

ARE YOU READY FOR SOME ... SEX, VIOLENCE AND GENDER  
STEREOTYPES? A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF *MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL*  
COMMERCIALS AND PROGRAMMING PROMOTIONS

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## Abstract

This study examined the content of 200 commercials from the 2004 season of *Monday Night Football* documenting sexual content, violence, and gender role stereotypes. The data revealed that despite the fact that men appeared twice as often as women, women were more likely to be stereotyped than men. About one quarter of the commercials contained sexual content and about one-fifth contained violence. Beer ads were more sexual than other ads but were not significantly more violent than other ads. There was no clear pattern of variance in the amount of sexual and violent commercials across quarters. Programming commercials were far more sexual and violent than other commercials and were most likely to appear last in the pod. These findings have relevance for recency effects of ad recall as well as social learning theory and gender schema theory. The present data indicate a decline in sexual content, violence, and gender stereotypes compared to previous television advertising studies. Possible reasons for the decline include recent political and social pressure and increased female viewership of NFL games. Despite apparent declines in sexual and violent content, this study alerts us to lingering concerns about commercial content, and raises the possibility that the networks themselves may be the worst offenders.

## Chapter I

### Introduction

Since the early days of television, producers and directors have pushed the envelope of socially acceptable content, slowly but constantly moving the moral line of limitations (Minow & LaMay, 1995; Strasburger & Donnerstein, 1999). TV advertising for products and programs has also seen a push towards using risqué images and situations containing sex and violence (Courtney & Whipple, 1983; Gunter, 1995; Soley & Reid, 1985). Advertising during sporting events are no exception (Hall & Crum, 1994; Rouner, Slater, & Domenech-Rodreguez, 2003).

There is evidence that shows the use of sex and violence is a poor advertising practice because people tend to remember less about the product, focusing mainly on the explicit images (Bushman & Bonacci, 2002; Bushman & Phillips, 2001; Chestnut, LaChance, & Lubitz, 1977; Courtney & Whipple, 1983; Reid & Soley, 1981). The Bushman studies (2001 & 2002) showed that when ads are imbedded in sexually explicit and violent programming, people tend to remember only the images, not the sponsors. When the ad itself contains sex and/or violence, viewers are even less likely to remember sponsors. Despite ineffectiveness of racy and violent commercials, TV advertisers continue to use explicit imagery to sell products and promote programming.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the content of advertising and programming promotions during the 2004 season of ABC's *Monday Night Football*. The program was the seventh most popular prime-time network show for fall 2004 and number one for male viewers over 18. The average rating per episode was 11.0, the lowest it had ever been. This rating was still respectable considering that it means an average of 12 million TV households tuned in each week (Martzke, 2004). This study

determined the amount of sexually explicit content and acts of violence during *Monday Night Football* ads and applied the evidence to recent trends in sports advertising.

Gender stereotyping in commercials was also addressed.

There are reasons to be concerned about the questionable content sponsors and networks use during sporting events. Advertising during sports targets males (Howard, 2004), so the spots are catered to what arouses men, which means using sex appeal and thrill-driven, violent imagery (Slater, Rouner, Murphy, Beauvais, Van Leuven, & Domenech-Rodriguez, 1996).

Bikini clad women parading their bodies for the sake of selling a product promotes the attitude that women are commodities or objects rather than people (Gunter, 1995). These objectified models are presented as pleasure packages for men to enjoy (Hall & Crum, 1994; Signorielli, McLeod, & Healy, 1994). This image is degrading to women and offensive to many (Courtney & Whipple, 1983). Studies have shown that stereotyping and objectifying images of women are prevalent in beer commercials (Rouner et al., 2003; Hall & Crum, 1994) and that beer ads frequently appear in commercial breaks during sports broadcasting (Slater et al., 1996).

Violent images in advertising desensitize viewers to violent acts (Bushman & Bonacci, 2002). Political leaders such as John McCain, Orrin Hatch, and Joe Lieberman have attacked organizations advertising violent movies and games that targeted young people. The campaign caused the WB network to change its ad acceptance policy. The network took action voluntarily as a result of research, public awareness, and high-profile attention (*Media Violence*, 2000; Teinowitz, Kerwin, & Ross, 1999; *Violence Marketed to Children*, 1999). Senators, FCC leaders, and network executives have recently addressed the problem of indecency and irresponsibility on broadcast television

specifically the content of sports commercials (*Broadcast Decency*, 2004a; *Broadcast Decency*, 2004b; *Broadcast Decency Enforcement Act*, 2004; *Decency in Communications*, 2006; *Media Violence*, 2000; *Violence Marketed to Children*, 1999).

This study quantified the amount of sex, violence, and gender stereotypes in advertisements during one popular sports program. This study will help to gauge trends in “edgy” advertising content to see if the use of explicit imagery is increasing or decreasing and by how much. If universities are aware of the implications of explicit advertisements, they could pass their knowledge on to the next generation of media workers. Academia is currently training the media leaders and decision makers of tomorrow. If enough attention is given to the importance of responsible advertising decisions, the issue could make it into the university classroom. Influencing academia and media students could affect the profession in a positive way.

This study and others like it could further scholarly and professional discussion of advertising practices. The sports broadcasting community could take note and assess the advertisements airing during sports programming. Measuring and analyzing commercial content used during *Monday Night Football* furthers the body of knowledge in advertising and could initiate TV advertising reforms through increased public discussion of these issues. In the wake of the 2003 Super Bowl controversy it is important to revisit advertising content concerns. This study adds to the literature by assessing trends in the content of sports advertising. This study also seeks to fill a gap in the literature by comparing the content of programming promotions and commercials. While previous research has studied commercials extensively (Bardwick & Schumann, 1967; Bello, Pitts, & Etzel, 1983; Bretl & Cantor, 1988; Bushman & Bonacci, 2002; Bushman & Phillips, 2001; Chestnut, LaChance, & Lubitz, 1977; Courtney & Whipple, 1974; Courtney &

Whipple, 1983; Dominick, & Rauch, 1972; Ganahl, Prinsen, & Netzley, 2003; Goffman, 1979; Hall & Crum, 1994; Larson, 2001; Livingston, & Green, 1986; Newell, & Wu, 2003; Reichert, Lambiase, Morgan, Carstarphen, & Zavoina, 1999; Rouner, Slater, & Domenech-Rodreguez, 2003; Shrikhande, 2003; Signorielli, McLeod, & Healy, 1994; Slater et al., 1996; Terry, 2005; Welch, Huston-Stein, Wright, & Plehal, 1979), there is little research on the content of network promotions (Lowry & Shidler, 1993; Soley, & Reid, 1985).

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

Much research has been done concerning sexual content, gender stereotypes, and violence in television advertisements and the evidence is well documented (Blank, 1977; Brentl & Cantor, 1988; Carstarphen & Zavoina, 1999; Comstock & Lindsey, 1975; Davis, 1982; Ganahl, Prinsen, & Netzley, 2003; Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Goffman, 1979; Gunter, 1995; Joliffe, 1989; Minow & LaMay, 1995; Reichert et al., 1999; Rouner et al., 2003). Advertisers have a tendency to place males in stereotypical masculine roles such as sports and professional settings that savor freedom and adventure (Slater et al., 1996). Commercials shown during sports programming, some containing sports content, illustrate these differences in the portrayal of gender roles (Hall & Crum, 1994; Livingston & Green, 1986; Rouner et al., 2003). The female body is used frequently in ads with nudity or lurid angles and scans of body parts (Courtney & Whipple, 1983; Hall & Crum, 1994; Rouner et al., 2003; Soley & Reid, 1988). These ads depict women as sexual objects rather than people (Schwartz, Wagner, Bannert, & Mathes, 1987).

Females criticize these sexual themes in advertising that employs female models in revealing attire and/or using verbal sexual innuendos (Bello, Pitts, & Etzel, 1983; Rouner et al., 2003). Males are more energized, enthralled, and positive toward such ads (LaTour, 1990; Rouner et al., 2003). This evidence points to disturbing implications, especially for young people with little or no real-life sexual experience. Young people view programming and advertising with themes of sexuality that establishes norms and expectations about sex (Rouner et al., 2003; Ward, 1995). Television has become the primary source children and teens learn about sex, replacing realistic sources like parents and teachers (Rouner et al., 2003; Ward, 1995). “There is an emerging literature

demonstrating that sexually explicit media promote sexual callousness, cynical attitudes about love and marriage, and perceptions that promiscuity is the norm” (Bushman & Bonacci, 2002, p. 563).

