GENDER COMMERCIALS

Reproduced in this chapter are some commercial still photographs—ads—featuring human subjects. In addition, some use is made of news shots of “actual” persons, that is, of models who are being pictured in their own capacity. My assumption is that anyone whose picture appears in media print has almost certainly cooperated in the process and therefore—like a professional model—has placed this appearance in the public domain, foregoing the protection from social analysis that persons, at least living ones, can strongly claim regarding pictures taken for home consumption.

The pictures reproduced were selected at will from newspapers and current popular magazines easy to hand—at least to my hand. They were chosen to fit into sets, each set to allow the displaying, delineating, or mocking up of a discrete theme bearing on gender, especially female gender, and arranged with malice within each set to the same end. Each set of pictures is accompanied informally by some verbal text.

Some comments first concerning how pictures can and can’t be used in social analysis. My claim is that the themes that can be delineated through pictures have a very mixed ontological status and that any attempt to legislate as to the order of fact represented in these themes is likely to be optimistic.

(1) The student of commercial pictures can draw a random sample from a magazine’s particular issue, or from a defined period of issue, or from a specified list of magazines, and disclaim characterizing other issues, periods, or magazines, even more so other sources of pictures, such as newprint, postcards, and the like, not even to mention actual life itself. Specifiable representativeness, then, is a way that a collection of pictures could qualify—and a way the pictures about to be analyzed do not. (Of course, findings based on a systematic sample very often get their weight from the fact that the reader can be trusted to generalize the findings beyond their stated universe, statistical warrant for which would require another study, which, if done, would induce a still broader overgeneralization, and so on, but that is another matter.) Observe that this sort of representativeness pertains to pictures as such and doesn’t tell us what we very often want to know, namely, what aspects of real life pictures provide us a fair image of, and what social effect commercial picturing has upon the life that is purportedly pictured—a limitation also of the purposely selected pictures displayed here.

(2) Since there is little constraint on what I elect to identify as a theme (a “genderism”), or which pictures I bring together in order to display what is thus identified, or on the way I order the stills within a given series, it could be taken that anything could be depicted that I can manage to suggest through what appears to be common to a few pictures. Success here requires nothing more than a small amount of perversity and wit and a large batch of pictures to choose from. The larger the initial collection, the more surely the analyst can find confirming examples of what he thinks he has found in one picture or would in any case like to depict—a case of representativeness declining as the data base increases. So effective depiction of a theme cannot in itself prove anything about what is found in pictures or, of course, in the world. Indeed, something like the method I use is employed by artful compilers of photographic funny books, camera pranksters who match gesticulatory pictures of famous citizens against animals and plants apparently engaged in similarly characterizable postures, or who superimpose ballooned thoughts and statements, these formulated to define the situation as it never was in actual life, committing the protagonists to responses of a wildly scurrilous kind. So, too, the texts accompanying the pictures are cast in the style of generalization-by-pronouncement found in the writings of freelance body linguists, stray ethnologists, and lesser journalists.

(3) The particular matters I want to consider raise three distinct and general methodological questions that should not be confused: discovery, presentation, and proof. Only the first two will here be at issue, these two allowing me to exploit without a major research investment the very special advantages of working with photographs, which advantages are as follows:

(i) There is a class of behavioral practices—what might be called “small behaviors”—whose physical forms are fairly well codified even though the social implications or meaning of the acts may have vague elements, and which are realized in their entirety, from beginning to end, in a brief period of time and a small space. These behavioral events can be recorded and their image made retrievable by means of audio and video tapes and camera. (Tape and film, unlike a still, provide not only a recoverable image of an actual instance of the activity in question, but also an appreciable collection of these records. More important, audio and video recordings of very small behaviors facilitate micro-functional study, that is, an examination of the role of a bit of behavior in the stream which precedes, co-occurs, and follows.) The coincidence of a subject matter and a recording technology places the student in an entirely novel relation to his data, forming the practical basis for microanalysis. This special research situation should not be confused with the use of recording technology to document a news story, provide a feel for a community, limn in the contours of a relationship, depict the history of a nation, or any other matter whose meaning is not linked to a fixed physical form which can be realized in the round in a recordable space and time.

(ii) Pictures from any source are now cheap and easy to
reproduce in uniform slide form. A collection allows for easy arranging and rearranging, a search and mock-up, trial and error juggling, something between cryptography and doing jigsaw puzzles, a remarkable aid both to uncovering patterns and finding examples, whether mere illustrations or actual instance records.

