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Gender roles in technology product advertisements in library trade magazines

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Gender Roles in Technology Product Advertisements in Library Trade Magazines

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Wayne State University



Dilevko & Harris Study (1997)

“It appears then, that in its social construction, the information highway, at least as it is represented in advertising, has already, in the fields of business and computing, placed women on the sidelines. If the representations of gender in *Online/Database* ads signal the future of librarianship, the same pattern may be about to unfold.” (Dilevko & Harris 726)

How has the depiction of gender roles in library professional journals changed in the past 12 years?

Dilevko, J. & Harris, R.M. (1997). Information Technology and Social Relations: Portrayals of Gender Roles in High Tech Product Advertisements. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science*, 48, 718-727.

Technology Ads and Gender Representation 2

Winter 2008 – course on Gender and Technology

Major theme – is the close association between masculinity and technology.

Readings on advertisements included in course because they reflect and reinforce current cultural values and beliefs, including gender stereotypes associated with technologies. Scholars in gender studies, sociology, and other social sciences have concurred that women frequently are portrayed as passive users of technology while men are shown as masters of technological innovations.

Dilevko and Harris examined advertisements for technology products appearing in business, computer science, and library trade publications to determine if depictions of gender roles were equitable or stereotypic. They found that technology product ads in the business and computer science publications had more men than women and that the men were portrayed as innovators of technology while women were often used to show how simple a product was. The traditional library science publications they studied – *American Libraries* and *Library Journal* – had technology ads that were more equitable where gender was concerned. However, the magazine *Online*, which they classified as a non-traditional, technology-focused publication, had ads more consistent with the ads in business and computer science magazines.

(read quote)

12 years later – I was curious if the depiction of gender in technology ads appearing in library trade publications has evolved and become more equitable.

Methodology



- Followed criteria and categories established by Dilevko and Harris.
- Random sample of 10 issues of 4 professional periodicals.
- Coded by gender category and thematic representation.

Technology Ads and Gender Representation

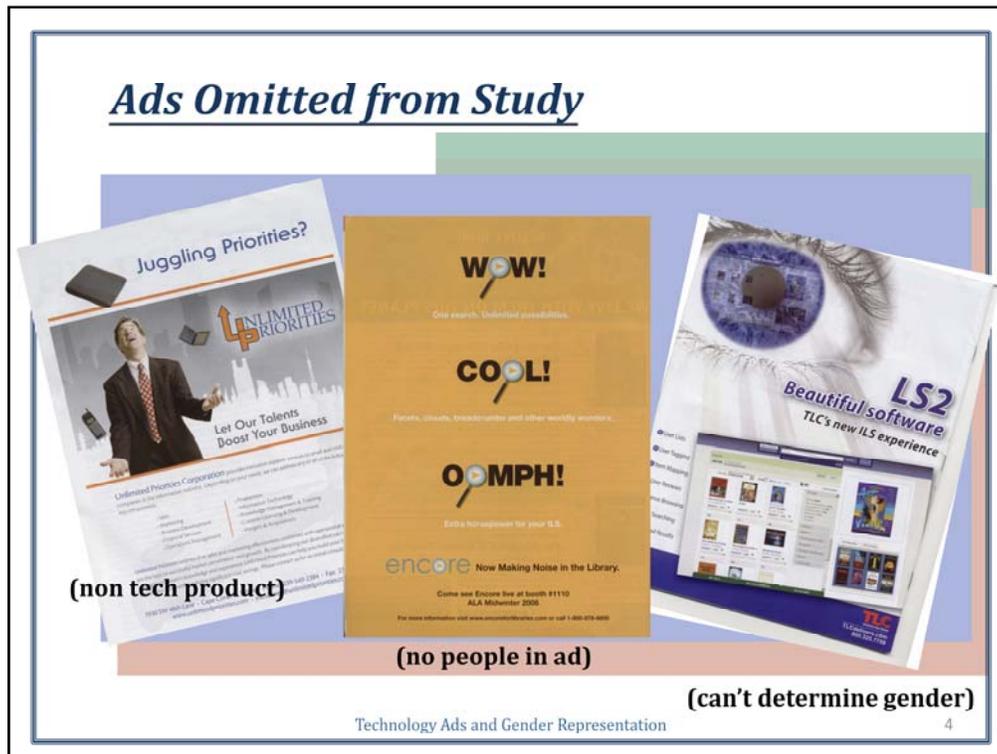
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Replicated part of the Dilevko/Harris study. I looked at library trade publications only, and I used a smaller sample.