In a meta-analysis of the media effects on children and adolescents researchers found only five studies demonstrating a connection between sexual content in the media and changes in teenagers’ sexual behavior or attitudes (Strasburger & Donnerstein, 1999). In contrast they found more than 1,000 studies linking media violence to real-life violence. All five studies concerning sexual content showed that more exposure to television resulted in increased sexual activity (Corder-Bolz, 1981; Brown, 1991; Peterson & Kahn, 1984; Peterson, Moore, & Furstenburg, 1991; Furno-Lamude, 1997). More has been published on the impact of television on the attitudes and actions of teens since the Strasburger and Donnerstein (1999) study. The consensus is that the media’s portrayal of sexuality contributes to the difficulties of youth making healthy decisions about sex (Brown, 2000; Brown, 2002; Brown, Steele, & Walsh-Childers, 2003; Collins, Elliott, Berry, Kanouse, Kunkel, Hunter, & Miu, 2004; *Decency in Communications*, 2006; Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999).

The study of sexual content in TV advertising is as important as studying the programming itself considering that the average person will be exposed to 600,000 commercials before age 21 (Larson, 2001). This study provides a clear picture of the content of the commercials used during *Monday Night Football*. It is another step toward better understanding the content in advertisements to which people are exposed over the course of time.

Studies have shown that the types of interpersonal interactions children see portrayed on television commercials shape their expectations about real-life relationships

(Freuh & McGee, 1975; Larson, 2001; Signorielli, 1989). The studies have demonstrated that heavy viewers hold more traditional gender stereotypes of gender role behavior than light viewers. Drawing upon research of gender stereotyping in sports advertising (Hall & Crum, 1994; Slater et al., 1996), the present content analysis explores the extent to which sports advertisements are promoting traditional gender stereotypes to which young viewers are particularly susceptible. This is the first study to examine gender stereotyping in *Monday Night Football* commercials and promotions. To the researcher's knowledge this is only the second study to examine sexual content in programming promotions (Lowry & Shidler, 1993), and it is the first to examine violence in promotions.

Based on a 2003 national survey, of adults over 18 who frequently watch pro-football, 68.1% were male and 31.9% were female. Of the adults over 18 who occasionally watch pro-football, 50.4% were male and 49.6% were female. Of the adults who frequently watched pro-football on television, 30.8% have children aged 3 to 17. Of the adults who occasionally watch televised pro-football, 31.9% have children aged 3 to 17 (Simmons National Consumer Study, 2004). Combined with the Neilson ratings, this means that about 3.7 million households with children were watching 2004 *Monday Night Football* broadcasts (Simmons National Consumer Study, 2004; Martzke, 2004).

## **Theory**

Social learning theory and gender schema theory are two media effects theories relevant to studying advertising content. These two theories help researchers understand the implications of using risqué and violent advertising content of the sort analyzed in the present study.

**Social Learning Theory.** When applied to the study of media effects, social learning theory tells us that the media offer many models on which to imitate depicted behavior (Bandura, 1977). Geen (1994) modified this theory, proposing that models for behavior may not be initiated immediately but may be stored as cognitive scripts for future use. His modification recognized that people can acquire scripts for behaviors simply by observation as guides for future behavior. The scripts are stored until a situation in real life resembles the situation stored in memory at which time the script may be retrieved and used (Geen, 1994). Laboratory experiments (Geen & Thomas, 1986), field experiments (Wood, Wong, & Chachere, 1991), and longitudinal studies (Huesmann & Eron, 1986) support Geen's updating of Bandura's social learning theory, and most are concerned with the imitation of violence. An important meta-analysis recently concluded that viewing television aggression not only correlates positively with aggressive behavior, but that the relationship was much stronger among children sampled compared to adults sampled (Hogben, 1998).

Television is a particularly effective and powerful mass medium that promotes social learning. This single model of communication has multiplicative power transmitting new ways of thinking and behaving to many people in different locations (Bandura, 1994; Bretl & Cantor, 1988; Ganahl et al., 2003). A recent study applied social learning theory to examine the role of television in influencing audience members' ideas about thinness and ideal body shape. Harrison and Cantor (1997) recognized that images of thinness and dieting are very common on television, and that the media often provide instances of thin actors being rewarded. Viewers with higher exposure to thinness-depicting and thinness promoting messages scored higher in drive for thinness and were more likely to be dissatisfied with their bodies (Harrison & Cantor, 1997).

The Fiji Islands in the South Pacific only recently began watching television. Its impact on the attitudes of Fijians demonstrates the power of social learning theory as it operates through television. For years, women in Fiji were admired for being large. Then the island acquired its first television channel in 1995, bringing *Beverly Hills, 90210*, and Heather Locklear on *Melrose Place*. A sample of females in 1995 and the same sample in 1998 revealed that 29 percent of the 1998 sample scored higher on a test of eating disorder risk, compared with 13 percent three years earlier. In the 1998 survey, young women who said they watched television three or more nights per week were 50 percent more likely to describe themselves as “too big or fat” than women who watched television less frequently (Goode, 1999). These studies are relevant to the present study of advertising content. They demonstrate the impact of television on social learning, particularly that images of “the ideal figure” and portrayals of violence on television affect attitudes and behaviors of viewers.

**Gender Schema Theory.** One of the most important tools that people use to make sense of the complexities of the world is a schema. One informal definition is that a schema is a preexisting assumption about the way the world is organized (Singer, 1968). Schemata are pyramidal structures organized with general or abstract patterns of information at the top followed by categories containing prototypical examples to illustrate these patterns. Individuals form the general patterns through life situations experienced personally or encountered vicariously (Graber, 1984). People are “cognitive misers” with limited capacity of dealing with information. This forces them to practice “cognitive economies” through the formation of simple mental models or “generic knowledge structures” of the world (Fiske & Kinder, 1981, p. 172).

Schema theory construes perception as “a constructive process wherein what is perceived is a product of the interaction between the incoming information and the perceiver’s preexisting schema” (Bern, 1981, p. 355). The process of accepting, rejecting, and categorizing into patterns of thinking is a parsimonious way of dealing with the vast amount of information that people encounter. Extracting meaning, getting the gist or significance of the story, right away saves the trouble of storing details or background information. But this type of processing results in vague memories, inability to recall details, and trouble separating various incidents (Graber, 1984).

Sandra Lipsitz Bern (1981) applied schema theory to the phenomenon of sex typing. Bern (1981) describes sex typing as the process by which a society allocates adult roles on the basis of masculine or feminine sex traits. She proposes that the child learns to invoke a “heterogeneous network of sex-related associations in order to evaluate and assimilate new information. The child, in short, learns to process information in terms of an evolving gender schema” (Bern, 1981, p. 355). Gender schema theory proposes that sex typing derives from gender-based schematic processing that exhibits a generalized readiness to process information based on sex-linked associations that make up the gender schema (Bern, 1981).

Martin and Halverson (1981) describe sex typing as applying gender judgments to behaviors, objects, and roles, including considerations of how children perceive and behave toward the animate and inanimate environment. They developed a model that proposes that gender labeling (the ability to distinguish between the sexes) allows for selective attention to one’s own sex. Selective attention enables individuals to acquire gender stereotypes—domain-specific knowledge about toys, activities, work roles, etc. The researchers asserted that sex stereotyping is a normal cognitive process best

examined in terms of information-processing constructs. Their model proposed that gender stereotypes function as schemata that serve to organize and structure information.

Martin and Halverson (1981) also proposed a typology to describe the relation between sex schemas and other schemas. Their typology divided schemas according to whether they are potentially self-defining and according to their salience or availability. Using their typology, the researchers concluded that sex stereotyping occurs when the schemata involved are self-defining and salient. The researchers proposed two schemas involved in sex typing and sex role learning: An overall, “in-group-out-group” schema of general information to categorize objects, behavior, traits, and roles as being either for males or females; and an “own-sex” schema—narrower and more specific to the objects, behavior traits, and roles that characterize their own sex (Martin & Halverson, 1981).

Gender schemas affect the encoding and retrieval of gender information present in certain advertisements. Studying the content of sports advertising will reveal the types of messages that potentially affect gender schemas. Adolescents look for media models that reflect their own pre-developed notions about gender. Females prefer television programs about relationships and interdependence. Males seek autonomous and independent media models (Walsh-Childers & Brown, 1993). Adolescents seek out appropriate gender role and sexual media presentations that match a model’s gender to the advertised product uses in realistic and not negatively stereotypical ways (Courtney & Whipple, 1983). “Adolescents may use gender schemas to perceive, attend to, store in memory, recognize, recall, and integrate information to quickly sort out and evaluate the messages they receive as important, salient or useful” (Rouner et al., 2003, p. 437). An example of the media’s influence is Pearson’s (1992) finding that, unlike males, adolescent females compared themselves to female models in print ads, which resulted in

lowered levels of self-esteem. Gender schemas filter and classify mass media content. Media content shapes and influences the nature of gender schemas. Thus, further study of cognitive gender schematic processing of media influences has an important place in mass communication studies. This study seeks to analyze the messages that viewers are receiving from sports commercials—messages that shape the way people view their sexual identity, their specific gender roles, and their attitudes about sexual activity.

