses authority, which means it goes unquestioned. In the early years, when agency life required long hours and nearly around-the-clock dedication to the job, participants never questioned the need to work hard. Their supervisors passed down the lore that client demands never slept and that a client service business such as advertising always requires long hours and hard work. Lincoln (1986) asserts that myths like this persuade members of the society of “the righteousness of their lot in life” (p. 164, emphasis in the original). Even more importantly, these types of myths legitimize oppression. The long work hours at an ad agency not only go unquestioned, but they also have become more entrenched over time because the myth has gained both authority and stability. In the early going, the women in this study felt excitement regardless of the long hours. They were learning new skills and forging new friendships. But by mid-career this changed. While mid-career represented a new stage of life when many participants began to marry, their agencies continued to demand they remain married to the job. Those with children experienced even deeper conflicts between work and home (See Figure 5.1). Dilemmas like this stemmed from their continued belief in the client service myth as an irrefutable truth. As a result, they completely believed and also willingly accepted the notion that so long as they remained in advertising, the job would require long hours and sleepless nights.
Based on the data, mid-career women account executives experience frustration at trying to balance the demands of their job with their responsibilities outside of work. Women feel the need to demonstrate an unwavering commitment to their jobs, their clients and the agency at large. The culture in creative hot shops often embraces and reinforces ideal worker norms and perpetuates myths such as “work hard, play hard.” As a result, if women want to succeed they need to do so within these parameters.

Each woman in this study succeeded in advancing within her agency. Each one, without exception, treated her job as her first priority in order to get ahead. Susan used the term “married to her job” and openly admitted to being what she called “one dimensional” with no work/life balance. Madigan, who advanced very quickly in her position, admitted to putting her work first.
She put it this way, “I was really into it. I worked really hard. When the client calls and wants something, nobody gives a shit if your kid has a softball game.”

In describing their agencies’ leadership teams, many women said their agencies employed a token woman at the top. In each case, these women had no children and fully dedicated themselves to their work. Making it into the inner circle at an agency hot shop requires this level of commitment. As case in point is Jane, who during data collection, held a position on the management team of her agency. This team was comprised of two women and five men. In reflecting on these dynamics, Jane reinforced the importance of putting one’s job first to get ahead:

One reason why there aren’t females in leadership positions is that this is a very demanding career. I can’t promise people that come work for me work/life balance. It is just not possible in this industry. If you choose to elevate your career it comes at a price. Every man that I know who is on the senior leadership team or holds an executive position at an agency – I can count on one hand the wives in those situations that had careers. Of the senior management team here, none of their wives work.

It is just really hard if you want to have a family and be successful at [advertising]. I firmly believe that women can’t have it all. There are trade offs, and I get angry when women say they can have it all. Not without tradeoffs. I don’t get as much sleep as I want. I don’t spend as much time with my kids as I want. I don’t eat healthy. We have one family meal at home, on Sunday’s we try to have family dinners, but that’s not having it all (Jane, 2013).

Here we see evidence of Jane’s full acceptance of the client service myth. Lincoln (1986) asserted that myth represents a form of ideology. When members of advertising leadership teams accept the representations of the ideology the way Jane has, the myth remains intact. Myths like this cause the profession to achieve a level of homogeneity brought on by the unified belief that demanding clients require workers to put in long hours, lose sleep and sacrifice time with their family. Until or unless members of ad agency leadership teams challenge this myth, the client service myth will enjoy a long life. What is more, the men who run these agencies, the men whose wives do not work, have a vested interest in perpetuating the myth, lest they lose their
power and authority. As a result, these men use their executive position to assure the myth’s acceptance. The ad agency staff regards these leaders with reverence. They trust these men as the captain of the ship. The outcome can be seen in the docility and submissiveness of people like Jane who toil away day and night without complaint, fully believing in the myth’s authority. As was discussed in the review of the scholarly literature, the hierarchical organizational structure of most agencies reinforces the chief executive’s authority in a self-policing way. Lincoln (1986) asserted that if and when agency workers question the client service myth, lieutenants like Jane will support their commander and assure the myth’s longevity. There is a “taken-for-granted rightness” (Lincoln, 2010, p. 56) about the man at the top, a sacred authority. In the advertising world, this type of autocratic leadership results in women like Jane accepting the cultural norms set by these leaders.

The need to travel represents the single biggest sacrifice for women account executives. Often times client assignments means traveling frequently, multiple times per month and for extended periods, a week at a time. The pressure to travel on a moment’s notice brings pressure and conflicts at home. Complaining about it or asking for a reassignment amounts to what Goffman (1959a) may term “moral career suicide.” Goffman maintained that those who built moral careers enjoyed a place of honor within the organization brought on by the respect of their supervisors and others. Among all the participants, Nancy was the only one who retired from advertising after more than 30 years of service. She built a moral career achieving high honors within the profession. Nancy felt traveling for work came with the territory and she did not question it. She described an incident about the need to travel upon returning to work after having a baby:

By the time I was into my career enough to decide if I was going to have a family or not - and I did, I had two wonderful children - I knew what the travel demands were going to
be and I accepted them. That is what I had to do to be good at my job and service my clients well. I readily accepted that.

I remember coming back from my first maternity leave and I didn’t go to the office the first day. I went to the airport. The administrative assistant met me there with my tickets and I went off to the client’s [office] for three days on the west coast. I just made it work. You make your choices as to what is important.

I also sacrificed time for friendships. I didn’t have time to go out for a glass of wine with a friend or time to have a cup of coffee at Starbucks with a friend. There was never time to do things like that (Nancy, 2013).

This complete dedication to one’s jobs comes at a price. Just as not doing so comes at a price. After having her children, Shelly continued to put in long hours but she felt like a marked woman. She remembered, “I wasn’t getting the opportunities to do more and I think it was kind of unsaid that because I was a mother that had to leave a lot of days at 5 o’clock and not be there until 10 o’clock at night, it just limited my further opportunities.”

As the data show, to advance one’s career in advertising a woman needs to demonstrate she is an ideal worker. If not, she suffers career stagnation. As Acker (1990,1992) pointed out, while it seems as though the concept of the ideal worker is gender neutral, the truth is anything but. Even though advertising agencies expect both male and female account executives to put in long hours and travel extensively in service to the client, only women endure nine months of pregnancy and are often absent from work as a consequence. Only women deliver babies and require medical leaves of absence after delivery. The boxes on organizational charts may look gender neutral but given the physical realities of childbirth, Acker correctly points out that organizations make underlying gender assumptions as they lay out their policies for advancement. As the data point out, men in leadership positions at creatively-driven ad agencies have wives who take primary responsibility for life at home. In order for women to move up, they need to compete with these men on equal footing which means putting work before home.
By prioritizing work over family, women add to their social capital. They enter a circle of agency elites who are effectively married to their jobs.

From the data, we see that as women analyze these work versus family dilemmas, they come to a point of reckoning. Women with children feel frustrated by their choices or the lack of choices. Advertising account executive work offers rich job content and personal fulfillment but the lack of flexibility due to long work hours and travel causes tension at home. As a result women feel like both their job and their home life suffer which forces the need to choose. Joanne described her dilemma between maintaining her position as head of an agency and tending to her family:

No matter how much they talk about work/life balance when you have to get on a [client] conference call and if you don’t get to the day care, your kids are going to be the only ones standing at the fence. And there is nothing like it. There is just no comparison to that kind of tug and feeling.

You have to step back [and] you have to choose. You have to do the thing that tugs at you the most. [For me], it would have been harder for me to maintain that position [at the agency]. I wasn’t being the kind of mother and parent and wife that I wanted to be. I needed to let [family] go to be the kind of president of the company I wanted to be. I did not see a path where I would be able to successfully balance that in a way that would make me a sane, logical person (Joanne, 2013).

Based on the data, the situation comes to a head, spurred on because of difficulty at home or due to the pain felt at work. Often, women feel guilty for leaving work while others remain at the office putting in long hours. They know their choice to go home at a reasonable hour impacts their career mobility. Conversely they feel guilty for missing family time when they stay late at the office or travel on client business. They feel exasperated by the judgmental, unforgiving nature of ad agency culture. Neve summed up her situation and seemed to speak for many in this study when she said:

I lasted at Good Old Boy agency [pseudonym] as long as I could, and then I realized, I’m not going to be happy either way because I am not home enough, I am not home at the time I want to be home. I’m not in the decisions enough [at work] to put up with the pain
I’m experiencing. Because family is 24/7 and family is unpredictable. With families you sometimes need to put work aside and agencies don’t like that on a continuous basis (Neve, 2013).

Here we see several of Goffman’s theories at work simultaneously. First, total institutions are all encompassing, they engulf the worker both day and night. This results in the transformation of individual identity into an institutional or collective identity (Goffman, 1961). Total institutions culturally consume individuals. Secondly, the moral career (Goffman, 1959a) requires the building of one’s character as superiors pass judgment. Workers need to exhibit energy, commitment and focus without the hint of fatigue. If they fail along these lines, they lose their moral standing within the institution. What is left is the need to portray the part of a committed worker as if on a stage. The need to act the part and put up a front so top management cannot see the conflicted individual underneath. Inevitably staying in character proved too difficult for the women in this study and things came to a head.

**Someone to Go to Bat For You**

In the pursuit of career mobility, one last theme emerged. No matter how intelligent they were or how hard they worked, all the women in this study felt reaching executive levels of management means defying the odds. While not calling it a glass ceiling, they each talked about the barriers to upward mobility. They witnessed very few successes and saw very few women make it to the upper echelons of agency management. Still, the most successful among them, the ones who moved up quickly and made the greatest strides, enjoyed one element in common - they had powerful sponsors who testified to their worth. These women accumulated the most social capital and converted this capital into sponsorship. Their sponsors’ interventions always changed the course of their careers and kept them in favor so long as the sponsorship continued.

Sponsors came in two types, internal and external. Internally, when others in the agencies’ inner circles decided to champion the careers of the women in this study, their careers
advanced. Because of their social capital, their willingness to play the game, their relatively masculine traits and their willingness to put work first, these women attracted the attention of others, specifically men, who were willing to go to bat for them and argue for their advancement, sometimes against the opposition of others. Many participants documented instances of sponsorship. For example, Nancy recalled a situation where a man in upper management recognized her value and sent her on an assignment to Europe. When she returned, she presented her work to the president of the agency, which provided visibility few others at her level received. She considered the support she received from this man to be “a gift” because it gave her upward career momentum that she may not have received otherwise. Similarly, Susan credited her champion as helping her become the youngest vice president at her agency. Joanne too impressed an important advocate at her agency, a man who touted her accomplishments and was in a position to influence her career trajectory. About him, she recalled, “He very positively influenced my life and my career.”

It is important to note that these men served as backers, not mentors or coaches. They interceded on behalf of these women and got them promoted. With the accumulation of social capital, these women forged relationships with these power brokers who, in turn, worked the system to help advance these women’s careers. Barbara provided valuable data in this area. She gave a detailed account of a man she worked for who held a powerful position in top management. He twice advocated for her, the first time his support resulted in her promotion to department head and the second time it resulted in her appointment to managing director of a satellite office. She described it this way:

I don’t think the founder would have made either of those things happen because he was known for being a misogynist. [After] five or six or seven years, I was clearly the heir apparent to run the department, but the promotion never really happened. But, I didn’t get to the point where I was demanding it and restless for it, it just seemed inevitable to me. It would have happened sooner, I think, if I had been a man.
But finally, it wasn’t until Bob (a pseudonym) came in to take over as head of the creative department, as chief creative officer. He and I formed a really great partnership as a strategic planner and creative, which is an important partnership. He basically went into the founder’s office and said, “She should be the head of the department and make that happen.” And, then it happened practically over night.