(iii) The student can exploit the vast social competency of the eye and the impressive consensus sustained by viewers. Behavioral configurations which he has insufficient literary skill to summon up through words alone, he can yet unambiguously introduce into consideration. His verbal vagaries can serve as a means to direct the eye to what is to be seen, instead of having to serve as a full rendition of what is at issue. The notion of a "merely subjective response" can then be academically upgraded; for clearly part of what one refrains from studying because the only approach is through verbal vagaries has a specific nature and is precisely perceived, the vagary being a characteristic of one's literary incapacity, not one's data.

(iv) A set of pictorial examples (whether illustrations or instance records) of a common theme provides more than a device for making sure that the pattern in question will be clear to the viewer. Often one or two examples would suffice for that. Nor does the size of the set relate to the traditional sampling notion of showing how prevalent were cases of a particular kind in the sample and (by extension) in the sampled universe. Something else is involved. Different pictorial examples of a single theme bring different contextual backgrounds into the same array, highlighting untold disparities even while exhibiting the same design. It is the depth and breadth of these contextual differences which somehow provide a sense of structure, a sense of a single organization underlying mere surface differences, which sense is not generated simply by reference to the numerical size of the set relative to the size of the sample. Whereas in traditional methods the differences between items that are to be counted as instances of the same thing are an embarrassment, and are so in the degree of their difference, in pictorial pattern analysis the opposite is the case, the casting together of these apparent differences being what the analysis is all about. Indeed, something is to be learned even when an advertiser in effect performs analysis backwards, that is, starts with the same models and the same sales pitch and then searches out different possible scenes as vehicles for them and it—all this in the hope of building product interest through a mixture of repetition and novelty. For in purposely setting out to ring changes on a set theme, the advertiser must nonetheless satisfy scene-production requirements such as propriety, understandability, and so forth, thereby necessarily demonstrating that, and how, different ingredients can be choreographed to "express" the same theme. Here, certainly, it is entirely an artifact of how advertisements are assembled that a set of them will exhibit a common underlying pattern, and here the student is only uncovering what was purposely implanted to this end in the first place. But how the advertiser succeeds in finding different guises for his stereotypes still instructs in the matter of how the materials of real scenes can be selected and shaped to provide a desired reading.

(4) The pictures I have un-randomly collected of gender-relevant behavior can be used to jog one's consideration of three matters: the gender behavioral styles found in actual life, the ways in which advertisements might present a slanted view thereof, and the scene-production rules specific to the photographic frame. Although my primary interest is actual gender behavior, the pictures are accompanied by textual glosses that raise questions of any order that might be stimulated by the pictures. In any case, what will mostly be shown and discussed is advertisers' views of how women can be profitably pictured. My unsubstantiated generalizations have the slight saving grace that they mostly refer to the way gender is pictured, not the way it is actually performed.

(5) By and large, I did not look for pictures that exhibited what seemed to me to be common to the two sexes, whether just in pictures or in reality as well. Nor for pictures that dealt with sex differences which I assumed were widely and well-understood. The vast amount of what is—at least to me—unremarkable in advertisements is thus vastly underrepresented. (Something of the same bias actually informs every ethnography; it is differences from one's own world and unexpected similarities that get recorded.) But given these limitations, once a genderism was identified as one worth mocking-up, almost all sex role exceptions and reversals I came across were selected. It is to be added that although the advertising business is focused (in the U.S.A.) in New York, and although models and photographers are drawn from a very special population indeed, their product is treated as nothing-out-of-the ordinary by viewers, something "only natural." In brief, although the pictures shown here cannot be taken as representative of gender behavior in real life or even representative of advertisements in general or particular publication sources in particular, one can probably make a significant negative statement about them, namely, that as pictures they are not perceived as peculiar and unnatural. Also, in the case of each still, by imagining the sexes switched and imagining the appearance of what results, one can jar oneself into awareness of stereotypes. By keeping this switching task in mind, the reader can generate his own glosses and obtain a cue to the possible merit of mine.