Took 10 issues of 4 library trade magazines from the past two years. I examined American Libraries, Library Journal, and Online, and Dilevko and Harris did, but I also added Computers in Libraries, a publication comparable to Online in terms of target readership, to make sure that I had enough ads to work with.

The ads had to 1) promote a computer-based service or product
2) be at least ½ page
3) depict a person who could be identified as male or female

Using D/H's criteria, I coded them first, according to the gender of person or people in the ads, and second, by the activity of the people or the theme of the ad.



Ads not included in the study

Non-tech product – man juggling a cell phone, a laptop – not the ad is for a management company, not a computer-based product or service

No people in ad – ad for encore, a tool for searching catalogs, but no people in the ad

Gender – the ad is for an ILS platform, and includes an eyeball, but can't determine gender of the person.

Technology Ads : Counts by Journal Title

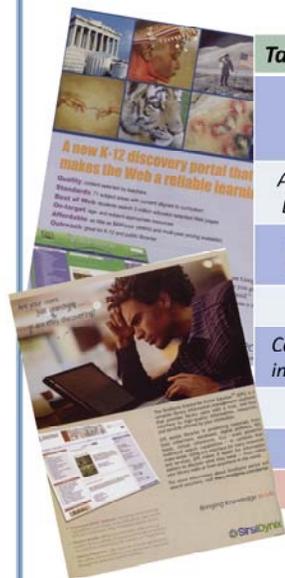


Table 1: Technology Ad Counts by Journal Title

	Total Technology Ads	Technology Ads Meeting Gender Criteria	Technology Ads Not Meeting Gender Criteria
American Libraries	77 (24.3%)	27 (23.1%)	50 (25.0%)
Library Journal	120 (37.8%)	48 (41.0%)	72 (36.0%)
Online	56 (17.7%)	25 (21.4%)	31 (15.5%)
Computers in Libraries	64 (20.2%)	17 (14.5%)	47 (23.5%)
Total	317 (100.0%)	117 (100.0%)	200 (100.0%)
	317 (100.0%)	117 (36.9%)	200 (63.1%)

Technology Ads and Gender Representation

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There were 317 technology ads that were at least half a page. Once I added the gender criterion, I had significantly fewer – only 117 – ads to examine.

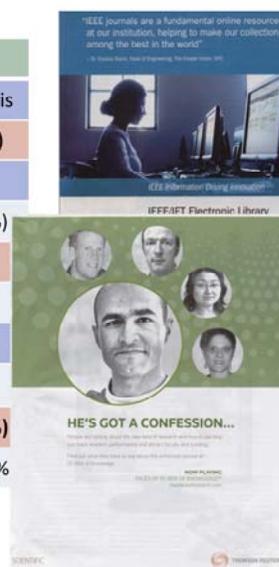
LJ – the highest number of technology ads, and the highest number of usable ads. Computers in Libraries had the fewest number of usable ad – only 17 of the 117.

The percentage of usable ads is small, but matches the D/H study's findings. In the results section of their article, Dilevko and Harris wrote "Most advertisements for computer-based technological items depict only the product without any human presence. Indeed, in an initial sample of advertisements in the journal issues examined, 63% of computing Computer Technology/Engineering technology ads depicted product alone."