So, that is a good example of having a champion, and I also have learned over the last couple of years as I have gotten myself into wondering why there are not more women running agencies. Men are better at stuff like that. They champion other people, men and women. They are better at forcefully saying, “This person should have this job. Put them in that job. She is better at that than he is” (Barbara, 2013).

While endorsement and support came from insiders like those described above, endorsements also came from outsiders, particularly clients. From time to time, clients specifically ask for certain agency personnel on their accounts. When this happens, agencies comply without discussion because the clients control the money and the agency’s fees. As a result, they have a say in who works on their business.

The data collected for this study are rich accounts of women whose careers benefited from clients asking for them. Some women told of the agency president receiving calls from clients lauding the contributions these women made. Sometimes when the agency changed or rotated personnel a client would object. In these instances, the client would call the agency president to demand a reinstatement of their favorite account executives or creatives. Susan put it this way: “part of my good fortune was having great clients who wanted me at the table.” Susan considered it good fortune because she remained on key accounts longer, which gave her a greater chance to impact their business and be rewarded for it. Barbara remembered presenting at a new business pitch where a client paid her a compliment, which caught the attention of the agency president. She said, “I remember sitting in a meeting where we had won a piece of business on the spot and the client looked across the room and pointed at me and said, ‘when someone is that passionate about your business, you want them working on your business.’” This
type of declaration by a client in front of agency executives established Barbara as an
instrumental player and it fostered her reputation at the agency, providing her with an additional
accumulation of social capital and helping her establish her authority as a woman in a male
dominated culture. Bourdieu (1984) included the influence and support that comes from
professional backers as a form of social capital. Bourdieu considered these types of extreme
connections, as in Barbara’s case, to be “high social capital” (p. 110) which almost always leads
to “individual trajectory” (p.110). For Bourdieu, the accumulation of social capital results in
honor and respect, two ingredients he identified as critical to winning and keeping the confidence
of those in charge. We see this play out among the various women in this study who won the
favor of both clients and internal agency champions.

Summary

The women in this study were ambitious career women with aspirations of succeeding in
the advertising industry. As with their earlier years, they continued to perfect what it meant to
“act the part.” In the mid levels of management acting the part takes on an adjusted meaning.
Here women account executives need to be keen observers, reading the habitus correctly. They
need to be visible, forge relationships with the right people and learn to play the game to their
advantage. As part of this, women continue to work long hours, travel and prioritize their jobs
over their personal lives as a way of demonstrating their total commitment and ideal worker
status. In some cases, they impressed powerful people who championed these women’s careers
and helped them get promoted and gain greater responsibility at the agency. This situation
creates a day of reckoning. As we will see in the next chapter, the women in this study faced a
three way crossroads. Some tried to work within the system to get the flexibility they needed to
manage home and family. Others opted out. And a few remained at the agency on the fast track,
hiring outside help to manage the home front. We will now take a detailed look at long term
survival in the ad agency business and explore women’s experiences as they turned 40 years old and older.
CHAPTER SIX:

REFLECTIONS ON LONG TERM SUCCESS

Introduction

At the time of data collection, the careers of this study’s participants typically spanned 20-30 years. During their long careers, the vast majority of them (14 out of 15) attained vice president or group account director status within their agencies. Among these executives, three went on to become key members of their agencies’ leadership teams, reporting to their respective CEOs. One actually ran an agency as president, later moving to another agency as managing director where she ran the office. Because the majority of my participants attained the upper reaches of their agencies’ corporate structure, they witnessed the goings on of the inner circle and observed the factors that contributed to the long-term success or the demise of women who worked along side them. These experiences qualified them as excellent sources of data on what it takes for a woman to survive long term as an advertising account executive. Here it is important to define “long term.” For the purpose of this study, long term means a career of 18 or more years spent as an account executive and having attained the level of vice president.

In this chapter I will explore several topics related to what it is like for women to survive long term as advertising agency account executives. As the women in this study reflected on their time working for creative hot shops, the topic of ageism arose. The data suggest a gender bias exists in conjunction with this ageism. Secondly, I will review the key performance metrics that participants cited regarding long-term survival. Next, I look at the present day career status of the participants, most of who have opted out of the industry. I will review their reasons for leaving and discuss their reflections related to their decisions to exit the industry. Lastly, I will provide participants’ thoughts and ideas about the future. Some of the women in this study saw
progress on the horizon and believed their careers helped pave the way for greater equality. I begin by looking at the issue of ageism in advertising.

The Trap Door In the Floor

From its inception, the advertising industry has valorized youth. In fact, a review of the scholarly literature pointed to an early belief that agencies were “no place for anyone over 35” (Marchand, 1985, p. 45). This belief continues to this day, so much so that at least one agency represented in this study institutionalized this bias in the form of a mandatory retirement age of 55 years old. This stands as a full ten years younger than the typical retirement age in most American business organizations. When asked to recount the number of people in their agencies who reached the age of 50 or more, most women in this study could not recall a single person. Only one participant identified workers over 50 years old and these workers held positions as administrative assistants. Most participants remembered their agency leaders, again mostly men with the exception of a token woman to two, to be in their forties. Some participants felt clients consider anyone older than this as old fashioned and unfamiliar with the latest digital developments. Clients often look to agencies as experts on the most recent trends. Older workers jeopardize this impression and as a result, youthful executives remain at the helm. In Goffman’s terms, we continue to see evidence of the importance of the everyday presentation of self. Here, looking and acting the part of a digitally savvy trendsetter and early adopter of the latest technology offers clients (the audience) the assurance they are in good hands. One needs to play the role convincingly and win over the audience in order to receive the applause afforded to the most believable and persuasive performances.

Female advertising account executives question the lack of older role models in the advertising industry. The topic comes up in the course of everyday conversation and while some worry about it more than others, women feel the presence of ageist attitudes in the industry. For
example, among Jane’s peers, gallows humor allows for a little levity on an otherwise serious concern. Jane’s friends call the age vacuum the "trap door in the floor” a reference to the stage device for eliminating characters from the production. More than once during Jane’s remarks, she unwittingly made reference to Goffman-like theoretical concepts as she did in this instance. As she explained this remark, she also alluded to the importance of self-presentation and convincingly playing the part of a trendsetter. She explained it this way:

It seemed like there was a trap door in the floor of these agencies, where after the age of 40, women just disappear. I thought it was ageism. And, I think [there] is some ageism at play, but I don’t think people do it knowingly.

[One] aspect of why this job is so hard and [why] I don’t know if I will do it forever is you have to think young. Because pop culture is driven by trendsetters and early adopters who tend to be younger, whether it is technology, music, film, you name it. If you look at Silicon Valley, most of those companies are start ups with people in their 20s. If you can’t keep a fresh look and open to change, you’ll get passed by (Jane, 2013).

Neve agreed and provided added perspective, which also reinforced the importance of looking and acting young as a long-term survival strategy for women. She said:

There are no old people [in advertising]. Anytime you are 45 [years old] you are in the danger zone of being too old. I am figuring this out for myself because I am definitely in that zone. Everybody in advertising wants people that are young. They think young people have new ideas. They want young people [because] they want people that look good (Neve, 2013).

Importantly, many women felt a double standard existed at their agencies, meaning the age bias levied against the men was less frequent and less severe. In the agencies represented in this study, men reached older ages and survived longer than the women. Joanne noted:

The men tended to be older than the women. Because they were in control and men looking older doesn’t have the same perception as women looking older. I think that comes from society. I think that [it] is still true today. You can be an aging man and be more accepted than you can be an aging woman. Nobody expects men to die their hair. [But] that’s expected of women. And I don’t think that means that men age any more or less gracefully than women do. I think [in] society, women are expected to look good all the time and men can look like crap (Joanne, 2013).
Two possible explanations for the double standard emerged from the data. The first looks at the issue vis-à-vis sexuality. This concept starts with the idea that men prefer younger, better-looking women as sexual objects. Over time, these preferences have become institutionalized in the field of advertising generally. For example, the belief that young people provide the agency with fresh thinking. One corollary assumption is that “sex sells” is an attitude reserved for attractive, young women working in a creative hot shop. Along similar lines, the second theoretical explanation stems from the fact that once a woman reaches her 50s, she takes on a matriarchal persona, which men find unappealing in a business setting. Barbara used the term “mom leader” and related it to the satirical sketch on Saturday Night Live that ridicules older women for wearing blue jeans in an attempt to look hip, only to have it backfire. The skit players laugh and call these jeans “mom jeans” which tend to be baggy, high-waisted and out of fashion. Specifically, Barbara offered these comments about the double standard:

I think men can last longer. I think [for] an older woman it is harder. It is worse for older women than men. For all the reasons I am sure you already know. If men are going to have to “put up with” a woman, they would rather have a younger one because – this sounds terrible – but, she is easier on the eyes.

There are studies about that too. Even kids in grade school, the more attractive kids tend to get better grades. So, it is kind of human nature. There are plenty of women at both agencies I just mentioned, which I would call male-oriented cultures. [They] have a lot of busty attractive women; it is a criterion when they hire them. [They think] “I’d rather have a smart woman who looks more like a model than a smart woman that doesn’t look like a model in my shop.” So, for sure there is a lot of that that goes on.

And [there is a] weird psychological part of it too. I think men don’t want to be around their mother. And there comes a point where over 50 [year old] women start to take on the image, among un-evolved men, of a maternal [figure]. Who wants that? That’s not the image [you] want to project. It is that cool factor in the agency. [The] cool, modern, contemporary, “with it” factor.

There is nothing worse than the “mom jeans” stigma. [Men think] “I don’t want a ‘mom leader’ I want a ‘real’ leader” (Barbara, 2013).
The women in this study worked in creative hot shops where the habitus favored young workers. Within this culture, they knew their advancing age worked against them and they worried about the consequences. In order to neutralize the age bias, they compensated by turning in top performance. Four themes emerged in this area: strong work habits, specialized skills, stellar business results and staying on trend. I will now look at each and show their relationship to long-term success.

**Playing at the Top of Your Game**

**I Am Woman, Hear Me Roar**

The strategies for long-term survival collectively fall under the theme “playing at the top of your game.” Here, women operate under the belief that they need to out-perform their male counterparts to achieve equal recognition. All workers in an ad agency put in extremely long hours, but the majority of the men in these creative hot shops rely on non-working wives to manage the home front. None of the women in this study had stay-at-home spouses. While some had husbands whose jobs allowed for more flexibility, all the women prioritized their careers and those with children worked hard to avoid the “mommy track” label. To avoid mommy tracking, women overcompensate. For example, Barbara labeled it “hyper-performing,” Neve called it “extreme competence, being much, much better than any man in that position,” and Jane prided herself on always “over-delivering on everything.”

To accomplish this, women feel they need to go to extraordinary lengths to get noticed and be seen as equal. By over delivering they develop reputations as strong performers. When the men in top management gather in closed-door sessions to discuss assignments and promotions, women want their names to be associated with dedication and strong business results. As a result, they work extra hard to establish reputations as an ideal workers. For most women, especially those with children, this can cause conflicts at home, which they solve in two
ways. Most commonly they sacrifice sleep. For example, Jane established a routine that included returning emails after midnight. Rhonda used the dark hours before dawn to do the same. Secondly, women develop support networks at home. Some hire domestic workers to cook, clean and help with childcare. Others rely on spouses to carry at least half of the load at home. Nancy used a combination of both of these strategies, which she felt made a difference in her staying power at the agency. She said, “we had a nanny although she wasn’t a live-in nanny, she was a come-and-go nanny. And, my husband was incredibly helpful and supportive.” Here we see how women account executives with family responsibilities find ways to manage the home front in an attempt to survive long-term. Because many of their male colleagues enjoy immunity from domestic work, women in advertising experience a disadvantage. According to Williams (2000), the world of business has been built on a male-centric model, one that assumed a family structure where the male head of house worked outside the home for pay and the female head of house took care of all domestic matters on the home front without pay. This structure allows men to prioritize work over family. Within the advertising field these norms have been accepted for over a century. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that women account executives fail to recognize their subjugation. Bourdieu (2000) used the term “symbolic violence” (p. 167) to describe this type of domination. The root of the violence stems from misrecognition, which means misidentifying the situation for what it is and failing to see the hegemony. This leaves women disadvantaged when it comes to working side by side with male coworkers. Drawing on outside resources like nannies and housekeepers helps women compete in the male-dominated cultures of creative hot shops.