### **Implications of Indecent Advertising Content**

Studies have shown that commercials embedded in programming containing sex and violence impair memory for the ads (Bushman & Bonacci, 2002; Bushman & Phillips, 2001; Courtney & Whipple, 1983; Reid & Soley, 1981; Chestnut et al.,1977). One possible reason for this finding is that people are still thinking about plot and the sex and violence of the programming during commercial breaks. This phenomenon could also be true for sports broadcasting ads. In the same way that violence and sex impair the memory of products and services, sports occurrences like huge penalties or touchdown receptions during football games could impair the memory of the ads that follow. Whether the thrills of the game impair memory of the ads is a logical question that this literature review raised. The Bushman studies show that when arousal increases, memory of products decreases. The arousal was caused by sexual and violent imagery, but it stands to reason that the arousal passionate sports fans experience would have the same effect of impairing memory of products, services, and programming. This study examines the content of the commercials themselves quantifying the types of imagery researchers argue impairs memory (Bushman & Bonacci, 2002; Bushman & Phillips, 2001; Chestnut et al.,1977; Courtney & Whipple, 1983; Reid & Soley, 1981).

In a related study, men and women viewed violent film clips and took an objective attention test (Williamson, Kosmitzki, & Kibler, 1995). The results showed that the aggressive stimuli interfered with the attention span of females far more so than males. This difference was attributed to the fact that women traditionally are socialized to avoid aggressive behavior, while it is accepted and even desirable for men to be aggressive (Eron, 1980; Williamson et al., 1995). This study examines the extent sports commercials contribute to gender stereotyping by featuring roles such as the calm, passive woman and the wild, aggressive man.

The popularity of American football, a violently aggressive contact sport, is an example of socialization differences stereotyping the genders: Male players entertain by rough and tumble plays on the field while female cheerleaders and dancers entertain by their attractiveness on the sidelines—their pretty faces and shapely bodies shown off by their skimpy outfits (Bennett, 1990; Sutor, 1995). “(Cheerleading) is an attempt to hide sexual exploitation behind a veil of enthusiasm for sport” (Bennett, 1990, p. 67). This study seeks to find out how frequently sports commercials portray the same female exploitation that occurs on the sidelines.

Another study relevant to the analysis of sports commercials suggests that young, white males respond more positively to ads during sports programming (Slater et al., 1996). In their study of male adolescent reactions to beer commercials, frequently advertised during football games, the authors produce an interesting implication: “If male adolescents are especially responsive to non-beer products advertised during sports, it seems that the television industry may be, from an economic vantage point, more dependant than it need be on brewers’ advertising in sports programming” (Slater et al., 1995, p. 431).

Hall and Crum (1994) found that images of women's bodies and body parts ("body-isms") significantly outnumbered the body-isms of men in beer commercials advertised during sporting events on ABC, CBS, and NBC. Their study raised concerns about the dehumanizing influence of these images and their association with alcohol use and the violence in the televised sporting events during which beer commercials frequently air. By examining the beer ads in this sample of 2004 *Monday Night Football* ads, this study provides a comparison of the beer ads a decade later to see if the use of females for their sex appeal is increasing, declining, or staying about the same.

**Ad Position Effects on Recall.** Researchers have investigated the question: Does the position of a television commercial in a block (pod) of commercials determine how well it will be recalled? (Terry, 2005; Newell & Wu, 2003). In the laboratory setting, subjects viewed lists of 15 commercials and recalled product brand names. In an immediate test, the first commercials in a pod were well recalled as well as those at the end of the pod demonstrating a primacy and a recency effect. In an end-of-session test, the primacy effect persisted, but the recency effect disappeared (Terry, 2005). In a naturalistic study of ad placement recall, Newell and Wu (2003) surveyed subjects the day after the 2000 Super Bowl and the 2002 Super Bowl to determine unaided recall of brands of ads shown throughout the game. The results support the primacy effect in that the first ads in a pod and those at the beginning of the broadcast were recalled significantly more than ads the later in the pod and later in the program (Newell & Wu, 2003). In another field study, researchers used certain public television stations in the Netherlands where commercials occur in long pods between programs. Subjects were interviewed at their homes within 30 minutes of broadcast of a given block of commercials. Free recall of product names revealed a primacy effect. There was also

some evidence of a recency effect, in that the final item alone was better recalled than the immediately preceding items (Pieters & Bijmolt, 1997).

The present study analyzes the types of commercials that air first and last in pods in 2004 *Monday Night Football* broadcasts, as well as commercials at the beginning and end of the broadcasts. If patterns exist in the type of content at these positions in the broadcasts, viewers might not only be remembering certain products more than others, they might be more prone to remember certain content like sexual imagery and violence. As suggested by the literature, ads at certain positions in the broadcast may carry more weight than others. This study seeks to determine what types of commercials occur at those positions.

**Programming Promotions vs. Product and Service Commercials.** Trade publications and academic researchers have documented that both the networks and affiliated stations attempt to get viewers to tune in to their programming through print advertisements with violence and sex appeals (Forkan, 1982; Soley & Reed, 1985). Soley & Reed (1985) found that print ads for network programs were more likely to emphasize sex and violence than print ads for affiliate and independent programming. In a longitudinal study of network primetime programs and promotions from 1987 to 1991, researchers found a substantial decrease in the sexual behaviors portrayed in the programs; but the emphasis on sexual content of the promos increased (Lowry & Shidler, 1993). This study seeks to compare the amount of sex and violence in network promotions with product and service commercials in the broadcasts of 2004 *Monday Night Football* broadcasts to see if promotions contain more objectionable content than commercials. Based on the literature, where the promotions occur in the pod and in the broadcast will have an impact on viewers' memory of the promotion.

## **Political Discussions of Televised Sex and Violence, Network Implications**

Sex and violence in the media is a popular topic for legislative challenges voiced by politicians. Senator Mark Pryor and his wife do not let their 12-year-old son watch NFL football alone simply because they are worried that the advertisements are inappropriate. In a Senate committee hearing Pryor told an executive vice president of CBS,

We sit there with the remote control so that as soon as the commercials come on, we can change the channel. And I don't think that's healthy. I don't think that families should have to do that and have to be nervous wrecks to sit down and watch a football game. (*Decency in Communications*, 2006)

Prior specifically mentioned that programming promotions contained content he did not want his children to see.

A challenge was aimed at the advertising industry in the wake of the Littleton, CO, school shootings. Senators John McCain and Joe Lieberman asked the Surgeon General to produce a study of the effects of media violence on behavior. Part of the study was to focus on advertising (Teinowitz et al., 1999). Similarly, President Clinton asked the Federal Trade Commission to investigate the marketing of violent entertainment material to children. The FTC found that the movie, music recording, and computer game industries intentionally market products that contain certain violent content in a way that undermines the ratings they themselves apply to their products (*Press Conference with Federal Trade Commission Chairman Robert Pitofsky*, 2000).

The findings and the political and public attention on media violence prompted one TV network, the WB, to take action on its own initiative by changing its ad acceptance policy to be more stringent (Teinowitz et al., 1999). Through empirical evidence of the commercial content of a major sports program, the intent of this study is

to spark scholarly and professional discussion of explicit content in advertisements with the hopes that TV networks will listen and take part.

Following the lead of the WB network, voluntary limitations upon ad content could be enforced by TV networks especially during programming that does not contain sex and violence. Several cultural factors influenced the WB's decision. The Columbine school shootings had just occurred and there was public discussion of the influence media violence had upon the student shooters. The attention that Senators Lieberman, Hatch, and McCain and others gave to the issue of advertising violent products in 1999 contributed to the WB's decision to tighten their advertising policy (*Media violence*, 2000; *Violence Marketed to Children*, 1999). The WB took the initiative and self-regulated their advertising policy (Teinowitz et al., 1999). Public attention and discussion of the issue could have an effect upon other network advertising policies.

The literature contains evidence that sex and violence, whether in the program or the commercial itself, reduces the ability to recall the ad (Bushman & Bonacci, 2002; Bushman & Phillips, 2001; Courtney & Whipple, 1983; Chestnut et al., 1977; Reid & Soley, 1981). If media policy makers took this seriously a change in ad policy could follow.

