Something in Adland doesn’t add up: It’s time to make female creatives count.

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Abstract

The increased visibility of gender issues in society has inspired a trend amongst marketing companies for female empowerment. Marketers are working with clients, developing advertising which advocates equality for female consumers. Yet despite this trend for femvertising, a closer inspection of the departments where ads are made reveals little progress has been made towards gender equality for the women working inside creative advertising. Clearly, something in Adland doesn’t add up. This study considers whether this stems from women’s thwarted attempts to establish a leadership identity within strongly-gendered cultures where they are subject to established practices. This is explored through interviews with 30 female creatives from the US, UK, and mainland Europe. Based on the findings, the paper presents three over-arching themes: vision; voice; and visibility, which together represent the challenges women experience in developing a leadership identity, but also suggest the opportunities for agencies to increase the influence of female creatives. If the advertising industry’s claims to represent society are to be taken seriously, it must move beyond empowering female consumers, to similarly empower its female creatives and achieve greater gender equality in the industry.

Advertising, Femvertising; Female empowerment, gendered-environment, creative directors
THE GENDER PROBLEM AT THE HEART OF ADVERTISING

In response to the increased visibility of gender issues within society (Rubery, 2019), female empowerment has become a prevalent theme in marketing (Drake, 2017). Brands such as Always and Pantene are producing advertising campaigns such as #LikeAGirl and #ShineStrong to advocate equality for women. This new style of advertising termed ‘femvertising’ (Champlin, Sterbenk, Windels, & Poteet, 2019) has proved popular among brands and agencies alike (Akestam, Rosengren & Dahlen, 2017), and given rise to new award schemes and categories, such as the Athena awards and the Glass Lion from Cannes Lions. The pro-female stance of these adverts has also been welcomed as a counterpoint to the widespread use of gender stereotypes which have characterised advertising to-date (see Eisend, 2019; Middleton, Turnbull, & de Oliveira, 2019).

Yet closer inspection of the departments where ads are made, reveals little progress towards gender equality has been made in the past 30 years (Mallia & Windels, 2018). Why is it that despite advertising’s recent interest in empowering female consumers, it has been much slower to achieve equality for women working inside the industry, with only a small minority of women progressing to creative leadership? As part of an on-going exploration of women and marketing, this study sought to understand more about this apparent disconnect.

**Why do we need more female leaders in creative advertising?**

Female representation in leadership is an important issue for any business (Spencer, Blazek & Orr, 2019), with diversity positively linked to business success (McKinsey & Co, 2015) and the value of a company (Isidro & Sobral, 2015). Yet, a lack of women in creative leadership raises additional concerns for advertising which is credited with the power and the responsibility to not only influence, but also reflect society (Shabbir et al., 2018). While female consumers are exerting unprecedented levels of influence on the marketplace, their
female representatives working within advertising remain a small minority. With women driving over 60% of social media sharing (3% Movement, 2019) and up to 85% of consumer decisions (Grow & Broyles, 2011; Mallia, 2009), why do females still account for only 14.6% of all creative directors worldwide (Grow & Deng, 2015)? Clearly something in Adland doesn’t add up.

Not surprisingly, the advertising industry is being criticised for being out of touch, and seen as needing to improve its reputation by developing more socially responsible practices (Štumberger & Golob, 2016). Although there are notable exceptions, such as Susan Credle and Vicki Maguire who are seen as two of the most influential women in advertising today, the lack of senior female creatives may help explain why women feel that advertising does not reflect them (JWT Intelligence, 2017) or even understand them (Coffee, 2014). Urgent industry change is now needed (Kemp, 2019) to not only legitimise advertising’s claims to reflect society, but also address concerns that the ad industry is becoming increasingly irrelevant (Pattissal, 2019).