Show Me The Money

As we gave seen, long-term survival requires full dedication and long hours. But working extra hard, while important, needs to result in visible, measurable accomplishments worthy of
praise. Most often this means generating revenue for the agency or moving the client’s business forward in some quantifiable way. When this happens, economic capital in the form of revenue generated for the agency as well as end-of-year cash bonuses for the worker become part of the success equation. Barbara called it “fiscal, tangible evidence of my value.” The word “evidence” seems carefully chosen. Most of the women in this study agreed on the importance of irrefutable business results, results that could be measured in terms of dollars. This most often meant fees generated from client billings or winning a piece of new business. Helen considered it paramount to do what she called, “bring in the money.” Susan laughingly agreed by saying “if you don’t lock yourself into some revenue, your ass is grass.” As an example, Louise grew her account into one of the biggest and most profitable at her agency. This coupled with her long hours and hard work, created a stellar reputation within her department. Another participant went so far as to promise to her supervisors that she could sign on a number of new clients within a three-month period and she did just that. She applied herself, worked hard and ultimately beat her own projections. These types of tangible accomplishments offer an important advantage when building a long-term career. However, uncontrollable circumstances and market forces sometimes prevent continued growth and as a result, women develop additional work habits to help them survive, including developing specialized skills, which is discussed next.

**No One Else Can Do What I Do**

Developing specialized skills helps female account executives to position themselves as indispensible to their agencies. Developing a specific area of expertise can take several forms, for example several women in this study became known for their expertise in digital marketing during the early years of the digital revolution when these talents were rare. Others examples include brand development, direct response marketing and public relations. Having specialized skills can insulate women from the vulnerabilities associated with business downturns, client
turnover and the layoffs that result from them. Because of the ageism and gender biases in the advertising field, older women experience an acute vulnerability in this area.

Mary believed her digital skills “trumped all” and allowed her more latitude than other women, which she valued because she was a single mom and sometimes needed to rush home to a sick child. As Louise started to age, she felt the pressure mount but maintained that “women of my age as we get 15 years into it, 20 years into it, that’s where our specialized skills can sometimes save us.” Louise worked for a creative hot shop and had responsibility for a large account but she also had digital marketing skills, which few other account executives had at the time. Similarly, Joanne’s specialized skills gave her the confidence to stand up to an on-the-job gender issue, which she boldly confronted head on without fear of being fired. She claimed, “They couldn’t hire a lot of people to replace me. There weren’t a lot of people out there in the business doing what I was doing.” Possessing specialized skills coupled with over-delivering on results offers a winning combination for women account executives, one that enhances longevity in a youth obsessed business.

**Snapchat, Gossip Girl and Entertainment Weekly**

The last strategy within the “Playing at the Top of Your Game” theme comes from a willingness to reinvent one’s self by staying abreast of current trends and proving that one is young at heart and youthful in mind. Because many advertising ideas and campaign concepts stem from popular culture, advertising agency account executives need to know the latest developments in music, movies, fashion, celebrity gossip and social media. Women feared using outdated popular culture references that might reveal their age and prove their irrelevance. So, they worked hard to demonstrate the opposite. For example, when Neve first started in the industry, her supervisors often made reference to the *Dick Van Dyke* show, a hit television comedy of the early 1960s. Her unfamiliarity with this program led her to regard her supervisors
as out of touch. As she aged, Neve took steps not to fall into the same trap. She found ways to update her cultural reference point to keep up with younger workers. She said,

Pop culture is currency. I watch pop culture and kind of make sure I know what’s going on. More than I ever did [before]. I do it more consciously now. Because, I guess I was just in the middle of it before. . . There was a comfortable period where I could [reference] *Three’s Company*. Now, I know I can’t talk about *Three’s Company* or something that occurred before 1990. I [need to reference] something in the last 10 years – a character on a show or a metaphor or something like that.

[Starting out] people were talking about the *Dick Van Dyke Show* and I didn’t know anything about that. Now, I have to talk about *Modern Family*. I have to pay more attention to it now (Neve, 2013).

Here we see an example of why female account executives feel they need to consciously study pop culture. It offers them a way to stay relevant within the creative hot shop habitus and be accepted as a good fit. Keeping up on the latest music, films and television programs helps amass the much-needed cultural capital required to succeed in the field. Throughout their careers, women must strive to present themselves as youthful and aware of the recent trends and current events. This strategy remains critical to success in the later years just as it had in the beginning. In Goffman’s terms, this means studying one’s lines, learning the script and demonstrating one’s ability to stay in character over the long term. What once seemed easy and natural now takes more effort.

In order to stay current, two strategies emerged from the data, one serendipitous and the other deliberate. For the women with teenage children, staying abreast of popular culture is a happy accident. Women with teenagers observe the video games, smartphone apps and social media platforms used by their children and hone their knowledge of the latest trends and digital technology by way of their offspring. Jane offers a case in point,

When I talk to friends who are accountants who are wired to think about numbers, they’ll [say] “I haven’t been to the movies in three years.” I can’t even imagine that in my world. And, it helps to have kids. I’m the first person [in the know] not because I read about it in *TechCrunch*, but because [of] my kids. [They] Snapchatted before anyone heard about
it. So, I know about Snapchat and Instagram and all these things. It helps to have kids because they are up to speed on things (Jane, 2013).

Women without teenage children sometimes even seek out other young people as a deliberate way to stay current. They also turn to other sources to keep up to date on popular culture including reading gossip magazines and trend reports. They consider it an investment in themselves and their career longevity. Again Jane provides a valuable example:

I read a lot of publications, like *Entertainment Weekly* [to learn] about the latest bands and the hot new indy trends. About a year ago, I read about Alabama Shakes (a band). I read about them in a *Rolling Stone* article. Then, I read an album review in *Entertainment Weekly*. So, when I saw they were coming [to town], I said to my husband, “we need to go see them play.” It was the best concert I’d ever been to.

I like that little piece of discovery. I research all these little sites and magazines [and] certain TV shows like *Gossip Girls* and *Grey’s Anatomy*. They will take new emerging music. I enjoy it. After I get home from work, I’ll put together some play lists [from the shows]. I learned all these songs before they come on the radio. I see tons of movies. I make an effort (Jane, 2013).

As demonstrated by Jane’s account, women need to go beyond knowledge of current trends and the latest music. Simple awareness is too passive. Instead, women need to show they actively participate in popular culture and modern technology. Aging women account executives need to act the part of a more youthful worker, in an everyday presentation of self as Goffman (1959b) theorized. These women work hard, they research their roles carefully and then use rehearsals and dress rehearsals in preparation of convincingly playing the part. This means displaying one’s self on the front stage for others to witness and take note. Women go to movies and rock concerts they would not go to otherwise. As an industry talent recruiter, Leah said she looks for evidence of active participation in pop culture in the candidates she interviews. For example she looks to see if candidates are posting to Twitter or keeping a blog or have their own websites. In cases like this, acting the part helps make one more marketable, particularly older job seekers or aging workers who want to avoid being targeted for layoffs.
“Playing at the top of your game” means working extra hard, producing stellar results, and generating revenue for the agency. It also means honing specialized skills and staying on top of popular culture and the latest technology. Despite the years defying the odds, most of the women in this study chose to leave advertising. They had career momentum and achieved great success and yet, some felt unwelcome to stay and others felt a personal desire to find greater fulfillment elsewhere. I now look at the conditions that led to their desire to opt out.

**Opting Out**

As noted, advertising agencies retain very few workers over the age of 50. For women, the age of exit appears to be lower. In an effort to better understand the factors contributing to this phenomenon, the women in this study examined their own careers as well as the careers of their female coworkers and friends at other advertising agencies. At the time of this writing, only four of the 15 participants in this study remain employed at an advertising agency. The data collected on this topic is rich with explanation. When discussing what causes women to leave advertising, three concepts surfaced: burnout, lack of fulfillment and the imbalance between work demands and family obligations. I will now look at each of these in depth.

**Burnout and Downshifting**

After committing themselves to their work for 18 years or more along with the requisite long hours, sleep deprivation and cross-country travel that comes with those years of service, fatigue sets in to the point of exhaustion. These feelings contribute to one’s desire to leave the agency business. For example, Madigan characterized it this way:

> You know, “work hard-play hard.” These people worked their butts off. Advertising is hard. I think it is just a hard business. When you are in a service industry, it is difficult. Because you are at the beck and call of your clients. And, agencies are difficult. [It is] high pressure and high churn and burn. I think people just get tired of it (Madigan, 2013).
In describing this situation, Madigan maintained that her theory applied equally to men and women. Others felt women experienced burnout more readily than men. This belief stemmed from the fact that most of my participants’ male colleagues had stay-at-home spouses who took care of the home front. For women in advertising, especially for mothers, the added burden of childcare creates a tipping point.

Another element that contributes to women’s early exit from the advertising industry comes from financial freedom. By age 50, it is possible for women account executives to be financially secure, which allows them to downshift. This dynamic especially holds true among the women who entered the agency business in the 1980s before industry consolidation and buyouts took place. During the buyouts, women in the upper echelons of these agencies who owned stock received large buyout packages. Regardless of the circumstances, there exists a belief among participants in this study that after 18 or more years, women account executives probably earned enough money to leave the business if desired. In this scenario, leaving the industry takes on a voluntary nature. Mary painted this picture:

I think [women] become empty nesters and their kids are off in college. They’ve got some money. [They say,] “You know what? I’m done. I don’t have to work this hard.” Part of it is exhaustion because it’s such a busy industry. I think it is lack of appreciation. I think you get tired because it is such a fast-paced changing world. So they are leaving voluntarily (Mary, 2012).

Nancy’s first agency enforced a mandatory retirement age of 55 years old for all agency workers. At the time the agency was privately held. When asked about the rationale for this policy, Nancy hypothesized it as a reward for “all those long nights and hard trips. They felt that you’d worked hard for a long time and if they could get you out and into your second career of writing novels or painting or whatever you thought you wanted to do, you were going to be justly rewarded for having worked there for 30 years.” Similarly, Jane, who had just turned 40,
mentioned having met with her financial planner to put together a blueprint for retirement. She described it this way:

I think *US News and World Report* rated advertising account executive as one of the top five most stressful jobs. [I stay up] ‘til two in the morning every day ... I deal with babies [in the creative department] that need their way. It’s like, I’m a parent already. There gets to be a point where you’re like, “this is silly. This was fun while it lasted.” You get to a point where it’s enough.

I don’t see myself doing this past 50. Not that I am going to retire at 50 but I want the flexibility to. Because at that point, I’ve put so much into it that I’m just going to be tired. And at that point I still want to be attached to [advertising] but I don’t see myself doing this. [I will be] picking up freelance projects, consulting and doing what some of my previous bosses are doing now. [I want] to make enough money, and stay connected to it. But [I don’t want] the drama that is involved in it (Jane, 2013).

The work of advertising account executives consumes women, leaving them little room for outside interests, family or even sleep. In thinking about the lack of workers in their late forties and early fifties in advertising, women believe that burnout combined with financial security are the main factors. In Goffman terms it resembles a long-running play that has been on Broadway for many, many years. Actors get tired of playing their part night after night and begin to feel stale in their roles. The fun and excitement of opening night faded a long time ago. They feel it is time for a fresh cast of characters to come in and breathe new life into the ongoing production.