(6) A further caveat. Advertisements overwhelmingly and candidly present make-believe scenes, the subjects or figures depicted being quite different from the professional models who pose the action. Obviously, then, a statement about, say, how nurses are presented in ads is to be taken as a shorthand way of saying how models dressed like nurses and set in a mock-up of a medical scene are pictured. (A fee could persuade a real nurse to pose in an ad about nursing or
allow a "caught" photograph of her in action to be used, but
ordinarily advertising agencies find that a real nurse in a real
hospital unsatisfactorily typifies her kind.) I will on occasion
employ this simplification, speaking of the subjects of a
picture as though they were instantiations, namely, recorded
images of the real thing. The complication is that posing for
an ad almost invariably involves a carryover of sex, female
models appearing as female figures, and male models as
males. (So, too, there is a carryover of broad ranges of
age-grade.) It follows that any discussion of the treatment of
gender in ads happens to strike where a sense is to be found
in which model and subject are one. In statements about
sex-stereotyping, then, there is special warrant for falling
back upon simplified reference. An advertiser's contrived
scene featuring a "nurse" does not present us with a
photographic record of a nurse, that is, an actual picture of a
real nurse, but nonetheless presents us with one of a real
woman, at least in the common sense meaning of "real." After
the studio session is over, the model does not go on
being a "nurse," but she does continue to be a "woman."

(7) Finally, a word about the arrangement of pictures in
each series and other details. In general, subject matter
proceeds from children to adults and from actual pictures to
overly contrived commercial ones. (An implication is thus
implanted that ritualized behavioral practices found in a
variety of contexts in real life come to be employed in a
"hyper-ritualized" form in ads featuring women.) Depictions
disconfirming the arrangements argued here, i.e., depictions
of sex role reversals, are placed at the very ends of the series
to which they belong and are marked off with a special
border. It should also be noted that throughout females in a
"feminine" stance will be seen to take up this position
relative to another woman, not merely relative to a man,
strongly suggesting that gender stereotypes—least photo-
graphic ones—involve a two-slot format, the important issue
being to fill the slots with role differentiated subjects, not
necessarily with subjects of opposing sexual identity.

The pictures themselves have all been reproduced in black
and white for reasons of cost. Although it would have been
somewhat more accurate to reproduce the color ones in
color, I feel that not much has been lost. Each picture has
been numbered, and the numbers correspond to those
appearing before the relevant verbal text; the text itself
immediately precedes the series of illustrations to which it
refers. Pictures as well as text have been footnoted, and
pictures as well as text appear in footnotes. The photographs
have been arranged to be "read" from top to bottom,
column to column, across the page.

III Having considered reasons why my selection of
commercial pictures need not be taken seriously, I
want to consider some reasons why they should.

The task of the advertiser is to favorably dispose viewers
to his product, his means, by and large, to show a sparkling
version of that product in the context of glamorous events.

The implication is that if you buy the one, you are on the
way to realizing the other—and you should want to.
Interestingly, a classy young lady is likely to be in the picture
adding her approval of the product and herself to its
ambience, whether the product be floor mops, insecticides,
orthopedic chairs, roofing materials, credit cards, vacuum
pumps, or Lear jets. But all of this is only advertising and has
little to do with actual life. So goes the critical view of these
exploitive arts. Which view is itself naive, failing to appreciate
what actual life has to do with.

Whatever point a print advertiser wants to make about his
product, he must suffer the constraints of his medium in
making it. He must present something that will be
meaningful, easily so, yet all he has space to work with will
be type and one or two still photographs, typically
containing protagonists whose words (if any seem to be
spoken) are unavailable. And although textual material
outside of the picture brackets will provide a reading of
"what is happening," this is commonly a somewhat
duplicated version; the picture itself is designed to tell its
little story without much textual assistance.

How can stills present the world when in the world
persons are engaged in courses of action, in doings through
time (not frozen posturings), where sound is almost as
important as sight, and smell and touch figure as well?
Moreover, in the world, we can know the individuals before
us personally, something unlikely of pictures used in
advertising.

Some of the solutions to this problem are obvious. A
scene can be simulated in which figures are captured in those
acts which stereotypically epitomize the sequence from
which they are taken—presumably because these acts are
identified as happening only in the course of, and
currently during, an extended action. Thus viewers are
led to read backwards and forward in sequence time from the
moment of vision. Another solution is to draw on scenes
that are themselves silent and static in real life: sleeping,
pensive poses, window shopping, and, importantly, the
off-angle fixed looks through which we are taken to convey
our overall alignment to what another person—one not
looking at us directly— is saying or doing. Another solution is
to position the characters in the picture microecologically so
that their placement relative to one another will provide an
index of mapping of their presumed social position relative
to one another. And, of course, there is the use of scenes and
characters which have come to be stereotypically identified
with a particular kind of activity by the widest range of
viewers, such as self-recognition in the world. Inciden-
tially, advertisers overwhelmingly select positive,
approved typifications (even so their product will be
associated with a good world as opposed to being dissociated
from a bad one), so that what we see are idealized characters
using ideal facilities to realize ideal ends—while, of course,
microecologically arranged to index ideal relationships.
Finally, advertisers can use celebrities as models, for although
these personages are not known personally they are known
about.