**Why don’t more women reach positions of creative leadership?**

It would appear that the number of women in the pipeline isn’t the problem. Women make up around half of the advertising workforce in the UK, US, and Spain (Windels & Mallia, 2015), but few of these women make it to leadership positions. Prior research into advertising in the USA, UK, Mexico, Peru, and Spain has identified a number of barriers which prevent women from getting to the top of male-dominated departments (Grow & Broyles, 2011; Mallia, 2009; Mallia & Windels, 2011; Mensa & Grow, 2015; Mensa & Grow, 2019; Windels & Lee, 2012). Various reasons have been cited by previous research including: motherhood (Grow & Broyles, 2011; Mallia, 2009), a lack of flexible work arrangements and long working hours (Mallia, 2009; Mallia & Windels, 2011), insufficient recognition from peers,
limited access or even exclusion from key accounts, and a tendency for male creative
directors to hire people just like them (Broyles & Grow, 2008). The creative department of ad
agencies is described as a stand-alone and strongly gendered environment built on a
machismo culture (Mensa & Grow, 2019) and a male paradigm (Nixon & Crewe, 2004;
Stuhlfaut, 2011). Here, personality factors more often associated with men, such as
perseverance, toughness, competitiveness, and even a ‘thick skin’, are seen as important
factors for organisational success (Grow & Broyles, 2011; Mallia, 2009, Windels & Lee,
2012) with military language which is seen to perpetuate cultures of masculinity (Brands,
2014) embedded into the creative process (Turnbull & Wheeler, 2017). The net result is that
few women advance, or thrive in these departments. Instead, female creative directors have
become “tokens in a man’s world” (Grow & Deng, 2015, p. 21) with 12% of female creatives
now considering leaving the industry altogether over the next two years (Hanan, 2019).

**Time to take a different view?**

Despite the insights provided by research, the lack of progress towards increasing the
numbers of women in creative leadership, suggests that there is still more to understand about
this persistent problem (Windels & Mallia, 2015). Therefore, this study explores whether the
lack of women at the top of creative departments can be attributed to the thwarted attempts of
women to be affirmed and supported as potential leaders within these gendered
environments.

More men at the top of creative departments necessarily means fewer role models for
women, and a tendency for those in the organisation to equate leadership with male stories
These institutional biases present significant challenges for women seeking progression and
have a profound impact on how women understand and communicate themselves as potential
With advertising offering little, or no, formal leadership development training, it remains a largely unstructured industry (Mallia et al., 2013) in which self-promotion is considered necessary for progression to creative leadership (Grow & Broyles, 2011). Yet, women who engage in self-promotion and display the expected agentic behaviours required of leadership, such as assertiveness and confidence, might be seen as acting outside of the characteristics ascribed to their gender (Eagly & Karau, 2002), and will often encounter criticism and backlash from male colleagues (Rudman & Phelan, 2008; Thompson-Whiteside, Turnbull & Howe-Walsh, 2020). This backlash can take different forms but might include a woman being seen as less likeable, or even excluded from certain activities by the community.

If, as CEO Karen Kaplan notes, real inclusivity goes beyond simply increasing the numbers of women, to allow women to influence the strategic direction and leadership of the industry, how can this be achieved? This study explores the experiences of female creatives as they seek career progression. The findings have implications for advertising practice, but they may equally resonate with the experiences of women in other male-dominated industries.

**REVISITING THE RESEARCH**

*Identity formation*

Individuals might reach the position of Creative Director (CD) due to their social and cultural capital, including their ability to engage in effective personal promotion (Mallia et al., 2013). The role of CD presents a possible self (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Ibarra, 1999) and is a desired identity for many female creatives. Yet assuming the identity of a creative leader will involve an on-going negotiation between the individual and their community. Identity is socially constructed through social and relational processes (DeRue & Ashford, 2010; Wenger, 1998), becoming a living entity (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that is developed and
redeveloped over time, based on feedback from a community (Paechter, 2003). In this way, the community of practice plays a vital role in developing the identity of a potential leader.

A possible self can become a provisional self when an individual emulates the behaviours associated with the possible self on offer (Ibarra, 1999). For example, an individual might experiment with the leadership-style actions and behaviours required of CD, but these can either be affirmed, or equally resisted by management and colleagues (Ibarra, Ely & Kolb, 2013). In response to this feedback, the individual may choose to retain some aspects of the provisional or experimental self, while other aspects may be discarded (Epitropaki et al. 2017). When the community of practice either affirms or rejects the provisional identity of a potential leader, they can initiate what DeRue and Ashford (2010) describe as positive or negative spirals. Affirmation from management and colleagues can boost self-confidence starting a positive spiral, potentially leading to further endorsements, such as key projects, or even formal leadership roles, helping an individual over time to incorporate leadership into their sense of self and encouraging them to seek new leadership opportunities (Day & Harrison, 2007). If, however this provisional self and leadership-style actions are resisted by the community, it can start a negative spiral in which self-confidence and further motivation to seize opportunities or display further leadership action, is reduced therefore weakening a sense of self as a leader (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). In this way, continued participation, interaction and positive feedback from the community are key to female creatives being accepted in a leadership role, and crucial in allowing them to see themselves as a creative leader.