**Where Did The Glamor Go?**

As women gain more experience and as they mature in their roles at creative hot shops, they begin to question the importance of their work. As their responsibilities increase at the agency, their jobs call on them to diplomatically solve ever more complex issues for unhappy clients, and defuse conflicts with the creative team. Earlier in their careers, some of these same challenges seemed exhilarating and interesting. As they age, they take a critical look at the accounts they work on; perhaps even question the value some of these companies bring to the
world. For example, one participant questioned the value of working on sugared cereals. In short, the excitement and glamor experienced early in one’s career fades over time. With career growth comes wisdom, which causes some to wonder about the manipulative nature of the art of advertising. In speaking for herself, Susan put it this way, “you get to a maturation level where [you say] ‘this is crap.’ There is no good I am doing. It’s all about winning awards so I can sit in a white linen tablecloth restaurant in New York with a bunch of yahoos (the creatives) who really are doing this for their ego.” Olivia believed the women she worked with raised these questions more frequently than men. Olivia left advertising and remade her career in the area of executive coaching and development. When talking about her reasons she said,

> When I got out of advertising it was because I found helping people create their lives was more rewarding than creating brands. As I look at what’s driving that, [first] you have women raising kids and trying to balance values and priorities. And you are always on a plane; all your clients are out of town. You were gone a lot.

> At a certain point you have to ask, “Is what I am doing personally rewarding?” And women, I have found, have been more reflective about this, not that men are not, but for women that kind of thing comes up faster. “Am I making a difference in the world?” A lot of [what we do] is persuading and selling. One day [I said] “you know what? [I’m] not feeling it anymore. So, I’m going to go into growth and development [work] and go help [people].” It is the same strategic skill set – creating and understanding strategy and then how to apply it and what-have-you. For me [advertising] just started to be a little hollow (Olivia, 2013).

> The data suggest that women may more readily question the shallowness of the advertising business versus men. However, these issues of job content and fulfillment are exacerbated by feelings of overwork and for mothers these feelings include the angst brought on by the unending demands at home. Ultimately, women reach a tipping point, a point at which they feel it is too painful to continue working in a creative hot shop that demands too much and gives back too little. I will now take a closer look at this phenomenon.
The Day of Reckoning

Thirteen of the 15 women in this study were mothers. Most of them provided detailed accounts regarding the anxiety brought on by trying to maintain ideal worker status while simultaneously taking on at least half, if not more, of the burden of childcare. Six of these women left the agency business because of this stress. They each felt the demands of the job prevented them from being the type of mother they wanted to be. For example, in talking about her position in a creatively-driven agency, Olivia said, “It was demanding. You missed family a lot, which is ultimately why I [said] ‘I can’t have these values and so it is time to go.’” Jane too recalled one of her mentors and bosses in the business reaching this day of reckoning. She looked up to this woman and remembered the situation this way:

She had guns blazing, rising through the ranks at two agencies in Chicago and came here and was kicking ass. She was 30 years old. She said, “I’m not doing this and being a mom. So she took herself out. She took herself out of the running because she didn’t think she could do it. Part of that was she knew what it took to get [to this] point, so she knew what they expected from her to get to the next level (Jane, 2013).

Most women characterize the need to choose between family and career as justified, legitimate and voluntary. Because their roles call on them to service their clients directly, most accept the idea that client service requires an always-on approach. Barbara typified this sentiment when she said:

I witness a lot of it as voluntary. And I think it is because women’s priorities are different. Because all of a sudden they look around and go ‘I am just not willing to make the sacrifices that I need to make on my family and on my children and my own happiness and put up with all this nonsense.” So, I do think a lot of it is voluntary.

It is really possible [to make it work] as long as you decide you want to make it work. You can. I’ve listened to panels of women at these conferences, amazing and fantastic women who run agencies. I think one of the takeaways was there is no one way to do it. You have to do it in your style. But, it is really possible as long as you decide you want to make it work. You can. You can make it work in your own way.

[This is a] long way of saying I do think there is a lot of volunteerism in checking out. [Women are] probably reading the tea leaves or deciding they just don’t want to put up
with the stuff they know they are going to have to do to continue to claw their way ahead and make those compromises and play what is still very much a man’s game (Barbara, 2013).

As the women in this study considered their choices, they measured their agencies’ cultures to be unyielding and insensitive to the needs of working mothers. Barbara called it “reading the tea leaves” but Bourdieu (1984) considered this skill a product of living in the field. After a significant time in the field, workers have an internalize understanding of social norms and consequences. Their ability to predict outcomes improves with time. For the women in this study, most read the habitus and concluded there was little hope for cultural change within their agencies. They accepted the precept that advertising requires workers to be on call to service the demands of clients. While some of them enjoyed the work and received fulfillment from their careers, their reading of the habitus resulted in the belief that they had to select between family and career. Joanne offered this description regarding her decision to leave a job she loved:

I absolutely knew that I couldn’t do it and I mourned that job. Oh, I mourned leaving that job because I didn’t really want to leave that job. I loved that job. I remember sitting on this picnic bench just in tears on my last day because I had to leave. But, I also knew I couldn’t stay and do [what was required].

I watched a lot of my friends do it. I’d seen how this played out. It wasn’t good. I didn’t want to be that mom. I didn’t want to be that person who struggled and cried and tried to make it all work. It wasn’t so much about the agency or the people there. It was sort of the nature of the beast. I didn’t think they were going to be able to change it for me. They can’t change their business for one person. I didn’t really fault them as much as I said this is a culture (Joanne, 2013).

Interestingly, two participants in this study analyzed the landscape a little differently. One, Neve, was a mother. The other, Susan, was not. They both looked at the advertising agency operating model as a gender-biased system that unfairly forced women out while favoring men whose wives did not work outside the home. Neve put it this way:

[Women’s] jobs become more painful because women have more childcare responsibilities, so they are looking at [their] balance. And they [say], “I’m needed here and this is harder than it is for Johnny down the block.” You get those [performance]
reviews where [you’re told] “when you said that one thing you were a little too aggressive.” And you know that Johnny down the aisle doesn’t get that [in his review].

Johnny is having a better time at work and he has less responsibility because he’s got Betty at home dealing with it. So, women make different choices. They get passed over for things, they don’t get big raises. They don’t get invited to meetings. They don’t get the best accounts. They don’t get new business. It becomes a calculus they have to make. Do they want to keep doing it or not? (Neve, 2013).

When commenting on this subject, Susan recalled a long list of female colleagues who left their agencies because the advertising agency operating model failed them. Most of them, including Susan, now own their own firms, primarily small boutique consulting firms and small advertising shops. She offered these thoughts:

I am thinking of [the hot shop I worked for] and I’m thinking of Jill (a pseudonym) and she is on her own. I started my own business and Joyce (a pseudonym) went out and did her own thing and the girls from J & J Consulting (a pseudonym), they went out and did their own thing. And Jennifer (a pseudonym) did Jennifer & Company (a pseudonym). And Jacqueline (a pseudonym) went out and did her own thing.

I think there are two things [happening]. One is I think all of them are accomplished women who believed in whatever format they were thinking of for business as a better way to do it. And they did it. Some more successfully than others, but all I would say successfully because they are all thinking [about] a conscious choice to go do something different and not be held in by the rules and ramifications of corporate culture whether that be agency corporate culture or client.

It’s funny. It used to be everyone would defect to the client side. No one defects to the client side any more. They just go off on their own. It’s about independence (Susan, 2013).

Neve stands as another example of one of the women who left the agency business to start her own advertising research firm with another woman. Together they adjust their work hours to fit their needs and at the same time meet or exceed their clients’ expectations. Neve explained,

I tried a year at another agency thinking, “I’ll be fine.” The president talks a lot about family and all [agencies] do. He had a stay-at-home wife and his kids were grown and it was “it’s just this once, just this one time” that we are going to be staying late. And, that just happens to be three nights a week and Saturdays. Every week. And I just couldn’t make it work.
So that is when I embarked on this new experiment, which is - - I am doing my consulting business. And I am in charge, with my business partner and we can decide. And we still have a lot of problems with business and with clients and we have all those things and we have to do business development and stuff and we have to do payroll and all these things. But we get to say if we [want to be] busy.

We work at night but we don’t tend to work between 4:30 and 7:30 because that is the family witching hour and clients are fine with it. They don’t know that I’m upstairs and I’ve now got my [child] doing homework and I can now spend 15 minutes on business. They love it if you get back to them at 8 o’clock at night. They think you are burning the midnight oil. Makes them perfectly happy (Neve, 2013).

As the data collected from Neve and Susan demonstrate more and more women are beginning to think critically. By this stage of their careers, they have lived in the field for 18 years or more. As Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984, 1992) theory of practice suggests, these women have come to know the habitus so well that without effort they can predict what lies ahead. They know that the pain of being married to the job will get worse over time, not better. Typically, the habitus insinuates itself so deeply that agents fail to see any alternative. Bourdieu (2000) called this symbolic violence. Remarkably, some of the women in this study chose to question the habitus. They took a critical look at the ad agency mythology they grew up with and rejected some of the foundational elements. Lincoln (1989) maintains that when the experiences of subgroups differ sharply from the myth, they myth loses credibility. The myth’s authority suffers even more when the subgroup realizes that their treatment has been unequal and their privileges have been lesser. As Lincoln put it, “Critique flourishes in the gap between idealized images and lived realities” (p. 56). Resentment and discontent spawn critical reflection and new ways of thinking. As we can see, dissenters like Neve and Susan began to develop an alternative discourse and under these circumstances, Lincoln maintains there exists potential for real and meaningful change. For example, Neve looked at the client service myth and envisioned a way to be home for the all-important witching hour and still be able to meet her clients’ needs. Neve
and Susan’s new discourse helps women see the possibility of leaving the male-dominated world of the creative hot shop to start their own firms where they can find satisfaction in the independence that comes from setting their own schedules, selecting their own clients and determining how busy they want to be. Presently, the data only provide examples of this phenomenon on a small scale – only a few women in this study have done this and their firms are very small. What has yet to be considered is whether these businesses can grow into the creative hot shops that form the basis of this study while maintaining the flexible work environment enjoyed at their inception.

I now take a brief look at the careers of each of the 15 participants in this study to review their current status. I will show how, in the aggregate, their careers shifted over time and review the decisions they made as they aged in the industry.

Where Are They Now

At the time of this writing only four of the 15 participants remain active in advertising, and all four of them are younger than 50 years old. The eleven who left the business did so for the many reasons discussed in this chapter. Figure 6.1 shows the breakdown of participants’ current employment status.
Figure 6.1 Participants current employment status at the time of this writing.

The scholarly literature shows that success for men or women in hierarchical organizations, such as the advertising agencies in this study, hinges on conformity to ideal worker norms; norms that assume the worker can be “married to the job” with immunity from family obligations or other outside distractions (Acker, 1990, 1992; Williams, 2000). The male leaders in these agencies fit this description and as they sought out workers for promotion they replicated themselves. As Kanter (1977) asserted, “men who manage, reproduce themselves” (p.48). This form of homosocial reproduction left the women in this study at a disadvantage.