While the challenge to change the "sex sells" mentality of television advertising is daunting, the example above shows that when circumstances are right (i.e. a national crises followed by legislative attention) TV networks are inclined to change advertising policy on their own.

Yet, their bottom line is and will continue to be: profit (*Broadcast Decency*, 2004a; McManus, 1994). As Jeff Sangansky, former CBS programming chief put it, "The number one priority in television is not to transmit quality programming to viewers,

but to deliver consumers to advertisers” (Bushman & Bonacci, 2002, p. 563). If advertisers refused to sponsor violent and sexually explicit programming, those types of programs would cease to be produced (Bushman & Bonacci, 2003). Conversely, if networks imposed stricter restrictions upon advertisement content, especially during programming with high ratings (i.e. *Monday Night Football*) the sexually-explicit, degrading images of women and gratuitous violence in ads would go away.

**Monday Night Football Moves to ESPN.** It is unclear how the move of *Monday Night Football* from ABC to ESPN, its sister Disney network, will affect the content of the commercials (Shapiro & Maske, 2005). It may be that since the program is moving from a broadcast network to a cable network there will be more explicit commercial content because FCC regulations of cable are more relaxed than broadcast regulations (*Broadcast Decency Enforcement Act*, 2004; *Decency in Communications*, 2006). In a Senate committee hearing in 2004 FCC Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein justified the distinction between cable and broadcast because parents have the right to block any cable channel whereas free, over-the-air broadcasting offers no such alternative (*Broadcast Decency Enforcement Act*, 2004). In another Senate committee hearing in 2006 Joint Board Chairman of the National Association of Broadcasters Bruce Reese argued that viewers draw little distinction between over-the-air broadcasting and cable or satellite programming. He said that since 80% of U.S. households get their television via cable or satellite, broadcasters, cable, and satellite all should be governed by the same framework (*Decency in Communications*, 2006). Even though cable controls won’t work on a set receiving a broadcast signal, if the TV has a v-chip parents may block programs based on an established ratings system issued for every program (*Decency in Communications*, 2006). Yet, these considerations do not take into account the content aired in the

commercial breaks of “family friendly” programs such as *Monday Night Football* because the ratings are for the program, not the advertisements.

### **The TiVo Effect**

The technology of TiVo and digital video recorders has made TV recording easier. As the use of these systems rise, more and more viewers are “zipping” through commercial breaks. This is one reason that ad sales during live sports broadcasts have seen a surge over the last few years. Advertisers view live programming, especially sporting events, as safer investments because of the better chance that viewers are watching live and are unable to skip the commercials (Howard, 2004).

### **Super Bowl XXXVIII Effects**

During the 2004 Super Bowl a few “family-centric” ads targeted women along with the majority of ads that targeted men. Women viewership of the Super Bowl and of NFL games in general is on the rise (Reed, 2004). In 2003 women made up about a third of the Super Bowl viewers. The NFL has recognized the growing number of female fans and has begun efforts to market games specifically to women. Offering “NFL 101” classes for women and increasing licensed merchandise for women are attempts in recent years to capitalize on increased female interest in the NFL (Reed, 2004).

Super Bowl XXXVIII on February 1, 2004 was far from a turning point in sports advertising, away from the crude and the risqué. It was an event that shook the sports and broadcasting community to its core. Pop singer Justin Timberlake exposed Janet Jackson’s naked breast during the halftime show on CBS (Hearn, 2005; Moss, 2004; Shields, 2004; Wenner, 2004). In an attempt to bring more desirable demographics (e.g. young male viewers) to an aging broadcast network and to the NFL, at CBS’s recommendation the NFL had partnered with CBS’s Viacom sibling MTV to produce the

Super Bowl halftime show (Wenner, 2004). Strengthening the motives to use the halftime show to appeal to the elusive younger male demographic might have created a larger conflict of interest for CBS and the NFL pitting “appropriate family entertainment against that which would hit the center of the target demographic” (Wenner, 2004, p. 319). The aftermath included finger pointing towards all parties involved. MTV execs blamed Justin and Janet for surprising them with the “wardrobe malfunction” declaring the nipple incident “demoralizing” and “embarrassing” (Moss, 2004; Wenner, 2004). CBS apologized only for the moment of breast exposure while the NFL denounced the entire halftime show, which included other hip-hop artists “with raps glorifying violence and graphic expressions of sexual desire” including dancers simulating sex and repeated crotch grabbing (Wenner, 2004, p. 320). The NFL declared that MTV would never produce another Super Bowl halftime show (Wenner, 2004).

Yet it was not so easy for CBS and the NFL to distance themselves from a halftime show that they had overseen. The FCC received about 500,000 complaints from viewers and fined CBS \$550,000 (Hearn, 2005). In addition to the Jackson fine, the FCC had recently invoked indecency reprimands for infractions by Howard Stern, Bubba the Love Sponge, and U2 lead singer Bono’s use of the “F” word at an awards show (Shields, 2004; Wenner, 2004). So CBS joined with NBC and other allies with a legal counterattack claiming that the actions infringed on free-speech guarantees (Shields, 2004). Congress sided with the FCC approving a bill to increase maximum federal indecency fines from \$32,000 to \$500,000 for each network offence (Hearn, 2005).

“Nipplegate” was not the only offensive act up for review. The public discussion spread to the tone of the once highly touted Super Bowl commercials. The NFL was being held accountable for the coarseness of the commercials on their watch because

ultimately the League had veto power over CBS about what kinds of ads were off limits (Elliott, 2004; Kelly, Clark, & Kullman, 2004; Poniewozik, Ressler, Gregory, Cuadros, & Stewart, 2004; Wenner, 2004). Pundits and the public found 2004 Super Bowl commercials to be particularly offensive. The ads featured a flatulent horse, a dog biting men's crotches, and even hint of bestiality in a commercial where a monkey makes a pass at a young woman (Elliott, 2004; Wenner, 2004). The commercials were "castigated for bombarding viewers with more vulgarity and tastelessness than in any previous Super Bowl" (Elliott, 2004, p. C5). The commercials ran the gamut from frat house humor to brutal violence. One ad for the release of the horror movie, "Van Helsing," was singled out to be particularly inappropriate for family viewing because it "contained extremely disturbing and graphic images of brutality and gore" (Shales, 2004, p C1). This commercial stuck out in the mind of FCC Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein. He said he jumped out of his chair to get between the TV and his three-year-old (*Broadcast Decency Enforcement Act*, 2004). The NFL statement that it was "embarrassed" by the half time show struck many in the press as hypocritical due to the nature of the commercial content that was green-lighted far in advance (Poniewozik et al., 2004; Stanley, 2004; Wenner, 2004). Stanley (2004) cited erectile dysfunction ads as evidence of the NFL's hypocrisy:

If the NFL was really so shocked and appalled, why didn't it flinch at the Cialis advertisement that promised men 36 hours of relief from impotence, then warned that if they should experience an erection for four hours straight, they should seek "immediate medical care"? (Stanley , 2004, p. E1)

The 2005 Super Bowl ads on Fox were much tamer and did not include erectile dysfunction advertisers Levitra and Cialis. Reports were that the "national mood" had "turned conservative" and that advertisers did not want the limelight on products and commercials that might be seen as too racy (Friedman, 2005). Likewise, the sponsors of

ABC's 2006 Super Bowl ads seemed to keep their pledge to steer clear of the crude, lowbrow humor and violence. For the most part they were family friendly, even heartwarming—with one featuring a family of Budweiser Clydesdales helping the little foal pull the big beer wagon (Elliott, 2006; Zak, 2006).

This study compares the content of the *Monday Night Football* ads in the season immediately following the Janet Jackson debacle to measure instances of the sort that sparked a debate about indecency in sports broadcasting. If the trend is a decline in sexual and violent content since the watershed Jackson incident, the 2004 *Monday Night Football* ads will likely be less vulgar and explicit than the 2004 Super Bowl ads, but contain more sex and violence than the 2005 and 2006 Super Bowl ads.

Thus, the research questions for the present study are:

**RQ1:** Are men more likely to be the key actors in television advertisements during *Monday Night Football*?

**RQ2:** In *Monday Night Football* advertisements with men only, how often do men appear in traditional, stereotypical roles?

**RQ3:** In *Monday Night Football* advertisements with women only, how often do women appear in traditional, stereotypical roles?

**RQ4:** How much sexual content is present in *Monday Night Football* commercials and promotions?

**RQ5:** How many acts of violence occur during *Monday Night Football* commercials and promotions?

**RQ6:** Are there more sexual content and violence in programming promotions than there are in commercials during *Monday Night Football*?

**RQ7:** Are there more sexual content and violence in beer ads than there are in non-beer ads during *Monday Night Football*?