\footnote{Qualifications regarding the phrase "real woman" are presented

\footnote{A point suggested to me some years ago by David Sudnow (see
Sudnow 1972).}
Interestingly, it is not merely commercial advertisers who have recourse to these pictorial methods. Governments and nonprofit organizations employ the same devices in order to convey a message through pages, posters, and billboards; so do radical groups and so do private persons with photography as a hobby or a calling. (It is rather wrong, alas, to say that only advertisers advertise. Indeed, even those concerned to oppose commercial versions of the world must pictorialize their arguments through images which are selected according to much the same principles as those employed by the enemy.)

I want to argue now that the job the advertiser has of dramatizing the value of his product is not unlike the job a society has of infusing its social situations with ceremonial and with ritual signs facilitating the orientation of participants to one another. Both must use the limited "visual" resources available in social situations to tell a story; both must transform otherwise opaque goings-on into easily readable form. And both rely on the same basic devices: intention displays, microecological mapping of social structure, approved typifications, and the gestural externalization of what can be taken to be inner response. (Thus, just as a Coca-Cola ad might feature a well-dressed, happy looking family at a posh beach resort, so a real family of modest means and plain dress might step up their level of spending during ten days of summer vacation, indeed, confirming that a self-realizing display is involved by making sure to photograph themselves onstage as a well-dressed family at a posh summer resort.) This is not to deny, of course, that the displays presented in stills are not a special selection from displays in general. Advertisers, by and large, must limit themselves to soundless, scentless appearances and one-shot moments of time, whereas actual ritual need not be restricted in these particular ways.

Which raises the issue of "social situations," defining these as arrangements in which persons are physically present to one another. Stills may, and often do, contain a solitary figure, ostensibly not in a social situation at all. But if the scene is to be read by the viewer, then the subject must give appearances and engage in doings that are informative, and these informing are just what we employ in actual social situations in order to establish our own stories and learn about the stories established by others. Solitary or not, figures in stills implicitly address themselves to us, the viewers, locating us close at hand through our being allowed to see what we can see of them, thus generating a social situation in effect. And indeed, the photographer often clinches matters by requiring solitary subjects to simulate a gestural response to a phantom hovering near the camera, a forcible reminder of the place we the viewers are supposed to inhabit. Observe, the solitary subject not only "externalizes" information that will give us an understanding of what it is that can be taken to be going on, but also quite systematically fails to exhibit taboo and unflattering self-involving behavior, even though these are just the sort of acts that are likely to occur when the actor is assured he is alone. (So perhaps a byproduct of commercial realism will be the reinforcement of censored versions of solitary conduct.)

When one looks, then, at the presentation of gender in advertisements, attention should be directed not merely to uncovering advertisers’ stereotypes concerning the differences between the sexes—significant as these stereotypes might be. Nor only examine these stereotypes for what they might tell us about the gender patterns prevalent in our society at large. Rather one should, at least in part, attend to how those who compose (and pose for) pictures can choreograph the materials available in social situations in order to achieve their end, namely, the presentation of a scene that is meaningful, whose meaning can be read at a flash. For behind these artful efforts one may be able to discern how mutually present bodies, along with nonhuman materials, can be shaped into expression. And in seeing what picture-makers can make of situational materials, one can begin to see what we ourselves might be engaging in doing. Behind infinitely varied scenic configurations, one might be able to discern a single ritual idiom; behind a multitude of surface differences, a small number of structural forms.

Let me admit that these arguments about the relation of ritual to commercial pictures might seem to be a way of making the best of a bad thing, namely, using easily available ads to talk about actual gender behavior. But I am not interested here in behavior in general, only in the displays that individuals manage to inject into social situations, and surely this is part of what advertisers try to inject into the scenes they compose around the product and then photograph. Commercial pictures are in the main entirely posed, "mere pictures," at best "realistic." But, of course, the reality they presumably reflect distortedly is itself, in important ways, artificial. For the actuality here at issue is how social situations are employed as the scenic resource for constructing visually accessible, instantaneous portraits of our claimed human nature. Posed pictures can therefore turn out to be more substantial than one might have thought, being for students of a community’s ritual idiom something like what a written text is for students of its spoken language.
Relative Size

1-4 One way in which social weight—power, authority, rank, office, renown—is echoed expressively in social situations is through relative size, especially height. This congruence is somewhat facilitated among males through occupational selection favoring size—a form of circularity, since selection often occurs in social situations where size can be an influence. In the case of interaction between parents and their young children, biology itself assures that social weight will be indexed by the physical kind.