Thirteen of the 15 participants in this study were mothers who had family obligations outside of work. While none of the women in this study, mothers and non-mothers alike, felt their agencies offered them a healthy balance between work and personal time, the women with children experienced a particular kind of pain as described earlier. When this pain reached an unbearable level it prompted a day of reckoning. As Figure 6.2 shows, the women in this study sought solutions to minimize or eliminate the pain they experienced. For example, five of them...
negotiated a four-day work schedule for which they traded off their career mobility within the agency. Two of them left the account executive function and opted for support positions within their agencies. These positions also carried career mobility limitations. Six women remained on the fast track and hired domestic workers to help at home. In many cases, the first round of solutions either fell short of the participant’s expectations or triggered a career mobility trade-off that eventually seemed unacceptable given the hard work and extra hours these women continued to put in. Figure 6.2 outlines both these initial and downstream decisions. Each wave of decisions induced additional exits from the business. In all, eight of the 13 participant-mothers, or 60%, left the agency field, most commonly to start their own businesses. One participant left the industry for a client side job and returned to agency life about a year later. Based on the data, exiting the advertising business only to boomerang back seems extremely rare. Only one participant, Nancy, lasted long enough in advertising to retire from the industry. Nancy worked for her first agency for 24 years and retired at the age of 55. She later went on to work for another seven years for a well-known agency as a senior vice president before retiring completely. Lastly, out of the 15 women in this study, only four women are currently employed in large creative hot shops working as vice presidents or partners at their firms. All of them are in their mid-forties.
Figure 6.2 Study participant mothers. Career decisions prompted by the conflict between work responsibilities and family obligations.

Looking over the current career status of the participants as of the conclusion of this research, the data suggest the rarity with which females start and end their careers in the advertising field making it all the way to retirement. Instead, it appears women opt out as they begin to have families. They most commonly start their own small boutique consulting practices. Under this arrangement, they call their own shots, work the hours they want to work, and at the same time they take on projects that stimulate their curiosity and make use of their creative problem solving skills. As the women in this study looked ahead and forecasted how things might change for the next generation of female account executives, they saw subtle...
improvements toward greater equality in the industry. They saw small clues that the habitus is changing. I turn now to the subject of the future of advertising agency culture and provide thoughts on equality.

**Feminist Reflections on the Future**

Bourdieu (1977) asserted that while the habitus shapes one’s behavior, it does not completely determine the way actors behave. Individual agents use their free will to influence and re-shape the field. As the field evolves, so does the habitus. In essence, we see a two-way exchange, which explains how shifts in the habitus evolve over time. Many of the women in this study looked back over their careers and then took stock of the differences they saw for women working in the field now. One by one, they named several agencies with female CEOs. While female-led advertising hot shops remain rare, there are currently several prominent ones. Some participants cited the strides made by the feminist movement over the last 30 years as the reason women in today’s advertising agencies can ascend to top positions. A few participants, particularly the women closer to age 40, mentioned that the class ceiling is less of an issue now than ever before. They believe men in their 40s, the current generation of leaders, are less gender biased. As these men entered the advertising business, many came up through the ranks having had female supervisors and they learned to regard women differently than the men who came before them. Madigan offered this forecast and explanation, “Well, I think [the gender issue] could change in the next 20 years. The initial glass ceiling, I don’t see [it] as much any more. You see a lot more women in very senior roles. Years ago, you didn’t. I think we are ageing out of that [issue].” Others also believed the passage of time has begun to balance the roster at ad agencies. They believe their generation paved the way and that we are still in the early stages of seeing the payoff. These women believe that as they achieved positions of
authority, the next generation of men has come to view powerful women as a natural occurrence at agencies. Female led agencies, while still few, seem to have created office cultures that women prefer to work in. Barbara optimistically offered these observations:

Obliviously, there has been a huge increase in the number of women in the workforce in the last 25 or 35 years - - in my lifetime. And just [because of] the sheer numbers, there is a point at which guys say, “Okay. I guess that is it. I don’t see you as a woman, I see you as a colleague.” And I think men over 45 years old versus men under 45, there is a generational difference. I have a son who is 35 and his mindset and sensibilities are completely different than a 65 year old [male] CEO of today. He just grew up in a different context. So, it is societal.

I think people have to acknowledge that point – that social change happens slowly. You have to acknowledge that it takes time and you have to be patient. I am supposed to be doing in my lifetime what is going to benefit the next generation.

We are in the very nascent stage of a new age of women. I think it is going to be pretty exciting. Women are going to do things on their own terms. It is going to change society, and the business world and the economic world. In Silicon Valley, the women entrepreneurs have forged incredibly deep, powerful [female] relationships. This network helped propel their businesses forward because women just operate differently than men. Women tend to be really supportive of each other. They say, “I am going to introduce you to this person.” It is all about others and selflessness. So, we are at the beginning of a new age of women. Women are going to get themselves into top positions of influence and power. They are going to be able to do it in their own way.

I look at NewAge Agency [a pseudonym], it is one of the agencies that is run by a woman and there are far more women that work there. And, their culture is very, very different than most agencies. So when women are in positions of power and influence, they create a culture that is much more amenable to and much more supportive of women. It is kind of that simple. We are at the beginning of a new age (Barbara, 2013).

Barbara offered her thoughts in the context of the current advertising agency field and organizational structure, believing that as women climb the ladder to roles of power and influence, they will create a generalized working environment more conducive to women. Her concept assumes the bureaucratic, hierarchical nature of the agency remains intact. Barbara envisioned a future that included managerial and perhaps cultural changes but she failed to see a future that involved structural changes to the institution itself and the hierarchal way it is organized. In Barbara’s scenario an authoritarian figure remains at the top, a female figure that
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determines the ruling concepts. As Smith (1990) asserted in her standpoint theory, all humans view the world through a male-privileged and patriarchal lens where authority is concentrated from on high. This worldview has become so normalized, women fail to see it for what it is and instead interpret it as the natural order. Barbara’s comments reflect this. She was unable to envision a structure other than a top down flow of power. What’s more, because men currently control the ruling concepts within the advertising field, they decide the pace of change. As Lorde (1984) maintained it is unlikely “the masters tools will dismantle the master’s house” (p. 112).

However, Susan offered a different forecast. Susan believes technology is changing the need for a place-based business construct. As time goes on, she predicts a more flexible model will emerge where workers spend less time in bureaucratically organized offices and more time working remotely, offering them a little more flexibility and balance. For her, the desire for a more bureaucratic, place-based office stems from male authoritarianism. As women take charge, she predicts changes will occur. She characterized it this way:

There is a remarkably different business model and it is so nascent in its development. I believe it is going to be a full generation before it is actually truly optimized and actualized. This is a societal [norm] – I get up [in the morning] and go to a place, which is where I work. And that has been probably from the beginning of the industrial revolution. I go to a place where I am manufacturing and then I come home. And that is a social structure that is changing. It just is. I am dealing with it right now with my business partner. We need new office space. [I say], let’s downsize because eventually I am going to be doing a lot more from home. And that is so remarkably foreign. [My partner said], “No way. You have to be here because if you are not here you are not working.” That belief, if you are not here, you are not working, I believe is gendered.

If you are a communicator, you can have teams anywhere. There are times when you need face-to-face [meetings] but I don’t know if it is every single day. There is a different role for management – by communicating or Skyping. It is foreign and it is new and it is changing (Susan, 2013).

Susan unwittingly acknowledged a connection between patriarchy and the bureaucratic, top-down, place-based office habitus introduced in the industrial revolution. Her male business partner’s need to oversee workers and assure their compliance provides an example of the
patriarchy the radical feminists cited as the basis for the inequality women experience in settings outside the family unit, settings such as the workplace (Bryson, 1999; hooks, 1984; Howie & Tauchert, 2004). As seen in her partner’s reaction to the alternative she envisioned, patriarchy persists because men have a vested interest in its continuation. Because of the male history that underlies all business institutions, including advertising agencies, most people view business from the male point of view (Smith, 1987). This male standpoint becomes universal. Barbara provided evidence of this in her forward-looking view. She offered a vision of a more female-friendly advertising agency culture of the future, but her vision did not include a structural change in the way business is organized or conducted. Susan, on the other hand, envisioned something altogether different. She saw a dismantling of the centralized model in favor of a decentralized set up that allows workers, women and men, more freedom and independence.

The data offered by the women in this study demonstrate that as women in advertising gain knowledge and skills, they often leave the confines of the work hard, play hard habitus of the creative hot shop. They find fulfillment and balance by starting their own firms, servicing clients in a new paradigm that allows for more flexibility and greater harmony between work and home. As we look to the future, several scenarios seem to be evolving, all with an eye toward greater opportunity for women. Perhaps we will see the flexibility offered by the boutique firms replicated on a grander scale, or perhaps Susan’s prediction will come to fruition and the ad agency of today will fall by the wayside in favor of a decentralized, virtual set up. With the current habitus so firmly entrenched, the pace of change remains painfully slow. For now, female advertising account executives need to work at looking the part, acting the part, and being present on stage to manage their everyday presentation of self.
Summary

The women in this study worked tirelessly to cultivate their careers as advertising account executives. For most of them, their careers spanned more than 20 years. As they aged in an industry that valorized youth, they told stories of long term-survival and offered thoughts about what it takes to succeed against the odds. From the beginning they put in long hours, worked weekends and frequently traveled on client business. They generated revenue for their agencies by growing their accounts and by developing new business. In many cases they claimed to have worked harder than their male counterparts just to get equal recognition.

As they looked back on their careers, the women in this study accepted the idea that agency life requires an “all in” dedication. Very few questioned their agencies’ operating models. Most accepted the mythology that a job as an advertising account executive, like most service sector professions, means being at the beck and call of clients around the clock. Because of this, the mothers in the group believed the conflicts between their work and their home life represented personal problems rather than systemic issues that their employers needed to address.

Throughout this study, I used the interviewing process to probe for issues of power and dominance. I listened to participants’ accounts about hegemonic organizational structures that reinforced these power dynamics. In the next chapter I will provide insights into this and other issues that arose in this study. I will conclude by offering implications for ad agency leaders and the women who seek career advancement within this sector.
CHAPTER SEVEN:
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Background

I originally came to this research after a long career as an advertising account executive. During my many years in the industry, I observed very few people over the age of 40 and witnessed almost no one over the age of 50. Among the scant few workers who reached the upper age brackets, I noticed more men than women. I worked for several ad agencies over the years. Men held the highest positions in each with only a token woman here and there. I wondered if my personal experiences rang true in other agencies and questioned whether the age and gender biases that I experienced might be structural and pervasive throughout the industry.

An initial review into existing research yielded very little. The sparse available research included a few historical biographies of industry titans as well as chronicles of the milestones in the American advertising field. On the whole, this body of knowledge fell into the realm of popular nonfiction rather than scholarly inquiry. Only a few academic studies existed, each conducted by men. These studies covered the European market and focused on just one area of advertising, the dynamics within the creative department, which is inhabited by art directors and copywriters. My research fills an important gap. I set out to investigate how ad agency culture affects the long-term careers of women account executives as they age. In so doing, I looked at the factors that affected women’s decision to enter the business and how they navigated the male-dominated ad agency culture. I explored the strategies women used to get ahead and survive long term in a culture that favors youth. Importantly, my research provides a much-needed female point of view on a topic that disproportionately affects women but has only been studied by men.
I conducted 15 individual interviews among women 40 to 60+ years old. Their collective experience spanned 26 different agencies in seven of the largest cities in the United States. This wide ranging set of perspectives is one of three key strengths of this study. The second strength comes from the theory building methodology. Due to the exploratory nature of this research, I kept the interviews fluid and unstructured, which allowed me to build theory from the ground up. The third strength stems from the thick, rich description the participants provided regarding the particulars of their situations. They showed great courage by revealing many personal details about themselves, their families and their careers. Their wisdom and insightfulness shows in the data presented here.

Prior to starting this research and because of my personal experiences, I made a number of assumptions worth pointing out. First, I assumed that for women, looking the part (young, beautiful, thin, stylishly-dressed, well-accessorized, the latest hairstyle) played a dominant role in determining upward career mobility and long-term career success. While the data showed that looking the part fulfilled one of the success criteria, especially early in a woman’s career, I uncovered a far more complex picture, a very nuanced map filled with an intricate set of traits and behaviors. It included a hierarchical organizational structure that allowed for the advancement of only one type of worker, an ideal worker with immunity from family obligations. Secondly, I found that gender issues played a much bigger role than originally expected. Data detailing episodes of sexual harassment abounded with each participant offering exacting details about her experiences. Thirdly, I assumed that as long as a woman possessed the requisite intelligence and leadership to perform her job, what remained was simply bit of packaging to convince senior leaders of her overall fit.

