

Chapter One

Introduction

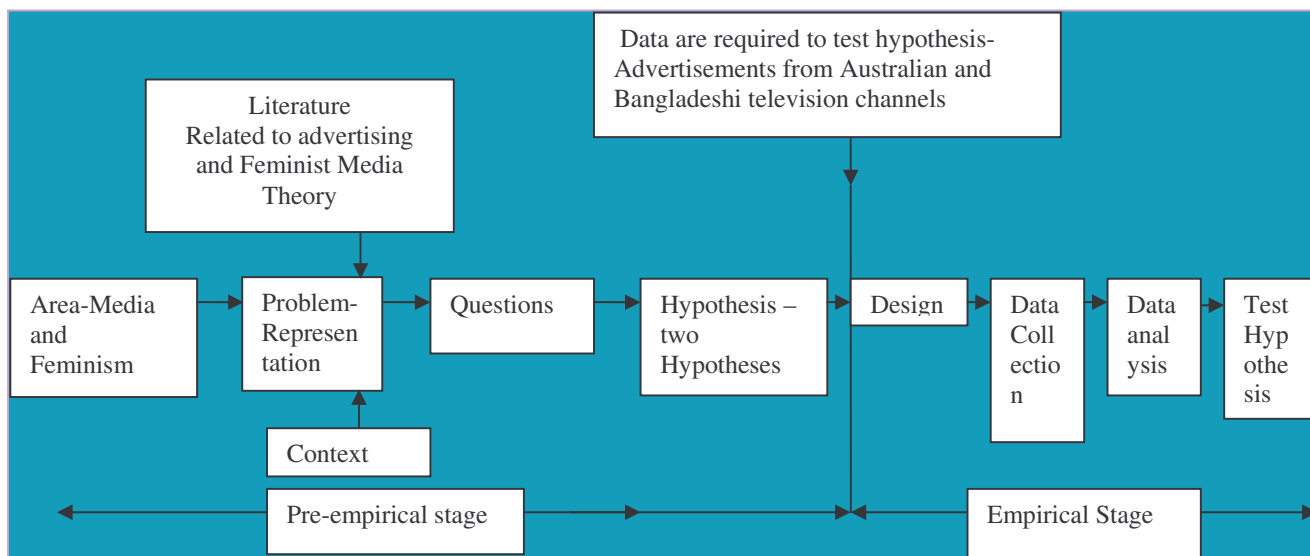
The present study considers the representation of women in television commercials in Australia and Bangladesh. Australia and Bangladesh are two very different countries in regards to their cultural, technological and geographical settings. However, sometimes their vision regarding women's identity intersects when "femininity" is defined and represented similarly and stereotypically in both countries. This study explores the similarities and differences in women's representation in both Bangladeshi and Australian television commercials. In these two countries' commercials, common images of femininity which circulate include women as sexual objects and objects to be looked at; that women are close to nature; women's bodies circulate around the binary of purity and pollution; women must be white, skinny and beautiful; women must obey customs established by patriarchy; and last of all, women in commercials are translated as women from the dominant culture. Consequently, these images strengthen women's secondary position and reinforce racial differences in societies. The study also assumes that commercials do not draw on a reserve of images of femininity, but that they both produce and reproduce images of femininity and sexual identity in particular ways. The study is important because from a feminist a perspective, understanding women's identity and understanding others' views towards women allows for these stereotypes to be deconstructed.

The study aims to:

- a. explore how women are portrayed as sex objects in television advertisements, by interpreting sexual and romance narratives implicit or explicit in the plots and investigating how women's bodies are fragmented in advertising;
- b. examine how women are subjugated to patriarchy; and
- c. discover how advertisements engage in racialized discrimination in both countries by investigating representations of indigenous and white women and woman from minority groups in comparison to the dominant group's presence in advertisements.

There are two hypotheses underpinning this research. Firstly, the 'East' and the 'West' sometimes collapse into each other in constructing femininity in the arena of advertising. There are similarities in that women are represented as sex objects, as compassionate, residents of private spheres, dependent, possessing a 'polluted' body, and loyal to patriarchy in advertisements, both in Australia and Bangladesh. Thus, femininity is produced by stereotypical constructs. Secondly, there are few representations of minority women in Australian or Bangladeshi advertisements. Thus this absence actively constructs dominant national identities as well as nationalism in advertisements of both countries.

The following model shows how hypotheses of the study will be tested:



Source: Planning of the present study, Based on Punch, Keith F. 2005, p.40

At the empirical stage commercials analysed that were screened on prime-time television (between 7:00 and 11:00pm) from August to October 2005 and from July to September 2006. These commercials were screened on various channels, including *ATN Bangla Television*, *Boishakhi television*, *NTV*, in Bangladesh and Channels 7, 9, 10 and *SBS* in Australia. A total of 780 advertisements were viewed. Of these, 280 screened on Bangladesh and 500 were screened on Australian television.

There are five chapters in this thesis. The second chapter introduces some theoretical narratives concerning women and media and relates those with the present study. The third chapter will describe the representation of femininity in Australian and Bangladeshi television advertisements. The fourth chapter will explore the representation of indigenous and ethnic minority women in these two countries' advertisements. The fifth chapter will offer a brief conclusion to the thesis as a whole. Further, this will discuss some avenues for improving or resisting representations of women.