**RQ8:** Is there a pattern of the distribution of ads with sexual content and violence?

## Chapter III

### Method

Content analysis was chosen because it is an efficient way to investigate the variables of such a large quantity of commercials. At first glance all the advertisements and promotions might seem dissimilar, yet through systematic organization the content was categorized and analyzed based on explicit and consistently applied rules. The use of content analysis to examine gender roles, sexual explicitness, and violent acts contained in commercials is best for addressing the hypotheses because content analysis of the data kept the outcomes consistent and objective. The same rules and guidelines were applied to every commercial. The quantification of the findings was precise and permitted succinct summarization of results (Wimmer & Dominick, 2003).

### Sample

A stratified random sample of 200 commercials was chosen from the 1,639 shown during the 16 regular-season National Football League games on ABC's *Monday Night Football*. The broadcasts began September 13, 2004 and aired every Monday through December 27, 2004. Each commercial break, or pod, had about three or four commercials though some pods contained as few as one commercial or as many as eight. When a pod was chosen for the sample all commercials during that pod were coded. Pods were divided into five strata: first quarter, second quarter, halftime, third quarter, and fourth quarter. In order to insure that the sample represented an accurate picture of *Monday Night Football* commercials, a pod was randomly chosen from each stratum until a total of 200 commercials were chosen. Since there were about half as many pods during halftime segments compared to each quarter, a pod from halftime was chosen

every other time so that the sample contained half as many commercials from halftime as from each of the quarters.

Two-hundred commercials were coded in which male or female adult characters appear. Advertisements featuring only children, animals, or objects were not included. Coders recorded what was advertised; whether for a product, service, or program—for example: “Campbell’s Chicken Noodle Soup” or “*Lost* program.”

The criteria categorizing the commercials were as follows:

Ad type: Since women have been associated primarily with household products (Courtney & Whipple, 1974; Dominick & Rauch, 1972), commercials were coded for eight ad types: “*programming*,” a TV show or TV event promotion; “*foodstuffs*,” any type of food or beverage; “*personal consumable*,” all consumable products that were not food like deodorants, soaps, shampoos etc.; “*home products*,” includes exterior and interior household goods like furniture, household cleaners, laundry, dish detergents etc.; “*car related products*,” including vehicle advertisements, gasoline, oil, maintenance, and repair ads; “*electronic and communications*,” any electronic product or communication service such as TVs, stereos, or cellular services as well as media such as newspapers and cable; “*restaurants*,” “*insurance or finance*,” life, health, auto or home insurance as well as credit cards, loans, or debt consolidation; “*service*,” work done as an occupation or business; “*movie/DVD*,” any advertisement for movies either currently showing in theaters or out on DVD/VHS; “*beer/alcohol*,” any beer or alcohol related product, “*other*,” any product or service that does not fall into the described categories.

Shrikhande (2003) used similar categories in her study of stereotyping women in television advertisements. These categories were also similar to those used by Brentl and

Cantor's (1988) and Ganahl et al.'s (2003) content analyses of gender representation in commercials.

Occupation of the central characters: A central character is defined by having a speaking role and/or three or more seconds of air time (Shrikhande, 2003). According to the traditional female stereotype, women are best as mothers or housewives, and if employed it is usually secretarial or non-professional work (Bardwick & Schumann, 1967). Shrikhande (2003) tested this assumption by coding for occupation using similar categories as the following six: When main figures were featured with children and/or a spouse in a home environment; engaged in any type of domestic situation like cleaning, serving food, cooking; or could be characterized as housewives or homemakers; the "family-home" occupation fit. Doctors, lawyers, business executives, or other professions that have social prestige were "professionals." If the commercial featured known public figures such as an athletes or actors the coder checked "media or entertainment figures." Low socioeconomic personal such as waitresses, gas station attendants, or mechanics were grouped in the "service role" category. A situation involving character interaction where no clear occupation is evident was coded as "social." Situations that do not involve character interaction where the occupation of the character is ambiguous were coded as "other."

Using tally marks the coders recorded the number of occurrences that appeared in each commercial. The following is a description of each:

Sexual imagery: This is defined as asserted or implied visual portrayals of sexual behavior. The following subcategories of sexual behavior developed by Greenburg, Graef, Fernandez-Collado, Korzenny, and Atkin (1980) apply:

- (1) Rape, homosexual or heterosexual—a forced act of intercourse, usually accompanied by assault or threat.
- (2) Homosexual acts—sex acts, other than rape between two persons of the same sex, e.g. intercourse ...
- (3) Intercourse—only heterosexual acts of intercourse, implicit or explicit, between two or more persons, including allusions to adultery, affairs, honeymoon activities, polygamy and visuals such as a couple in bed together or lying partially clothed.
- (4) Prostitution—any portrayal ... (of) pimps, solicitation, and the buying and selling of sex.
- (5) Petting—sexually stimulating behaviors more intense than simple kissing, touching, and hugging (e.g. a couple locked in a passionate embrace).
- (6) Miscellaneous—other sexual behaviors that do not clearly fit the other subcategories, including ... flashing, visual depiction of sex related objects (e.g. undergarments), visual depiction of partially nude characters, pornography, etc. (Greenburg, Abelman, & Neuendorf, 1981, p. 85).

Sexual language: This is any language about sex, open or implicit, including verbal referents to sexual behavior, sexual innuendos, references to homosexual relationships and behavior, and/or references to activities described above under “sexual imagery” (Greenburg et al., 1980; Greenburg et al. 1981). Examples of sexual language are ads for male enhancement drugs featuring implied sexual encounters.

Male gender role stereotyping: Defined as any situation when men appear in traditional roles as the dominant character. Rouner et al. (2003) cite examples of traditional male roles: “Males going off to work or participating in recreational and sports activities” (Rouner et al., 2003, p. 444). Other examples include men watching sports, doing manual labor, salesmen, or drinking beer.

Male objectification: Any situation objectifying men where male models are used for their sex appeal, and it is blatantly evident the man is used as a sex object. Often a female character is dominant. For example, women gaze out of an office window at a sweaty, muscular construction worker and discuss the attributes of his physique as he

works. This also includes camera shots “focusing on chest, buttocks, legs, or crotch”—  
i.e. body shots

that essentially frame the specified body part exclusively or a shot that the coder perceives draws his or her attention to that body part to the exclusion of other visual elements of the shot ... If camera shots focus on the man’s ... chest, buttocks, or crotch, it becomes clear that the advertiser is interested in titillating the audience. (Hall & Crum, 1994)

Male or female stance subordination: Masse’ and Rosenblum (1988) investigated stereotypical portrayals by studying the stance in which characters appeared. They found that figures in advertisements in subordinate positions such as shown sitting, bending, lying down, leaning, or standing with a slouch or drooping shoulders were most likely to be females. Shrikhande (2003) found partial support that female stance subordination still existed in commercials. Stance subordination was coded as a measure of female stereotyping (and as a counter-stereotype when males were in a subordinate position) in order to compare sports advertisements with previous research.

Female gender role stereotyping: Any situation when women appear in traditional roles such as mother, housekeeper, secretary, etc. Females cleaning, cooking, or caring for children are examples of traditional female roles (Rouner et al, 2003).

Female objectification: Any situation objectifying women where female models are used for their sex appeal or as background decoration, and it is blatantly evident the woman is used as a sex object. Often a male character is dominant. For example, men at a bar discuss the possibility of “hooking up” with any of several attractive women in a group (Rouner et al., 2003). This also includes camera shots “focusing on chest, buttocks, legs, or crotch”—i.e. body shots

that essentially frame the specified body part exclusively or a shot that the coder perceives draws his or her attention to that body part to the exclusion of other visual elements of the shot ... If camera shots focus on the (wo)man’s ... chest,

buttocks, or crotch, it becomes clear that the advertiser is interested in titillating the audience. (Hall & Crum, 1994)

Acts of violence: Aggression or violence that includes physical (hitting or threatening another person or humanoid such as Spiderman), verbal (insults, verbal derogation, angry commands) object (hitting or attacking an object, including action figures, or shooting at an unknown thing), or fortuitous destruction (prominent injury of object or person that is not directly “caused” by a character, such as an explosion) (Larson, 2001; Welch, Huston-Stein, Wright, & Plehal, 1979). Examples include a punch to the face, a threat to kill someone, man aiming a gun, or a car explosion.

The final section asks two questions concerning commercial content. 1) How would you rate the sexual content of this advertisement? 2) How would you rate the violence content of this advertisement? The coder rated the commercial based on a bipolar five-point semantic differential scale. The adjectives that anchor the first question are “highly sexual” and “not sexual.” The adjectives for the second question are “very violent” and “nonviolent.”