Technology Ads: Counts by Category

Table 2: Ad Counts by Category

	Current Study	Dilevko/Harris
Male (not working)	13 (11.1%)	203 (31.5%)
Male (working)	4 (3.4%)	24 (3.7%)
Female (not working)	27 (23.1%)	159 (24.8%)
Female (working)	18 (15.4%)	54 (8.4%)
Mixed (male working; female not)	2 (1.7%)	16 (2.5%)
Mixed (female working; male not)	6 (5.1%)	24 (3.7%)
Mixed (both working)	9 (7.7%)	46 (7.1%)
Mixed (neither working)	38 (32.5%)	118 (18.3%)
Total	117 (100.0%)	644 (100.0%)



Technology Ads and Gender Representation

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Note about the D/H column – I was able to extract the figures for the ads from the library periodicals only – numbers and percentages don't include the business or computer science advertisements.

In 5 of the 8 categories, my findings were consistent with Dilevko and Harris'.

Compelling differences in 3 categories:

- 1). The percentage of males “not working with the product” decreased dramatically between my study and the Dilevko/Harris study. In the 1997 study, the “male note working with product” category had the largest percentage of ads assigned to it. In my study, that category ranked fourth. In fact, the percentage of males-only advertisements decreased from 35.2% to 14.5%.
- 2). The proportion of technology ads where women were working with the product increased from 8.4% in the 1997 study to 15.4% in my study.
- 3). The percentage of “mixed groups with neither working with the product” was only 18.3% in D/H study, whereas the percentage jumped to 32.5% in my study.

Technology Ads: Thematic Representation



Table 3: Thematic Representation of Females and Males in Technology Ads “Not Working with Product”

	Current Study	Dilevko/Harris
Testimony :	Males 0 (0%)	5 (1.3%)
	Females 3 (7.5%)	26 (6.9%)
Action :	Males 6 (15.5%)	81 (21.6%)
	Females 6 (15.5%)	39 (10.4%)
Space :	Males 0 (0%)	6 (1.6%)
	Females 0 (0%)	5 (1.3%)
Famous :	Males 3 (7.5%)	28 (7.5%)
	Females 2 (5.0%)	8 (2.1%)
Simplicity :	Males 0 (0%)	9 (2.4%)
	Females 0 (0%)	15 (4.0%)
Other :	Males 4 (10%)	82 (21.9%)
	Females 16 (40.0%)	71 (18.9%)
Totals	40 (100%)	375 (100.0%)

Technology Ads and Gender Representation

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Following Dilevko and Harris as a model, I then coded the 40 ads that depicted males only or females only “not working with the product” according to their categories.

Why examine only the ads where people were not working with the product? D/H reasoned that these ads are more likely to reveal the values companies want associated with their products. The focus was not on the product, but on the person or the activity portrayed in the ad.

Explain categories

Again, my findings were fairly consistent with D/H’s results. There were differences in two thematic categories: action and other.

Action – Since 1997, there has been a decrease in the percentage of men in action shots from 21.6 % to 15.5%, and an increase in the percentage of women depicted in some sort of activity. In the D/H study, there were twice as many men as women in this category. In my study, I found equal numbers of men and women doing some sort of activity.

The second category of interest is the “other” category. There was a huge growth in the percentage of female only ads that fell into this category and a decrease in the percentage of males in the “other” category.

Conclusion and Future Research

- Suggests a shift in the depiction of gender in technology ads appearing in library trade publications.
- Authentic replication of Dilevko/Harris study.
- Examine the representation of high technology in ads for non-tech products.
- Investigate the thematic representations in the “other” category.



Technology Ads and Gender Representation

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In 2007 and 2008, women were depicted more equitably in technology product advertisements appearing in library science trade publications.

- Ubiquitous computer technologies – ads reflect reality
- More realistic for a profession dominated (at least numerically) by women

Redo study – selecting the journal titles, increasing the time frame studied, determining categories of themes based on the ads in hand, not on previously defined categories, having independent coders to test validity --

Gender and technology in non-tech products ads – what message and values are being conveyed about technology, who uses it, and how.

Look closely at the thematic representations in the ‘other’ category. Some of the categories, such as simplicity, appear outdated.