In other words, I believed a woman could fake the look so long as she turned in strong business results. I underestimated the power of the advertising field and the manifestation of the
habitus in creatively-driven hot shops, which readily exposes the imposters who are not “all in.” Lastly, I feared that my fixation on ageism in advertising might rest in my imagination and be blown out of proportion due to my personal encounters with it. Colleagues seemed never to discuss age or complain about workplace ageism and I thought my personal experiences might prove isolated. What I found confirmed the opposite.

**Findings and Conclusions**

Based on the data presented in this research, I formulated a three-part theory to help explain the ways women succeed as they age and as they climb the hierarchical organization structure in creatively-driven ad agencies. The first tenet involves the importance of the fish-in-water fit between the individual woman and the agency’s habitus. Women need to demonstrate this fit even before entering the field and then maintain this fit through the duration of their career. The second component involves Acker’s (1990) assertions regarding the rare female who successfully navigates the male-dominated business world to reach a position of power. Acker contended that these successful women take the shape of a “biological female who acts as a social man” (p.139). The participants in this study possessed masculine leadership traits and made the men they worked with feel comfortable rather than threatened. They found ways to increase their visibility with key players in the organization and they conformed to ideal worker norms. The third and last element of the theory involves turning in stellar business results. Simply put, the women in this study overachieved. In so doing, they convinced at least one key supporter, either a client or an agency executive, to champion their career, which broke down barriers and helped them rise to the top. I will now look at each of these elements in more depth.

**Importance of Habitus**

Advertising agencies close themselves off to the masses. Entry commonly occurs upon college graduation. Only rarely will a creatively-driven agency hire a woman from outside the
field at a mid-level or above. Entry also requires the leveraging of social capital. This study demonstrated numerous examples of women who networked their way into an interview and then converted this social capital into job offer. Creative hot shops represent tightly knit, closed clubs containing a firmly rooted and unforgiving habitus. This habitus requires a woman to look and act the part at every stage of her career. Women in advertising wear fashionable clothes, they display a distinctive style that reflects a trendy youthful look, and they are thin. In short, these women look the part that our culture associates with an advertising account executive. Just as importantly, women who get hired by these hot shops live the life of a stereotypical advertising person. These women exude charm in social situations. They possess natural leadership traits and intelligence. Importantly, these women live and breathe all things advertising, showing passion for the field and knowing every little detail about the latest campaigns. Simply put, young women account executives in creatively-driven hot shops act that part. This ideal presentation of self provides access to an otherwise exclusive club.

Importantly, for a woman to succeed, move up and survive long term in a creatively-driven ad agency, she must internalize these dispositions until they become a naturalized part of her core being. Here, Bourdieu offers the best theoretical precept as a starting point for my theory. For the women in this study, the creative hot shop habitus deposited itself deep within them. This made it possible for them to act and react in intuitive ways that cemented their place within their organizations and confirmed their natural fit within the agencies that hired them. While Goffman’s stage play metaphor offers one construct for thinking about looking and acting the part, the data in this study suggest that one cannot fake this presentation. Only sincere actors, not cynics, rise through the ranks of the advertising agency corporate ladder. In this context, I advise against the use of this study as a self-help guide for women seeking career advice or for women looking for a prescribed recipe for success. The recipe matters not because imposters
will be exposed. This is because the field deposits itself in actors who in turn exhibit lasting
dispositions and propensities to think and act in ways compatible with the habitus. As Bourdieu
(1992) maintained, it is like a fish in water where the fish is unaware the water exists. In the case
of creatively-driven advertising agencies, the water takes on a decidedly young and male ethos.
One’s fit and comfort level with this habitus must match naturally and organically; it cannot be
forced. Successful women in advertising understand the codes of the industry on an intuitive
level and they live them out in their daily lives effortlessly. They make it look easy.

Masculine, Ideal Workers

The organizational chart of most advertising agencies resembles a pyramid with many
entry-level jobs at the bottom and fewer jobs at each successive level on the way up. Using
Acker (1994) and Williams (2000) as a foundation, my theory suggests the pyramidal
organization structure poses the single biggest barrier to women account executives’ success. To
leap from one level to the next, women need to take on unambiguous male traits. They need to
make men feel comfortable by returning banter and by diffusing episodes of sexual harassment
by laughing them off. They need to be assertive, ambitious, decisive, comfortable stating and
supporting their opinions, and willing to take a stand in the face of opposition from their male
supervisors. The data suggest they need to display breadwinner status and demonstrate their
commitment to the job by working long hours, volunteering for new business assignments and
minimizing any distractions, at home or otherwise, that might call their dedication into question.
They need to compete on par with men whose wives do not work. By performing in this way,
women accumulate social capital and catch the eye of agency power brokers, who watch over
these women, request them on their accounts and promote them to higher levels of responsibility.
This type of environment feeds on and rewards competition between individual workers and
minimizes or discards the value of the collective action that comes from work done by collegial
teams. Until such time as a new organizational structure replaces the pyramid with a shape more hospitable to women, women will only succeed in these established agencies if they deny their biology and act like men. By taking on ideal worker status and attracting the attention of power brokers who can promote them in the system, women can succeed and climb the ladder to a long and prosperous career.

**Overachievers**

Ultimately, women who reach the top create lasting and tangible value for their agencies. In so doing, they amass all four types of capital espoused by Bourdieu – social capital, cultural capital, symbolic capital and economic capital. To achieve this level of success, they need to participate in new business pitches and contribute to the winning strategies that secure new accounts. They take on pivotal roles in these pitches and hold a seat at the table on par with the men. They push boundaries and take risks. They grow their current accounts in measurable ways. When the accounts they work on win awards, they, along with their agency, gain stature and status.

Importantly women who succeed learn to play the game within their agencies. They adeptly identify the informal and underlying systems of power and never run afoul of the politics. This requires three attributes: skill, an accurate reading of the habitus and energy. The skills include keen powers of observation to uncover and decode management’s hot buttons. Analytical skills assist in understanding the informal reward systems. One needs to identify which power brokers to get close to and how best to accomplish this goal. Here the accurate reading of the habitus proves indispensible and the result is the accumulation of the social capital necessary to get ahead. As the women in this study pointed out, the skillful management of interoffice politics takes on a central role in managing one’s career. Women provided data on “putting a foot wrong” (Neve, 2013) and ignoring the game to the detriment of their careers. All
of this takes energy. Women need to apply themselves to these efforts and take the time to
diligently work the system.

Lastly, women need to work at staying current and on top of popular culture trends and
technological innovations. This allows them to convincingly present themselves as young at
heart and youthful in mind. The women in this study offered many suggestions on the different
forms this can take and the strategies needed to get there. In order for women to stay current
they need to read magazines, watch movies, and download music. They need to play video
games with their teenage children. They need to learn about new social media platforms by
talking to the young people around them. They need to subscribe to trend reports. In short, they
need to work at it and never lose their edge. In performing in this way, by playing the game and
achieving strong and irrefutable business results, ultimately those in power take notice. When
good fortune sets in, this notice turns into championship and advocacy. In order for women to
succeed long term, it helps to have a sponsor who can demand justice and clear the path to
success.

Figure 7.1 outlines the career path taken by successful account executives in creatively-
driven advertising agencies. Overall, the shape of this diagram reflects the pyramidal structure
of the bureaucratic organization. The bottom part of the pyramid depicts entry level and outlines
the elements of looking and acting the part that prove so key in getting into the field to begin
with. Each level builds on the next. At mid-level, women need to maintain and retain the skills
and traits associated with entry (looking and acting the part) while at the same time mastering the
habitus. Here, women strive to stay competitive with their male counterparts by proving their
status as ideal workers. The goal is to win over the power brokers that can make or break
careers. While maintaining and honing these skills, the most successful women turn in stellar
business results, play the game well and work at remaining relevant in an ever-changing world.
Here the aim is to find a sponsor or champion in the system that can advocate and ultimately make the difference in long-term survival.

**Figure 7.1** Female account executives path, ascending the advertising agency hierarchy

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**Limitations**

This research posed several limitations. First, I started with convenience sampling. As a result, some of the women in this study occupied the same professional network. Some of them worked at the same agency at the same time. Eventually, I used a snowball approach, which opened up the study to new women in diverse networks. Still, approximately half of the women in this study were part of overlapping networks in one way or another. Secondly, while the age distribution of the women in this study spread itself fairly evenly across the range from 40 years old to just over 60 years old, the sample size at either end of the spectrum proved too small to feel confident about drawing any conclusions about intra-cohort differences that might be
attributable to age. Third, while the number of agencies represented in this study totaled 26, only one was located on the West Coast. As a result, the western area of the United States is under-represented. Lastly, I chose not to provide a draft of this analysis to the participants prior to publication. While they each had a chance to read, edit and approve the transcript of our interview, I offered them no opportunity to comment on my emerging theory and conclusions. Such a review might have enhanced my theory building and contributed to the robustness of this study.

**Implications for Theory, Research and Practice**

**Implications for Theory**

As an exploratory study on a topic with very little scholarly literature and virtually none conducted in the United States, this study opens up a new line of inquiry. Much of the data uncovered in this study included elements of discourse theory and the precepts discussed by Lincoln (1986, 1989, 1994, 2012). Rituals and slogans appeared frequently in the accounts offered by participants. For example, happy hour celebrations in and out of the office and formal office parties for holidays that included red carpets and paparazzi. Another example includes the use of slogans such as “work hard, play hard.” Additionally, the data contain many accounts of organizational myths, particularly surrounding the long work hours and recollections of 70-hour workweeks. While the analysis provided in my research touched on discourse theory, a more thorough investigation into ad agency culture through the lens of discourse theory is in order.

As was noted in Chapter Five, some of the women in this study self-identified as tomboys. As an emerging theoretical area, tomboyism provides a perspective worth exploring in greater detail in the context of women in leadership within the advertising industry. Little is known on tomboyism and even less has been studied regarding how it relates to success among
females in male-dominated industries. The scant amount of research available dates back several decades and would benefit from a fresh look.

Similarly, accounts of male domination and sexual harassment abound in this study. When participants elected to edit their transcripts, they most commonly eliminated data regarding the unwanted solicitation by the men in their offices. Even now, years later, they feared they might be identified through these accounts. They felt intimidated and as a result we removed much data from this study. Feminist scholars such as Smith and others help explain why women endure the many day-to-day indignities commonly experienced by women in agency life and why the pace of change has been so slow. The advertising industry started out as and remains a patriarchal institution. Younger women in the field, a part of the third wave of feminism, look upon issues of gender equality very differently than their older counterparts. As the new generation of women comes up through the ranks, their thinking begins with the premise that the gender gap has narrowed. They think in terms of equality of numbers and fail to see the cultural and structural issues that are so prevalent in the advertising industry. Women in advertising agencies seem to accept what Smith (2005) called bifurcation of consciousness, where women assume a man’s game as given and rather than change it they seek to compete within it and adapt to it. Feminist theory, while included in this study, represents a significant opportunity for additional theoretical analysis of the advertising industry.

The emerging theory of aesthetic labor offers an interesting interpretive lens for studies involving advertising agencies. Until now, studies using aesthetic labor theory have focused on high-end fashion retailers and luxury hotel businesses where image drives purchase. In both of these industries, aesthetic labor theory suggests employees serve as brand ambassadors. Here, looking and acting the part takes on a branded meaning. With the advertising industry’s fixation on brand building and with the amount of time and money advertising agencies spend on their
posh office spaces, it logically follows that their employees perform a similar role in the overall presentation of brand image. Studying the advertising industry, especially creatively-driven agencies through this lens might prove fruitful for future studies on the topic.