This study used the primary researcher as a coder and one outside coder. The independent coder was trained to code a pre-sample of 30 advertisements from the *Monday Night Football* episode that aired September 20, 2004. Intercoder reliability was tested using a pre-sample in order to better adjust the measurement strategy on a sample that would not affect the results. Intercoder reliability was achieved using Holsti’s formula for these nominal-level variables: Ad type, 1.0; Gender of the first three characters, 1.0; Occupation of characters one, two, and three, .88; Sexual imagery, .93; Sexual language, 1.0; Male stereotyping, .93; Female stereotyping, .86; Male objectification, 1.0; Female objectification, 1.0; Stance subordination, .86; and Violent

acts, 1.0. Intercoder reliability using Pearson's correlation for interval-level variables were: Sexual content rating, .86; and Violence content rating .86.

## Chapter IV

### Results

There were 200 commercials analyzed from the 2004 season of ABC's *Monday Night Football*. See Table 1 for content frequencies, percentages, and number of occurrences or counts. "Sexual imagery" and "sexual language" were combined into a "sexual content" category. "Female objectification" and "stance subordination" were combined into the "female stereotype" category. See Table 2 for gender distribution. Note that ads with men only (67 of them) occurred 30% more often than ads with women only (seven). Female stereotyping in commercials with women occurred more often than male stereotyping in commercials with men. But since there were 133 commercials with women and 193 commercials with men, the viewer was more likely to see male stereotyping because of the frequency of commercials featuring men—even though female stereotyping was 11 percentage points ahead of male stereotyping.

**Table 1 – Content**

	Frequency	Percent	Counts
Female stereotype	63	47%	173
Male stereotype	69	36%	93
Sexual content	41	20.5%	138
Violence	35	17.5%	104
Male objectification	18	9%	19
Male stance subordination	13	6.5%	14

**Note: Percent of female stereotyping is from ads with females. Percent of male stereotyping is from ads with males. Other categories are percentages of total commercials.**

**Table 2 - Gender distribution**

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Commercials with:	Frequency	Percent
Male(s) only	67	33.5%
Female(s) only	7	3.5%
Both	126	63.0%
Total	200	100.0%

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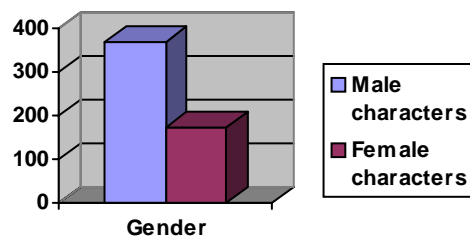
**RQ1:** Are men more likely to be the key actors in television advertisements during *Monday Night Football*?

Out of the 542 characters coded, 68% were male and 32% were female (See Figure 1). The 123 characters in 50 commercials coded in the pilot study revealed the exact same gender distribution. Men were the key actors because males as central characters outnumbered females more than 2 to 1. Ninety-six point five percent of the commercials featured men, whereas 70.5% featured women.

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	Characters	Percent
Male	368	68%
Female	174	32%
Total	542	100%

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**Figure 1 - Gender of central characters**

**RQ2:** In *Monday Night Football* advertisements with men only, how often do men appear in traditional, stereotypical roles?

Thirty-six percent of the commercials with men depicted men in traditional, stereotypical roles. Even though men outnumbered women two to one, there were 93 total counts of male stereotyping (compared with 173 counts of female stereotyping) (See Table 1).

**RQ3:** In *Monday Night Football* advertisements with women only, how often do women appear in traditional, stereotypical roles?

Nearly half of the commercials with women (47%) depicted women in traditional, stereotypical roles. Eighteen of the 63 commercials with female stereotypes also contained male stereotypes. There were 173 counts of female stereotyping in 133 commercials with women, 57 of those counts were for the portrayal of traditional female roles (such as mother, wife, or housekeeper), 106 counts were female objectification (such as scans of body parts and models as “background decoration”), and ten were for stance subordination (such as female characters sitting or laying down).

See Table 3 for gender and occupation crosstabulation. Media and entertainment figures were most prevalent at 37%, followed by the figures in a social setting at 24%. Both the family/home and other categories made up 12%. Characters as professionals appeared 9% of the time. Service people were portrayed 5% of the time. Only 2 of the 542 characters, less than 1%, were coded as clerical workers ( $\chi^2$  (df = 2,  $N$  = 542) = 22.062;  $p$  = .001).

**Table 3 - Comparison of gender and occupation**

		Family/home	Professional	Service role	Clerical	Media or entertainment	Social	Other	Total
Female	Count	32	12	4	2	59	50	15	174
	% within	18.4%	6.9%	2.3%	1.1%	33.9%	28.7%	8.6%	100.0%
Male	Count	34	38	21	0	143	82	50	368
	% within	9.2%	10.3%	5.7%	.0%	38.9%	22.3%	13.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	66	50	25	2	202	132	65	542
	% within	12.2%	9.2%	4.6%	.4%	37.3%	24.4%	12.0%	100.0%

**RQ4:** How much sexual content is present in *Monday Night Football* commercials and promotions?

There were 138 counts of sexual content in the 200 commercials coded. Twenty point five percent of the commercials contained at least one count of sexual content (See Table 1). Nineteen percent of the commercials were ranked as at least a “2” on a five-point semantic differential scale—one being “not sexual” five being “highly sexual.” Eight percent of the commercials were ranked as “2,” 3.5% percent were ranked as “3,” 3% were ranked as “4,” and 4.5% were ranked as “5,” (highly sexual) (See Table 4). The interval level statistics for the sex rating were: mean = 1.42, standard deviation = 1.019.

**Table 4 - Sexual rating of commercials and promotions on five-point scale of sexual explicitness**

	Rank	Frequency	Percent
(Not sexual)	1	162	81.0%
	2	16	8.0%
	3	7	3.5%
	4	6	3.0%
(Highly sexual)	5	9	4.5%
Total		200	100.0%

**RQ5:** How many acts of violence occur during *Monday Night Football* commercials and promotions?

There were 104 counts of violence or aggression in the 200 commercials coded. Seventeen point five percent of the commercials contained at least one count of violence (See Table 1). Sixteen percent of the commercials were ranked as at least a “2” on a five-point semantic differential scale, one being “nonviolent” five being “very violent.” Six point five percent of the commercials were ranked as “2,” 4% percent were ranked as “3,” 2.5% were ranked as “4,” and 3% were ranked as “5,” (very violent) (See Table 5). The interval level statistics for the violence rating were: mean = 1.34, standard deviation = .905.

**Table 5 - Violence rating of commercials and promotions on five-point scale of degree of violence**

	Rank	Frequency	Percent
(Nonviolent)	1	168	84.0%
	2	13	6.5%
	3	8	4.0%
	4	5	2.5%
(Very violent)	5	6	3.0%
Total		200	100.0%

**RQ6:** Are there more sexual content and violence in programming promotions than there are in commercials during *Monday Night Football*?

Programming promotions were the most frequent type of advertisement at 21.5%. Crosstabulation of programming promotions and commercials revealed that a higher percentage of promotions were rated “2” or more on the violence and sexual scales.

Forty-one point nine percent of the promotions ranked “2” or more on the sexual rating scale compared with 12.7% of commercials (See Table 6) ( $\chi^2$  (df = 2,  $N$  = 200) = 18.601;  $p$  = .000). Forty point six percent of the promotions ranked “2” or more on the violence rating scale compared with 17.9% of the commercials (See Table 7) ( $\chi^2$  (df = 2,  $N$  = 200) = 8.256;  $p$  = .004).

**Table 6 - Comparison of sexual rating for programming promotions vs. commercials**

		Sex rating		
		Rank of 1	Rank of 2, 3, 4, or 5	Total
Commercials	Count	137	20	157
	% within	87.3%	12.7%	100.0%
Programming Promotions	Count	25	18	43
	% within	58.1%	41.9%	100.0%
Total	Count	162	38	200
	% within	81.0%	19.0%	100.0%

**Table 7 - Comparison of violence rating for programming promotions vs. commercials**

		Violence rating		
		Rank of 1	Rank of 2, 3, 4, or 5	Total
Commercials	Count	138	30	168
	% within	82.1%	17.9%	100.0%
Programming Promotions	Count	19	13	32
	% within	59.4%	40.6%	100.0%
Total	Count	157	43	200
	% within	78.5%	21.5%	100.0%

**RQ7:** Are there more sexual content and violence in beer ads than there are in non-beer ads during *Monday Night Football*?