However, in the highly competitive creative departments of advertising agencies, this unfolding process may be particularly problematic for women. Firstly, effective self-presentation in formal settings such as meetings and pitches is considered necessary for progression to leadership, but prior research shows that women engage in lower levels of
self-presentation and are more reluctant to promote themselves (Bolino, Long & Turnley, 2016; Thompson-Whiteside, Turnbull & Howe-Walsh, 2018). Secondly, management and colleagues may view any self-promotion and leadership-style actions from women as going against the prevailing norms for their gender. In this case, women may be struggling to develop as a leader not just within a strongly gendered work culture, but also within a society which is still “deeply conflicted about her authority” (Ely & Rhode, 2010, cited in Ibarra, et al., 2013, p.16). To contribute to our understanding of these issues, this study explores women’s experience of negotiating a leadership identity in advertising’s strongly gendered creative departments.

**EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE CREATIVES**

*Collecting the data*

The researcher explored these issues during 2018 and 2019 with 30 female creatives in interviews undertaken face-to-face, via Skype, or telephone, lasting between 20 and 90 minutes. Initial contacts made at the International Festival of Creativity in Cannes, France were added to through a snowballing method (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2016). The women wished to remain anonymous, but work in a wide selection of leading ad agencies in the UK, USA, and mainland Europe, ranging in age from late 20’s to mid-50’s (see Table 1 for details of participants).

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To explore the leadership identity work of female creatives working in advertising, the researcher adopted a narrative approach to interviews allowing participants to better express their views (Willig, 2013) and reflect upon their experience of working within creativity (Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton, 2013). The interview started with questions at a more general level including questions about why they felt women were still in a minority, and then narrowed to explore their personal experiences of seeking leadership in advertising’s creative departments. Such a technique has been used effectively in studies which have examined challenges in a range of contextual settings (Thompson-Whiteside et al., 2018, Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016). After 30 interviews, the researcher determined that the same themes were being discussed and that data saturation had been reached (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Analysing the data**

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews, recording and transcribing these verbatim to retain the richness of the data for further analysis. Thematic analysis was undertaken (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with the researcher reading and re-reading the transcripts to familiarise themselves with the data, noting initial ideas for themes. Another researcher worked independently so that the researchers could then compare and agree themes to enhance inter-coder reliability. Following the methods suggested by Braun and Clarke, the data was then coded manually. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings and to aid the discussion, the actual words of participants are included here, quoted verbatim to illustrate the points under discussion. The differences in industry structure between countries and the

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*Table 1 Detail of Participants (Numbers allocated to provide anonymity).*
range of age of participants is recognised as a limitation of this study but despite these, the interviews revealed a number of common experiences.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study indicate that although women may seek to claim a leadership identity, it is not always accepted or affirmed within the gendered environment and current practices of the creative department. Resistance and even aggression from the community leads some women to become tired of the struggle, and even withdraw from the field.

Data analysis identified many themes which have been explored elsewhere (See Thompson-Whiteside et al., 2020), such as the need for women to conform to a strongly-gendered culture. However, the data also reveals some new insights. These themes were then brought together into three overarching themes (see Fig. 1):

![Vision]  ![Voice]  ![Visibility]

*Figure 1: Three themes which reflect both the challenges and the opportunities to increase the impact of women on creative advertising.*

These reflect the key areas of challenge experienced by women in creative departments as they seek leadership, but also suggest recommendations for agencies seeking to address gender imbalance in creative departments.

**Vision**

One of the requirements of a creative director is to shape the creative identity of the department and share a vision for its future. Having a vision means being able to not only highlight problems with current approaches, but to also generate and communicate new ideas
and opportunities for future practice (Ely et al., 2011). Yet, in departments dominated by men which offer little or no formal training in how to be a creative director, it is not surprising that male norms continue to shape both current practice and future thinking. There is still a strong association between male characteristics and leadership with a mythological male figure representing success. As one participant says, “I think there’s a false perception of what it means to be a leader, like there’s this myth of a creative God who’s like a guy who has this idea and it’s like, this is what we’re going to do, ‘everybody run’” (P10). Another participant adds, “He’s a certain kind of guy, has a certain kind of personality, and does a certain kind of work” (P24).