**Implications for Research**

The research performed for this study focused on creatively-driven agencies only. All of these agencies employed hundreds of people in highly stratified organizational structures. In each case, evidence of Goffman-like total institutions was present. These agencies teemed with examples of Lincoln’s theoretical concepts of myth, ritual and discourse. In all cases the habitus was strongly evident, giving off clues of how to dress and how to behave. This begs several questions worthy of future research. For example, is the habitus any different in more traditional agencies that do not enjoy creatively-driven reputations? Do these agencies employ the same “work hard, play hard” discourse and engage in the same level of after-hours drinking rituals? Similarly, a question remains as to what extent is the everyday presentation of self and the level of dramaturgy different between large agencies and small boutique-like shops?

Of the 26 agencies represented in this study, 25 of them employed male CEOs. The data collected here provides no opportunity to understand the difference in dynamics between male-led agencies and female-led agencies. To what extent is the bifurcation of consciousness (Smith, 2005) a factor in female led agencies? How does the discourse change? While the number of ad agencies run by women remains small, their numbers are increasing. A study that contrasts male and female led agencies would add to the body of knowledge on this subject. Lastly, many women in this study felt strongly that men and women in advertising experience some of the same biases, especially regarding lookism and ageism. Many women also felt that the criteria for selection and advancement within their agencies held equally for men and women. Given these data, a parallel study among men would provide valuable insight into whether men
experience the habitus differently than women. In addition, the advertising industry holds a notorious reputation for excluding people of color. While the issue has received publicity and coverage in the trade and national press, scholarly researchers using critical race theory is conspicuously absent.

**Implications for Practice**

The women in this study spoke of numerous biases in the hiring practices at the agencies where they worked. Paula’s story about the woman in the white shoes comes to mind. As practitioners review their hiring policies and consider the criteria they use for screening job candidates, this study offers several insights for reform. While continuing to screen for fit seems valid, the parameters of fit require examination. When modes of dress and hairstyle enter the selection process, it stands to reason that the system unfairly disqualifies worthy candidates. Next, criteria for career advancement warrant a review. Females make up 50% or more of the mid-level workers at most advertising agencies. As these women establish their careers and decide to have families, they encounter a day of reckoning. In an attempt to balance their career and family, they often opt out. When this happens, agencies lose top talent and a much needed female perspective. Just as importantly, their leaving perpetuates the gender-biased status quo. Turnover places undue burden on the agency both economically and organizationally. In order to prevent this turnover and balance the gender count in the upper reaches of the agency, ideal worker norms and the pyramidal, bureaucratic organizational structure require an overhaul. Creative work seems a misfit for the hierarchical organizational configuration that most agencies employ. Great ideas come from working in teams and brainstorming with colleagues. Yet hierarchical organizations foster individualism and person-against-person competition. Agencies pride themselves on their creativity and yet so far, they have failed to come up with a creative solution to a persistent problem of female turnover in the middle ranks. Lastly, agencies need to
take a critical look at the age distribution across their employee base. Baby boomers make up the largest sector of the population and yet agencies under employ from this demographic. Agencies link their judgments about older workers to beliefs that these workers lack energy, remain behind the times in adopting new technology and are woefully out-of-date when it comes to popular culture. While the youngest workers might thrive in these areas, they often falter when it comes to understanding how to strategically apply their ideas to solve clients’ business issues. Here the pairing of workers into diverse generational teams provides the best of both worlds. In summary, agency executives and their human resource departments need to take a critical look at their practices from top to bottom. Agencies valorize youth. They remain bastions of male dominance. The time is right to make progress against both these issues.

**Final Words**

The participant-mothers in this study struggled with competing priorities and often felt torn. As a result, many of them found solutions that required leaving their creatively-driven agencies and the jobs that brought them fulfillment and satisfaction. As they talked about it, they characterized their decision to leave the industry as voluntary. This occurred because the women in this study accepted the premise that agency work justifiably required them to commit all or nothing. I strongly advise women to question the assumption underlying this premise. Here, according to Bourdieu (2000) women misrecognize the situation. The habitus has insinuated itself so deeply within female account executives they have difficulty envisioning creative solutions. This represents insidious side of the habitus and it results in symbolic violence, a term used by Bourdieu (2000) to describe domination. Bourdieu (2000) defined symbolic violence as “the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (p. 167). He believed domination stems from misrecognition of the type demonstrated by the women in this study.
For meaningful change to take place, women account executives need to challenge the status quo. They need to reject the pyramidal shape of the organizational charts and reject ideal worker norms. They need to come up with an alternative way to organize their work and lobby management to test new ways of working. Even if these new ways start out small, on a project or as an experiment, the exploration needs to begin soon so learning can take place. By deciding instead to opt out, women not only leave the status quo intact they also unwittingly reinforce and strengthen it. Awareness of the situation provides the first step. In the process of collecting data and working with the participants in this study, I strove to apply a critical research interpretive framework. I wanted to go beyond understanding what was happening and why. I also hoped to transform and empower the participants in this study. I hoped to suggest new ways of thinking and hoped participants might begin to question the dominant ideology. As long as women accept ideal worker norms, they will continue to subscribe to mentoring as a solution for helping them climb the corporate ladder. Mentoring typically helps women tap into their inner masculinity so they can succeed at a man’s game. With this research I hope to begin the hard work of questioning the man’s game and starting to dismantle it. Without additional follow up with each of the participants in this study, I remain unsure as to whether this research sparked their critical thinking. I can only hope that I have made some progress toward this important research goal.
References


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study.
Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

| Project Name                                                                 | Looking the Part: How Hot Shop Advertising Agencies’ Commodification of Image Affects Older Women in Advertising | IRB Tracking Number | 379382-1 |

General Information Statement about the study:

The premise behind this study begins with the belief that ad agencies are branding experts and that the most successful agencies first and foremost practice their branding skills on their own brand. For example, ad agencies carefully tend to their image by focusing on and doing what it takes to win prestigious awards. They also spend large amounts of money on their impressive office spaces to showcase their creativity and inspire those around them.

This study hypothesizes that agencies use this same attention to branding to guide their hiring practices and staffing decisions and just as importantly, that in order to get hired, fit in and succeed in an ad agency, women develop and maintain personas that conform to the youthful, highly stylized nature of the business.

Through in-depth interviews this study seeks to better understand the thought process women account executives go through as they interview for jobs and ultimately get hired in advertising and to better understand the decisions they have made along the way to help advance their careers once employed by an agency.

You are invited to participate in this research.
You were selected as a possible participant for this study because:

This study will provide a voice for an unstudied group of advertising workers – 40+ year old women who have in the past or who are currently working as account executives at an advertising agency considered to be a "creative hot shop." For the purposes of this study the term "creative hot shop" refers to firms that consistently win awards and receive much press coverage highlighting their success in the creative arena.

Study is being conducted by: Diane Fittipaldi
Background Information
The purpose of the study is:

For more than a century, the ad agency industry has failed to make significant progress in diversifying its workforce. While many industries found ways to combat the gender bias common in business, many ad agency leaders continue to reproduce a male-dominated, youthful workforce that embodies a stylized and somewhat stereotypical creative ethos. Due to the ambiguous nature of what constitutes creativity, agencies rely heavily on aspects of self-presentation and image in making personnel decisions. Emerging theory (called Aesthetic Labor Theory) shows that in certain industries, such as high-end fashion retailers, employers seek out workers whose appearance matches the company’s brand image.

This study seeks to further the development of Aesthetic Labor Theory by exploring its extension to the field of advertising. At the same time, this study will provide a voice for an overlooked and often marginalized sector of the advertising workforce – 40+ year old women account executives who to this point have gone unstudied with their voices neglected from theory development.

Procedures
If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to do the following:

State specifically what the subjects will be doing, including if they will be performing any tasks. Include any information about assignment to study groups, length of time for participation, frequency of procedures, audio taping, etc.

You will be asked to participate in an in-depth one-on-one interview that will last approximately one hour. You will be asked to describe the organizations you have worked for and provide descriptions of these agencies. You will be asked about junctures during you career where you have sought advancement or promotions as well as about times you may have sought to change agencies all together.

As an exercise during the interview, I will ask you to sort a series of photographs. This exercise will seek your opinion on which of the people depicted in these photos best represents those most likely to succeed in ad agency culture.

After your interview, you may or may not be asked to take your interviewer on a tour of you agency so that she can better understand the environment you work in.

Participation in all of these activities is voluntary and you may choose to participate in all or in just some of these activities depending on your comfort level.
### Risks and Benefits of being in the study

The risks involved for participating in the study are:

While your identity will be protected through a pseudonym of your choosing and while the names of any agencies you mention will not be used, it is possible that any details you provide regarding specific events may be recognizable to others who were present during those events or who have since heard about it from others.

You will be provided a copy of this consent form which will contain your name and identity. If you misplace or lose this form, your participation in this study may be revealed.

The direct benefits you will receive from participating in the study are:

One of the goals of this study is to add a female perspective to emerging theory. By telling your story and probing deep for the meaning behind some of your career experiences, you may come to better understand and appreciate what you and others like you have been through. This study may cause you to think critically about your experiences, shed new light on your past and provide you with a new energy with which to analyze your past experiences. In the process you may experience enlightenment and/or empowerment that may transform the way you think about ageism and gender bias in advertising.

### Compensation

Details of compensation (if and when disbursement will occur and conditions of compensation) include:

**Note:** In the event that this research activity results in an injury, treatment will be available, including first aid, emergency treatment and follow-up care as needed. Payment for any such treatment must be provided by you or your third party payer if any (such as health insurance, Medicare, etc.).

Participation in this study is voluntary. Monetary compensation will not be available.

### Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report published, information will not be provided that will make it possible to identify you in any way. The types of records, who will have access to records and when they will be destroyed as a result of this study include:

Your name will not be used in published accounts or transcripts used for this study. You will be asked to provide me with a pseudonym which I will use throughout this study. The name of any advertising agency you chose to discuss will not be used when transcribing your interview.

I will record your interview using an MP3 recorder and use a password protected laptop.
computer to transfer the voice files to secure cloud storage at the University of St. Thomas, which will further be protected behind a password of my choosing. I will change this password several times during the course of my study to enhance security. I will personally transcribe the MP3 files, which will eliminate the need for a research assistant thereby increasing the protection of the data. I will use the secure cloud storage at the University of St. Thomas to house all the data, transcripts, drafts and files related to this study. Once study is complete and published, all original data will be transferred to USB drives with the source files deleted from the St. Thomas cloud storage. The USB drives will be stored indefinitely in a rented safe deposit box at USBank.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study**
Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with any cooperating agencies or institutions or the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time up to and until the date\time specified in the study. You are also free to skip any questions that may be asked unless there is an exception(s) to this rule listed below with its rationale for the exception(s).

There are no exceptions.

Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you

**Contacts and Questions**
You may contact any of the resources listed below with questions or concerns about the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher name</th>
<th>Diane Fittipaldi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher email</td>
<td><a href="mailto:dfittipaldi@stthomas.edu">dfittipaldi@stthomas.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher phone</td>
<td>612-860-8625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Advisor name</td>
<td>Dr. Donald LaMagdeleine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Advisor email</td>
<td><a href="mailto:DRLAMAGDELEI@stthomas.edu">DRLAMAGDELEI@stthomas.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Advisor phone</td>
<td>651-962-4893</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UST IRB Office</td>
<td>651.962.5341</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Statement of Consent**
I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I am at least 18 years old. I consent to participate in the study. By checking the electronic signature box, I am stating that I understand what is being asked of me and I give my full consent to participate in the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of Study Participant</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Electronic signature</td>
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<tr>
<th>Print Name of Study Participant</th>
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<tr>
<td>Signature of Parent or Guardian (if applicable)</td>
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<td>Print Name of Parent or Guardian (if applicable)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Signature of Researcher</td>
<td><em>Electronic signature</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Print Name of Researcher</td>
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INTERVIEW DISCUSSION GUIDE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Name</th>
<th>Looking The Part: How Hot Shop Ad Agencies' Commodification of Image Affects Older Women in Advertising</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher Name</td>
<td>Diane Fittipaldi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB Tracking Number</td>
<td>379382-1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview Discussion Guide
What follows is a list of questions that will guide the in-depth interviews with participants of this study:

Warm Up and House Keeping
- Welcome and thank you for participation
- Brief description and reiteration of the overview of the study
- Conversation will be recorded (provide explanation and rationale)
- Selection of pseudonyms

Part One: Career History and Background
- How did you come to select advertising as your chosen career path?
- Why did you select account management as your advertising career track?
- Tell me the process of how you got hired by << Name of Hot Shop Here >>
- Describe the culture at << Name of Hot Shop Here >>. [Probe for elements of discourse, myths and/or rituals]
- How did you feel about working there?
- How did your feelings about working at << Name of Hot Shop Here >> change over time?
- How would you characterize << Name of Hot Shop Here >> brand (corporate) image in the marketplace
- Describe the typical account manager at << Name of Hot Shop Here >>. [Probe for dress, style, look, age, gender]. Copywriter? Art Director?

Part Two: Agency Leadership and Career Advancement
• Describe the top echelon and senior leadership team at << Name of Hot Shop Here >> [probe for male/female dynamics. Probe for age descriptions]
• Describe what it takes to have a long and successful career (survive) at << Name of Hot Shop Here >>
• Describe what it takes to get ahead at << Name of Hot Shop Here >>
• What strategies did you use to get along and fit in?
• What coaching or advice did you receive (either formal or informal) that helped you figure out how to get along and fit in?

Part Three: Age, Gender and Style
• The advertising business expands and contracts quickly with new business wins and losses. During times of contraction, which staff members do you consider to be the most vulnerable for job loss and why?
• What advice do you have for tenured or senior account managers who want to survive at << Name of Hot Shop Here >>?
• What differences do you see in the way women account managers are treated at << Name of Hot Shop Here >> compared to me?
• What differences do you see in the way account managers over 40 are treated compared to younger account managers?
• Now that you are over 40 years old, how do you see your advertising career playing out?
• What circumstances caused you [or would cause you] to leave << Name of Hot Shop Here >>?
• If you could change one aspect of << Name of Hot Shop Here >> what would it be and why?

Wrap Up
• Reflecting back on this interview, what surprised you most about what we discussed?
• What if anything did you learn from our discussion?
• What questions would you like to have been asked that I did not address?
• What questions do you have for me as the researcher on this study?
• What final comments would you like to make?
APPENDIX C

Card Sort Exercise

Instructions: In this exercise I will provide you with 15 photographs depicting a variety of women, each with a different look, age and style. I’d like to have you go through them and sort them into two piles. One where you feel the woman in the photo works for an ad agency and the second pile for women you think do not work in an ad agency. After you have completed the sort, we will go through each of the choices you made and discuss your rationale and decision making criteria.
APPENDIX D

University of St. Thomas
Institutional Review Board
Application Form

Last edited by: Diane Fittipaldi
Full X Expedited

Last Edited on September 22, 2012
Exempt Classroom

[379382-1] Looking The Part: How Hot Shop Ad Agencies' Commodification of Image Affects Older Women in Advertising

Completion of this form is the first step in seeking the institution approval that is required for all educational and research projects whether or not they are funded. Answer all questions on this form completely, include attachments, and obtain all signatures prior to final submission of this package on IRBNet.

The University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board (IRB) will process your application, coordinate review and notify you of their determination. Research activity may not begin until you receive notification of APPROVAL from the IRB Office. Submissions to the IRB Office that are incomplete will be returned.

I. Principal Investigator

Name: Diane Fittipaldi
Student
Department: Leadership & Policy Administration
Phone: 612-860-8625
Email: dfittipaldi@stthomas.edu

II. Research Advisors

Name: Don LaMagdeleine
Department: Leadership & Policy Administration
Phone: 651-962-4893
Email: drlamagdelei@stthomas.edu
### III. Co-Investigators and Other Personnel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Department:</th>
<th>Phone:</th>
<th>Email:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### IV. Review Information

**Project Completion Date:** February 2014
Protocol Type:

- [ ] Full
- [X] Expedited
- [ ] Exempt
- [ ] Classroom

Research Category:

- [ ] Classroom Protocol
- [ ] Faculty or Staff Research
- [X] Graduate Student Research
- [ ] Student/Faculty Collaboration
- [ ] Undergraduate Student Research
- [ ] Other:

Subject to review by another IRB?

- [ ] Yes
- [X] No

If yes, provide the following information for each IRB that must review this research. Upload a copy of the signed approval form for each IRB approval obtained.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IRB Name</th>
<th>Contact Email</th>
<th>City, State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</table>

Review required by another academic committee?

- [ ] Yes - Masters committee
- [X] Yes - Dissertation committee
- [ ] No

V. Project Information

Lay Summary:
Also complete the "Lay Summary" Form and upload the completed form with this package.

**Background – Importance of this Research and How It Fits with Previous Research In the Field**

For more than a century, the ad agency industry has failed to make significant progress in diversifying its workforce. While many industries found ways to combat the homosocial reproduction common in business organizations, ad agency leaders continue to reproduce a male-dominated, youthful workforce that embodied a stylized and somewhat stereotypical creative ethos. Due to the ambiguous nature of what constitutes creativity, agencies rely heavily on aspects of self-presentation and image in making personnel decisions. Emerging theory on aesthetic labor asserts that in certain industries, such as high-end fashion retailers, employers seek out workers whose appearance matches the company’s brand image. My research will assist in furthering the development of this nascent theory by exploring its extension to the field of advertising. Specifically, I will conduct a qualitative, grounded theory study using in-depth interviews among middle-aged women who have worked for nationally know advertising agencies. I will explore their career histories to better understand how the ad agency culture affected the way their career choices and the presented themselves on the job. At the same time, my study will provide a voice for an overlooked and often marginalized sector of the advertising workforce – 40+ year old women account executives who to this point have gone unstudied with their voices neglected from theory development.

**Target Population and Anticipated Participants:**

I plan to focus my study on 15-20 women who have worked for advertising agencies in the United States, agencies that presently enjoy reputations as “creative hot shops,” a term used within the industry to denote firms that consistently win awards and receive much press coverage highlighting their success in the creative arena. I plan to collect data by interviewing women over 40 years of age who currently are employed as account executives and who currently work or have worked in an agency considered a hot shop. In addition to the above criteria, I will screen the participants to make sure they have worked for more than one agency over the course of their careers, as opposed to women who have made their careers in only one agency because I am looking for insightful comparisons across a wide swath of experience over the course of many years.

As part of this study, I plan to include the three participants from my pilot study, which I conducted as part of EDLD 905. I will use the data collected during that study and may return to these participants for follow up interviews as needed.

**Special Populations:**

☐ Cognitively impaired persons

[requires full board review]

☐ Economically disadvantaged

☐ Educationally disadvantaged
☐ Elderly/aged persons  
☐ HIV/AIDS patients  
☐ Hospital patients or outpatients  
☐ Minority group(s)  
☐ Minors - patients *  
   [requires full board review]  
☐ Minors - children under federal exemption for educational settings *  
   [requires full board review]  
☐ Minors - volunteers *  
   [requires full board review]  
☐ Non-English speakers  
☐ Normal adult volunteers  
☐ Pregnant women  
☐ Prisoners  
☐ Students (non-minors)  
☐ UST employees  
☐ Other special characteristics and special populations:  
☐ This project does not purposefully target any special populations.  
   * Note that the inclusion of anyone under 18 requires a Parental Consent Form.

Does the nature of the research include any type of conflict of interest or power relationships with any of the associated participants or organizations?  
☐ Yes  
☒ No  

If yes: Explain the nature of the conflict and/or relationship:

Project Funding:  
☒ No funding  
☐ Federal funding  
☐ Grant  
☐ Industry  
☐ Private funding
Confidentiality of Data:
Also complete the "Confidentiality of Data" Form and upload the completed form with this package.

Each participant’s identity will remain confidential during my research and in my final published dissertation. I will not use their real names in my transcripts, observer comments, notes, memos dissertation drafts or the final dissertation document. At the beginning of the study, I will ask each participant to provide me with a pseudonym of her choice, which I will then use throughout the duration of the study.

Throughout the duration of my research as well as in my final dissertation, I will not use the real names of any of the advertising agencies my participants mention and will assign any/or all such agencies a pseudonym. In the event that one of my participants mentions the name of a person, business, restaurant or other easy-to-identify entity, I will refer to each in its generic form rather than use real names. For example, rather than name a person in the ad agency, I will refer to that person by title, such as “the CEO” or “one of the copywriters.” Similarly, if the participant mentions the name of a café often frequented by agency personnel, I will refer to this café as “a nearby coffee shop.”

Each participant will sign a consent form revealing her identity. I will store the completed forms in a rented safe deposit box at US Bank indefinitely.

I will keep confidential and will protect all data used during the study. For example, I will record all interviews using an MP3 recorder and use a password protected laptop computer to transfer the voice files to the MyStorageWeb secure servers at the University of St. Thomas. This “cloud” storage at St. Thomas will further be protected behind a password of my choosing. I will change this password several times during the course of my study to enhance security.

I will personally transcribe the MP3 files, which will eliminate the need for a research assistant thereby increasing the protection of the data and the confidentiality of my participants. I will use the MyStorageWeb secure servers to house all the data, transcripts, drafts and files related to my study. Once I complete my study and publish the results, all data will be transferred to USB drives and stored indefinitely in the rented safe deposit box at US Bank mentioned above. I will then delete any original files from the MyStorageWeb servers at St. Thomas.

Possible Risks or Harms to Subjects:
Also complete the "Risks and Benefits" Form and upload the completed form with this package.

☒ None
☐ Use of private records (medical or educational)
☐ Possible invasion of privacy of subject or family
Manipulation of psychological or social variables such as sensory deprivation, social isolation, psychological stresses

Any probing for personal or sensitive information in surveys or interviews

Use of deception as part of experimental method

Social or economic risk

Other:

Informed Consent:
Simply giving a consent form to a subject does not constitute informed consent. Consent itself is a process of communication. Complete the "Informed Consent Process" Form and upload the completed form with this package.

VI. Assurances and Signatures

Assurances:
This research, once approved, is subject to continuing review and approval by the IRB. The principal investigator will maintain records of this research according to IRB guidelines. If these conditions are not met, approval of this research could be suspended.

Electronic signatures certify that:
• The signatory agrees that he or she is aware of the policies on research involving participants of the University of St. Thomas and will safeguard the rights, dignity, and privacy of all participants.
• The information provided in this application form is true and accurate.
• The principal investigator will seek and obtain prior written approval from the UST IRB office for any substantive modification in the proposal, including but not limited to changes in cooperating investigators/agencies as well as changes in procedures.
• Unexpected or otherwise significant adverse events in the course of this study, which may affect the risks and benefits to participation will be reported in writing to the UST IRB office and to the subjects.
• The research will not be initiated and subjects cannot be recruited until final approval is granted.

The following signatures are required for new project submissions:
• Principal Investigator
• Research Advisor(s), if applicable
• Co-Investigator(s), if applicable

INSTRUCTIONS TO RESEARCHERS
Thank you for completing the University of St. Thomas IRB Application Form. Be sure to review your work and include all required attachments and signatures before submitting through IRBNNet.

If you have any questions, please contact the UST IRB Office at 651.962.6017 or email irb@stthomas.edu.