Beer or alcohol ads were the third most frequent type of advertisement at 10.5%. A higher percentage of beer ads (38%) were ranked at least a “2” on the sexual rating scale compared with non-beer ads (17%). Nine point five percent were ranked “2” and “4.” Nineteen percent were ranked “5” (See Table 8) ( $\chi^2 (2, N = 200) = 16.309; p = .003$ ). Only one of the 21 beer ads got a “2” on the violence rating scale. Therefore a crosstabulation of the violence rating and beer/non-beer ads was not significant ( $\chi^2 (df = 2, N = 200) = 2.691; p = .611$ ).

**Table 8 - Comparison of sexual rating for beer vs. non-beer ads**

		Sexual Rating					
		1	2	3	4	5	Total
Non-beer ads	Count	149	14	7	4	5	179
	% within	83.2%	7.8%	3.9%	2.2%	2.8%	100.0%
Beer/alcohol Ads	Count	13	2	0	2	4	21
	% within	61.9%	9.5%	.0%	9.5%	19.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	162	16	7	6	9	200
	% within	81.0%	8.0%	3.5%	3.0%	4.5%	100%

**RQ8:** Is there a pattern of the distribution of ads with sexual content and violence?

The highest percentage of sexual commercials aired in the third quarter. Of the commercials that were ranked at least “2” on the sexual scale; 34.2% aired in third quarter pods, 28.9% in first quarter pods, 18.4% in second quarter pods, 13.2% in fourth quarter pods, and 5.3% in halftime pods. A crosstabulation of sexual content rating and position throughout quarters was not significant ( $\chi^2 (df = 2, N = 200) = 8.242; p = .083$ ).

The third quarter also aired the highest percentage of violent commercials. Of the commercials that were ranked at least a “2” on the violence scale; 34.4% aired in third quarter pods, 18.8 in first quarter pods, 15.6% in second quarter pods, 15.6% in halftime pods, and 15.6% in fourth quarter pods. The crosstabulation of violent content rating and position throughout quarters was not significant ( $\chi^2$  (df = 2,  $N$  = 200) = 5.943;  $p$  = .203).

An overwhelming majority, nearly three out of four, of the advertisements that aired last in pods were programming promotions (See Table 9). Twenty-three point three of the promotions were in the middle of the pod and 2.3% of the promotions were first ( $\chi^2$  (df = 2,  $N$  = 200) = 62.228;  $p$  = .000).

**Table 9 - Comparison of position within pod for programming promotions vs. commercials**

		First in pod	Ads in middle	Last in pod	Total
Commercials	Count	54	80	23	157
	% within	34.4%	51.0%	14.6%	100.0%
Programming Promotions	Count	1	10	32	43
	% within	2.3%	23.3%	74.4%	100.0%
Total	Count	55	90	55	200
	% within	27.5%	45.0%	27.5%	100.0%

## Chapter V

### Discussion

Compared to findings in previous literature, the present data indicate that sexual content, violence, and gender role stereotypes in sports advertisements are lessening. Yet, just because offensive content is declining is no reason to think that all is well. The types of commercials that aired during *Monday Night Football* have no place in “family friendly” sports broadcasts. The broadcast industry would like you to believe that the advertisers are the primary culprits of indecency during commercial breaks; however this study has shown that the programming promotions produced by the network itself were overwhelmingly more sexual and violent in nature. Since promotions are most likely to be shown last in the pod, the recency effect indicates that viewers are more likely to remember the sexuality and violence of promotions.

Broadcasters defend their “edgy” shows touting the ratings scale that parents can use to block programs for mature audiences. But there is no technology available to block the promotions for sexually charged, violent shows; and there is no rating system for commercials. Broadcasters say that it is the parents’ responsibility to monitor what their child sees on television, but parents have no way of knowing what will be shown in a commercial break. The fact that one in four advertisements was sexual in nature and that one in five was violent is unacceptable in a broadcast marketed to a family audience. The only safe way to ensure that unwanted content does not enter the home is to do as Senator Prior does with his children and change the channel during each commercial break. Parents should not have to be that diligent and quick with the remote control. Programs with family ratings should contain family friendly commercials. This might

mean the implementation of a ratings system for commercials and promotions to coincide with the rating of the broadcast in which it is aired.

There are several possible explanations for the apparent decline of sexuality, violence, and gender stereotypes in sports commercials. This shift could be attributed to the push of political correctness and the advancement of the modern feminist ideals of equality into the realm of sports advertising. Equality among the sexes has also impacted the sports world itself. For example, the 1972 Title IX amendment increased participation of women in college sports; and in 1996 the Woman's National Basketball Association was formed.

Most likely a better explanation for the decline of offensiveness is that the Janet Jackson nipple-baring episode and the raunchy-Super-Bowl ad backlash that followed prompted clean up of the commercials aisle. Another plausible reason for the decline in raunchy ads during NFL games could be the steady rise of female viewership. Since the NFL has recognized this trend and is actively marketing to the female demographic, the league may be steering clear of more ads that might offend female viewers (Reed, 2004). Female television networks, such as Lifetime and Oxygen, tend to be less sexual and stereotypical concerning programming and advertising decisions (Orecklin, 2002).

“Nipplegate” was a catalyst that sparked political and social pressure for decency in television advertising. Baring another extreme violation, the pressure from these sources will most likely subside. Decreased pressure could result in relaxed standards of broadcasts. Relaxed standards could lead to more egregious violations. Cycles of violations and reforms may be inevitable, but other ways of getting the attention of broadcasters and advertisers must be explored to decrease the frequency and intensity of such cycles.

It seems advertisers are still holding firmly to the notion that sex sells evidenced by the fact that they are still using sex appeal in commercials despite recent political and social reprimands concerning sports ads. Advertisers seem to think that these methods work despite emerging research that shows it is not an effective advertising technique (Bushman & Bonacci, 2002; Bushman & Phillips, 2001; Courtney & Whipple, 1983; Chestnut et al., 1977; Reid & Soley, 1981). Advertisers are likely relying on evidence and numbers that supports the effectiveness of using sex and violence (Boddewyn, 1991; Kang & Hamilton, 2003; Pitcher, 2003). Since advertisers will likely respond best to that which affects their pocketbooks, industry leaders must be exposed to the recent research that shows sex and violence impairs memory. More research is needed to publicize the effect that using sex and violence to sell products is a poor advertising practice.

It is unclear how the move of *Monday Night Football* from ABC to ESPN will affect its advertising content. Since MNF is now on cable and virtually unregulated compared with broadcast standards, there is the potential for much more offensive commercial content. As the Jackson scandal and political pressure fade is possible that the move to cable will open the flood gates for indecent advertising. MNF stunts, such as the 2004 skit where a desperate housewife got naked for a football star, have the potential to become more graphic now that the show is on cable (“FCC Rules ABC Skit for Football Game Wasn’t Indecent,” 2005). Future research should address the advertising content on *Monday Night Football* on ESPN.

Future research of programming promotions is also needed to explore the frequency and degree of offensive promotions advertised during family broadcasting. Such studies should investigate if mature promotions air at times when children are more likely to be watching. Future studies should also seek to analyze commercials during

other types of programming, such as news magazines and primetime dramas. This would provide a control element to show if explicit content is more prevalent in sports broadcasting. To gain a clear indication of the trends in sports advertising it is necessary to have data from past broadcasts of *Monday Night Football*. By examining *Monday Night Football* broadcasts from a decade ago it could be determined if there is more or less explicit content. The more years examined, the more accurately researchers will be able to determine trends.

One limitation of this study was only coding for three main characters, as defined by having a speaking role and/or three or more seconds of air time. While the three character categories were adequate for most commercials, there were advertisements with more than three main characters. To better represent the types of gender roles portrayed, future studies should code for every central character appearing in the commercial. Another limitation of this study is that there was no differentiation between the genders by having separate categories for “sexual imagery.” The presence of a “male sexual imagery” and a “female sexual imagery” category would have enabled better analysis of the gender component of sexual imagery. Despite these limitations and despite apparent declines in sexual and violent content, this study alerts us to lingering concerns about commercial content, and raises the possibility that the networks themselves may be the worst offenders.

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## Appendix A: Coding Bible

Coder – The coder should write down his/her name or initials.

Date – Write the date that the commercial aired.

Break number – Write the commercial break in which the advertisement appeared in relation to the beginning of the broadcast (1, 2, 3, etc.).

Number – Write the number of the commercial, numbered in the order in which it appeared during the total broadcast.

Commercials in which male or female adult figures appeared are coded.

Advertisements featuring only children, animals, or objects are not included. In order to be coded the advertisement appeared during the broadcast of ABC's *Monday Night*

*Football*. Categories for advertisements and central characters are defined as follows:

A. Note what is being advertised whether it is for a product, service, or program.

For example, "Campbell's Chicken Noodle Soup" or "*Lost* program."