Emulating a male leadership identity is seen as difficult or inappropriate for women. Women displaying the supposed male behaviours associated with leadership are often seen to be subverting prevailing gender stereotypes and accordingly suffer backlash or criticism (Rudman & Phelan, 2008). One British participant from a major global agency said,

“They thought that I had too many opinions and shouldn’t have opinions at all, and the way that I said things was wrong even though I think it was very much similar to how a man would say things” (P7).

A lack of affirmation from the community then impacts their ability to see themselves as a creative leader and can initiate a negative spiral. As one US participant from independent agency notes,

“I think as a woman in advertising you’re always thinking I don’t really belong here, you kind of speak to yourself, like wow I’m so lucky to have a job and would anybody else give me this job, and you almost feel like a work experience person who’s just had their contract extended, even when you’re a major player” (P1).

Constructing a leadership identity in an organization is a complex process of both claiming the desired identity, and having that identity validated through social interactions. Creative
women might well seek to claim a leadership identity, but it is not always accepted or endorsed within the gendered environment of the creative department, and without affirmation, a women’s leadership journey may stall. However, the women who participated in this study believe that the advertising industry is showing a distinct lack of vision for an industry built on imagination.

“Everybody always talks about great change or whatever, but it really hasn’t changed for 50 years” (P16).

“They think the way of fixing the situation is literally to put women inside an existing male system, we need a new system” (P14).

Seeking recognition in the existing system means that women keep their head down and get on with the job. Yet, participants acknowledge that beyond competence in the day job, a well-articulated vision for the future of the department and even the ad industry itself, can help an employee stand out and suggest their leadership potential. Envisioning an alternative style of leadership could also mobilise others to make change a reality. However, if women are currently expending energy in trying to emulate a male leadership identity and adopting the practices of a strongly-gendered culture, developing a vision for a different future might seem a luxury, rather than an essential part of leadership development.

**Voice**

Participants acknowledged the on-going discussions around the need to see more women in senior creative roles, but argue that there is an additional need to amplify the voices and creative ideas of women. Voice is defined by the World Bank as the capacity to speak up and be heard, to participate in discussions, discourse, and decisions. As one of the participants argues,

“We want a system where we are equal in telling those stories about women” (P29).
Indeed, the data indicates that women increasingly recognise that being heard; giving voice to vision is critical in establishing presence and credibility and in being seen as a leader. At the heart of the creative process is the need to sell ideas to win accounts and creative awards. However, women describe this competitive process as brutal, one in which ideas and their proponents are often interrogated and pulled apart to breaking point. The participants in this study also feel their voices are evaluated differently to men.

“Guys will just go up and present stuff, two seconds later everyone will go, yeah, round of applause, high fives...Women have to work a lot harder to get that kind of respect” (P27).

They report the more ‘muscular’ language used by men to assert their authority. In contrast, women report having their voice interrupted and being spoken over in meetings usually by men, and ultimately being judged by different standards. Even if they do speak up in meetings, they can often be belittled or find that their idea is attributed to a man.

“You can really feel the tension, [in a pitch] like it’s palpable, there’s just a general dismissiveness around your opinions, when what is needed is encouragement, encouragement, encouragement” (P23).

“Women get crushed in many ways, and derided, and sometimes it’s a little bit like the straw that broke the camel’s back and then they won’t choose to continue their career in advertising” (P30).

A French participant based in Paris adds,

“So if you have some hideous guy who makes you feel like an idiot it can set you back, and I’ve had that before where men have turned on you, and you may have given an opinion or viewpoint and it’s different to the other person’s and they make you feel like a total idiot, that doesn’t help with your confidence” (P2).
In this environment, women report that they can be hesitant to articulate their ideas and opinions, often preferring to wait until they are more certain of the facts. In short, they might not take the opportunity to express their leadership, or it might be taken from them initiating a negative spiral which undermines self-confidence, weakening a sense of self as a leader (DeRue & Ashford, 2010).

There was a belief among the women that in a high-stakes client pitch, there is still a persistent belief that men do a better job of articulating and selling the idea. Yet, participating, interacting, and gaining feedback from the community of practice are activities considered crucial to being accepted in a leadership role (Ibarra et al., 2013; DeRue & Ashford, 2010). The difficulties women experience in getting their voices heard limit their ability to express themselves. Consistent with the findings of DeRue and Ashford (2010), when women do not receive sufficient affirmation of their leadership identity it can inject doubt into their sense of self as leader.

Visibility
American activist Marian White Edelman famously said, "You can’t be what you can’t see" so it is little wonder that the predominance of men in leadership does little to encourage women in progressing to leadership positions. Instead, their minority status appears to give rise to what Faulkner (2009) in a study of female engineers, described as ‘in/visibility paradox’ whereby women are at the same time both highly visible as women, yet invisible as engineers. Female creatives would appear to suffer from a similar paradox. Their minority status within creative advertising brings greater visibility to them as women, but renders them less visible as creative leaders. As a consequence, participants report being highly visible as women and highlight issues of sexual harassment. Older participants however, reported that younger colleagues were less likely to acknowledge it when they are still finding their feet in the industry. It seems as if the reverence paid to some male creative leaders has perpetuated a
culture which facilitates, or at least turns a blind eye, to abuses of power. Participants describe how this has made both the reporting and the handling of any misconduct difficult. A culture persists in which some men have been seen as a cash, or indeed, sacred cow that cannot be challenged for fear of any impact on the bottom line or client relationships. A woman from the UK (P14) reports that she struggled to have issues of sexual harassment taken seriously, instead she was told “lighten up” and even “enjoy the attention”. Another US woman (P15) was told by HR that links with an important client made one particular male creative director “untouchable”. However, as one woman reports, now she is older, she is less visible as a woman and no longer a target, as she describes,

“when you walk into a meeting if you’re older and you’re not attractive anymore, you get more shit done, it’s worked for me since 40, but it’s a damn shame that I had to wait till 40 for somebody to take me seriously and leave me alone” (P9).

The problems of workplace sexism are also not limited to staff, as one woman reported,

“Casting is a big thing, because I used to work in the production side so I know a lot about casting, and I tell you any feminist will be horrified, it is an unbelievable issue... the discussion of women’s looks and the passing around of casting tapes for ‘recreational’ purposes” (P15).

There was some mention of #Metoo and the ad industry’s #TimesUp campaign which is seen to acknowledge the industry’s culture of inequality and sexual harassment. However, this may be having unintended consequences and even driven some male behaviours underground making them less visible. It appears that despite men being more conscious of their behaviour in the office, they now appeared to view out-of-hours activity as a way to be their “true” selves, away from the constraints of the workplace. These activities can feel exclusive and can also strengthen men’s opportunities to forge ties with leadership and develop their own leadership identity.
Despite the acknowledged risks, participants recognise that without any formal leadership training, women need to make themselves more, not less visible in order to be seen as potential creative leaders. Career progression is linked to self-presentation and promotion but as the women acknowledge, “no one will do it for you”. Therefore, increased visibility and developing a personal brand both on and off-line is an important part of being seen, heard, and most crucially, considered for leadership. Yet, consistent with previous research which recognises that women are more reluctant to promote themselves (Thompson-Whiteside, Turnbull & Howe-Walsh, 2018) and more passive, using relatively low levels of self-promotion (Bolino, Long & Turnley, 2016), participants recognise that increased visibility and the associated self-promotion can be uncomfortable.

“Self-promotion is really, really important, and women just don’t do that themselves at all. I think the way that they might be able to do it themselves is if they see more women do it” (P6).

Even if women achieve greater visibility through self-promotion, it can increase the scrutiny to which they are subjected. Ironically, this can make women more risk-averse and more likely to step away from their vision and sense of purpose. Women report how the risks associated with visibility drive some female creatives to shift to less front-line roles in either planning or account management. Others withdraw from traditional agencies and move to digital agencies and smaller shops, whilst many more leave to work for themselves. All of which, may help explain their low numbers in positions of advertising leadership and help us understand why more of their number are considering leaving in the next two years.

**TIME FOR ACTION**

The findings of this paper suggest that advertising agencies are guilty of hypocrisy. While they appear to have embraced equality and empowerment for female consumers, they have
been much slower to achieve equality for their female creatives. Beyond moral arguments for female empowerment and equality, there is a compelling business case for agencies to change. The industry is coming under increasing pressure with clients taking work in-house. Agencies face intense competition from Facebook, Google, and management consultancies who are coming into the sector (Handley, 2019), and are experiencing growing difficulties in connecting with consumers (Hsu, 2019). A recent report from research group Forrester (2019) suggests it is time for advertising to stop talking, and take urgent action to deconstruct and rebuild its current model, or risk becoming increasingly irrelevant.