B. Check the category of the ad's type:

- a. Foodstuffs: Any type of food or beverage
- b. Personal consumables: All personal hygiene products like deodorants, soaps, shampoos etc. Drugs and medicine.
- c. Home products: Included exterior and interior household goods like furniture, household cleaners, laundry, dish detergents etc.
- d. Car related products: Including vehicle advertisements, gasoline, oil, maintenance, and repair ads.
- e. Electronic and communications: Any electronic product or communication service such as TVs, stereos, or cellular services

- f. Restaurants
  - g. Insurance or finance: Life, health, auto or home insurance as well as credit cards, loans, or debt consolidation
  - h. Programming: TV show or event promotion
  - i. Service: Work done as an occupation or business
  - j. Movie: Any advertisement for movies, DVDs, or videos
  - k. Other: Any product or service that does not fit in above categories
- C. Central characters: A central character is defined by having a speaking role and/or three or more seconds of air time (Shrikhande, 2003). Note the gender of each central character, male or female.

Note the occupation of each central character:

- a. Family/home: Main figures, with children and/or a spouse in a home environment, or engaged in any type of domestic situation like cleaning, serving food, cooking—could be characterized as housewives or homemakers.
- b. Professionals: Main figures as doctors, lawyers, business executive, or any other profession considered a high social status.
- c. Media or entertainment figures: Featuring known public figure such as an athlete or actor.
- d. Service role: Considered low socioeconomic profession such as waitress, gas station attendant, or mechanic.
- e. Clerical: Secretary or office worker
- f. Social: Situation where characters interact and a clear occupation is not evident

- g. Other: Any occupation that was ambiguous or did not fit into above categories

The following section requires the coder to determine if commercials contain the following content. Using tally marks in the space provided, the coder should record the number of occurrences for each category that appears in each commercial. An occurrence dependant upon imagery is defined as one that lasts for one second or more in the same shot. A cut or transition ends the occurrence. A verbal occurrence is a complete thought in dialogue or narration. Below is a description of each category:

**Sexual imagery:** This is defined as asserted or implied visual portrayals of sexual behavior. The following subcategories of sexual behavior developed by Greenburg et al. (1980) apply:

- (1) Rape, homosexual or heterosexual—a forced act of intercourse, usually accompanied by assault or threat.
- (2) Homosexual acts—sex acts, other than rape between two persons of the same sex, e.g. intercourse ...
- (3) Intercourse—only heterosexual acts of intercourse, implicit or explicit, between two or more persons, including allusions to adultery, affairs, honeymoon activities, polygamy and visuals such as a couple in bed together or lying partially clothed.
- (4) Prostitution—any portrayal ... (of) pimps, solicitation, and the buying and selling of sex.
- (5) Petting—sexually stimulating behaviors more intense than simple kissing, touching, and hugging (e.g. a couple locked in a passionate embrace).
- (6) Miscellaneous—other sexual behaviors that do not clearly fit the other subcategories, including ... flashing, visual depiction of sex related objects (e.g. undergarments), visual depiction of partially nude characters, pornography, etc. (Greenburg, Graef, Fernandez-Collado, Korzenny, & Atkin, 1980).

**Sexual language:** This is any language about sex, open or implicit, including verbal referents to sexual behavior, sexual innuendos, references to homosexual relationships and behavior, and/or references to activities described above under “sexual

imagery” (Greenburg et al., 1980). For example, advertisements for male enhancement drugs featuring implied sexual encounters.

**Male gender role stereotyping:** Defined as any situation when men appear in traditional roles as the dominant character. Rouner et al. (2003) cite examples of traditional male roles: “Males going off to work or participating in recreational and sports activities” (Rouner et al., 2003, p. 444). Other examples include men watching sports, doing manual labor, salesmen, or drinking beer

**Male objectification:** Any situation objectifying men where male models are used for their sex appeal, and it is blatantly evident the man is used as a sex object. Often a female character is dominant. For example, women gaze out of an office window at a sweaty, muscular construction worker and discuss the attributes of his physique as he works. This also includes camera shots “focusing on chest, buttocks, legs, or crotch”—i.e. body shots

that essentially frame the specified body part exclusively or a shot that the coder perceives draws his or her attention to that body part to the exclusion of other visual elements of the shot ... If camera shots focus on the man’s ... chest, buttocks, or crotch, it becomes clear that the advertiser is interested in titillating the audience. (Hall & Crum, 1994)

**Male stance subordination:** Male figures in subordinate positions such as shown sitting, bending, lying down, leaning, or standing with a slouch or drooping shoulders (Masse’ and Rosenblum, 1988).

**Female gender role stereotyping:** Any situation when women appear in traditional roles such as mother, housekeeper, secretary, etc. Females cleaning, cooking, or caring for children are examples of traditional female roles (Rouner et al, 2003).

**Female objectification:** Any situation objectifying women where female models are used for their sex appeal or as background decoration, and it is blatantly evident the

woman is used as a sex object. Often a male character is dominant. For example, men at a bar discuss the possibility of “hooking up” with any of several attractive women in a group (Rouner et al., 2003). This also includes camera shots “focusing on chest, buttocks, legs, or crotch”—i.e. body shots

that essentially frame the specified body part exclusively or a shot that the coder perceives draws his or her attention to that body part to the exclusion of other visual elements of the shot ... If camera shots focus on the man’s ... chest, buttocks, or crotch, it becomes clear that the advertiser is interested in titillating the audience. (Hall & Crum, 1994)

**Female stance subordination:** Female figures in subordinate positions such as shown sitting, bending, lying down, leaning, or standing with a slouch or drooping shoulders (Masse’ and Rosenblum, 1988).

**Acts of violence:** Aggression or violence that includes physical (hitting or threatening another person or humanoid such as Spiderman), verbal (insults, verbal derogation, angry commands) object (hitting or attacking an object, including action figures, or shooting at an unknown thing), or fortuitous destruction (prominent injury of object or person that is not directly “caused” by a character, such as an explosion) (Larson, 2001; Welch, Huston-Stein, Wright, & Plehal, 1979). Examples include a punch to the face, a threat to kill someone, man aiming a gun, or a car explosion.

The final section asks two questions concerning commercial content. 1) How would you rate the sexual content of this advertisement? 2) How would you rate the violence content of this advertisement? The coder will rate the commercial based on a bipolar five-point semantic differential scale. The adjectives that anchor the first question are “highly sexual” and “not sexual.” The adjectives for the second question are “very violent” and “nonviolent.”

## Appendix B: Coding Sheet

Coder: \_\_\_\_\_ Coding sheet number: \_\_\_\_\_

Date aired: \_\_\_\_\_ Pod number: \_\_\_\_\_

Quarter: \_\_\_\_\_ Commercial number: \_\_\_\_\_

**A.** What is being advertised? \_\_\_\_\_

- B.**  Foodstuffs    Personal consumable    Home product    Car related product  
 Electronic and communications    Restaurants    Insurance or finance  
 Programming    Service    Movie/DVD    Beer/alcohol    Other

**C.** Central character 1: Gender:  Male    Female

- Occupation:  Family/home    Professional(s)    Service role    Clerical  
 Media or entertainment figure(s)    Social    Other

Central character 2: Gender:  Male    Female

- Occupation:  Family/home    Professional(s)    Service role    Clerical  
 Media or entertainment figure(s)    Social    Other

Central character 3: Gender:  Male    Female

- Occupation:  Family/home    Professional(s)    Service role    Clerical  
 Media or entertainment figure(s)    Social    Other

**Content:** (tally mark for each occurrence)

Sexual imagery	Sexual language
Male gender role stereotype	Female gender role stereotype
Male objectification	Female objectification
Male stance subordination	Female stance subordination
Violent acts	

How would you rate the sexual content of this advertisement?

Highly sexual					Not sexual
5	4	3	2		1

How would you rate the violence content of this advertisement?

Very violent					Nonviolent
5	4	3	2		1

## Vita

The author was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and has been a Louisianan all his life. During his undergraduate studies at Louisiana College in Pineville, Louisiana, he was a theater actor, freelance video producer, and co-editor of the campus newspaper. He was a member of the theatrical Greek organization Alpha Psi Omega, the academic honor society Alpha Lambda Delta, and was on the dean's list seven semesters. In 2002 he graduated *Magna Cum Laude* with a bachelor of arts degree in media communications and a minor in journalism. He taught elementary special education for three years while becoming fully certified through the Louisiana College practitioner teacher program. He began his graduate studies in 2004 at the Manship School of Mass Communication. He is set to graduate with a master of mass communication degree, summer commencement 2006.