A number of collectives and individual campaigners are actively campaigning for equal gender representation in creative director roles, including Cindy Gallup, Madonna Badger, the 3% Conference in the USA, Creative Equals and WACL in the UK, and See it Be it from Cannes Lions and Spotify. Yet, these activists and their current audiences are mostly women, who have taken on the responsibility for change (Pashley, 2018). However, they cannot, nor should they, do it alone. Global clients such as P&G and Unilever have recognised the appetite for change, and are combining growth with social responsibility to improve on their representations of women. However, participants in this study feel that ad agencies have been slower to take action. Yet, allowing women to exert more influence over agency leadership and creative messaging is now both a pressing issue and a commercial imperative. Based on current debate and insights from 30 interviews, recommendations are outlined below to suggest how advertising agencies can take opportunities to affirm the vision, voice, and visibility of female creatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Vision
The answer to advertising’s gender imbalance is not to simply put more women into the existing system. Advertising is an industry founded on imagination and creativity, now it must envision a different system. Agencies can:

- Set out a vision for gender equality with ownership at the senior level. Set a target and clearly communicate this to employees. Report and be accountable for progression. Provide unconscious bias training for everyone to help people see their role in the problem, e.g. Creative Equals in the UK run a number of diversity and inclusion courses for ad agencies.

- Create new communities of practice. Experiment with women-only creative teams to better represent the powerful female consumer.

- Envision new models of leadership. Re-design the identity of a CD as a gender neutral role, fit for 2020 and beyond. Provide and promote formal, gender-intelligent leadership training. See the work of Barbara Annis and the Gender Intelligence Group in the US.

- Change the gendered workspace. Stop making women feel ‘other’, take out the bar, the pool tables and the baby football. Redesign the space with everyone in mind. First steps might include asking employees to create mood boards, or design pop-up spaces.

**Voice**

Gendered cultures and accepted practice mean that women struggle to be heard, yet articulating a vision and selling creative ideas is a crucial part of developing a creative leadership identity. Agencies can:
• Apply a zero-tolerance approach to men interrupting women or speaking over them, even perhaps introducing gamification into the workplace to raise awareness of effective communication in a way that is engaging to employees (Robson, Plangger, Kietzmann, McCarthy & Pitt 2019);

• Provide public speaking training for women based not on technique but focussed on articulating and defending their perspective. Be seen as a first mover in getting women’s voices heard. Sponsor an industry-wide initiative to develop the voices of future female leaders, see the work of EG and Ginger Public Speaking in the UK.

• Redesign the pitching process to allow women to be heard. Offer positive affirmation alongside constructive criticism. Replace head-to-head competition with the iterative development of ideas.

• Change the narrative. The language of conflict is currently embedded into creative departments with references to war rooms, battles, penetration, and territories. Remove stereotypical male language from job descriptions, replace language such as “drive, competitive, aggressive” which can deter female candidates, with more gender neutral language.

Visibility

Women at all levels perceive visibility to be an important opportunity, but also a significant risk. To help women manage these, agencies can:

• Provide and promote clear reporting systems for sexual misconduct and deal with these reports promptly and thoroughly.

• Make female talent more visible. Women cannot be what they cannot see, thus this is a crucial step in inspiring a new generation of leaders. Increase the visibility of successful senior women through available platforms. Consider developing on-line
profiles, recorded interviews, or using Facebook Live to facilitate them in sharing their experience of negotiating a leadership identity.

- Be seen as an employer brand that is serious about female progression and influence. Use existing marketing channels to leverage initiatives to support women. This will not only help increase the visibility of female creatives, but can also boost agency profile.

**CONCLUSION**

Something in Adland doesn’t add up. Despite widespread discussion of equality and the recent trend for femvertising, advertising still has a gender problem. If the advertising industry wants its pro-female advertising to be taken seriously and avoid accusations of hypocrisy, then it must now similarly empower its female creatives. Creative women are still struggling to negotiate a leadership identity within gendered creative departments which limits their influence over the industry and the ads that get made. While the findings might describe the female experience in many male-dominated environments, advertising’s gender imbalance is also clearly linked to its current culture and practices. Acknowledging the problem is only the start, affirming women as current and future leaders is the crucial next step.
REFERENCES


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