In social interaction between the sexes, biological dimorphism underlies the probability that the male’s usual superiority of status over the female will be expressible in his greater girth and height. Selective mating then enters to ensure that very nearly every couple will exhibit a height difference in the expected direction, transforming what would otherwise be a statistical tendency into a near certitude. Even in the case of mere clusters of persons maintaining talk, various forms of occupational, associational, and situational selection markedly increase the biologically grounded possibility that every male participant will be bigger than every female participant.

Now it seems that what biology and social selection facilitate, picture posing rigorously completes:

Indeed, so thoroughly is it assumed that differences in size will correlate with differences in social weight that relative size can be routinely used as a means of ensuring that the picture’s story will be understandable at a glance:

5-7 And here exceptions seem to prove the rule. For on the very few occasions when women are pictured taller than men, the men seem almost always to be not only subordinated in social class status, but also thoroughly costumed as craft-bound servitors who—it might appear—can be safely treated totally in the circumscribed terms of their modest trade:
8–11 The theme of relative size is sometimes employed as a basis for symbolization, that is, designing a picture whose every detail speaks to a single thematic issue:

12–26 Women, more than men, are pictured using their fingers and hands to trace the outlines of an object or to cradle it or to caress its surface (the latter sometimes under the guise of guiding it), or to effect a "just barely touching" of the kind that might be significant between two electrically charged bodies. This ritualistic touching is to be distinguished from the utilitarian kind that grasps, manipulates, or holds:

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Here and elsewhere in connection with the role of fingers (see pictures 295–320), I draw directly on observations made by Michi Ishida, to whom I give thanks.
Because nothing very prehensile is involved in these ritualistic touchings, the face can be used instead of a hand.

Self-touching can also be involved, readable as conveying a sense of one's body being a delicate and precious thing.
Function Ranking

In our society when a man and a woman collaborate face-to-face in an undertaking, the man—it would seem—is likely to perform the executive role, providing only that one can be fashioned. This arrangement seems widely represented in advertisements, in part, no doubt, to facilitate interpretability at a glance.

37-44 This hierarchy of functions is pictured within an occupational frame.7

The irony has been noted that an appreciable amount of the advertising aimed at selling supplies for women’s household work employs males in the depicted role of instructing professionals or employs a male celebrity to tout the efficacy of the product (see Komisar 1972:307).
It is also pictured outside of occupational specialization:

"Chalfen (1973:94) reports that in his American sample: "The male head of household used the camera most of the time. In a few cases, a teenage son, who was learning about cameras and filmmaking, took over this responsibility."
59-60 Function ranking is also pictured among children, albeit apparently with the understanding that although the little actors are themselves perfectly serious, their activity itself is not, being rather something that touchingly strikes an anticipatory note. In brief, "cuteness" is involved.⁹

60 All instruction seems to involve some sort of subordination of the instructed and deference for the instructor. These expressive features of the learning situation are reinforced by the linking of learning to age-grade subordination throughout most of the individual's learning career. In our society, one form of learning seems especially associated with child status, the "kinaesthetic" form,¹⁰ involving a molding physical contact between instructor and instructed. Men seem to be pictured instructing women this way more than the reverse:

⁹The notion of kinaesthetic learning derives from Bateson and Mead (1942:85-86). This book brilliantly pioneered in the use of pictures for study of what can be neatly pictured. The work stimulated a whole generation of anthropologists to take pictures. However, very little analysis was—and perhaps could be—made of what these students collected. Somehow a confusion occurred between human interest and the analytical kind. Dandy movies and stills were brought home of wonderful people and fascinating events, but to little avail. Much respect and affection was shown the natives and little of either for the analytical use that can be made of pictures.

ⁱ⁰A useful study of gender stereotypes in the illustrations of children's books is provided by Weitzman et al. (1972), for which I am methodologically grateful.
Whenever an adult receives body-addressed help or service from another, the resulting action is likely to involve collaboration of hands. The recipient guides the action and/or takes over at its terminal phases. (Examples: passing the salt or helping someone on with his coat.) In this way, presumably, the recipient's sense of autonomy is preserved. It is also preserved, of course, by his acquiring those skills through which he can efficiently tend to his own bodily needs. Infants and children, however, must suffer their hands being bypassed while an adult gets on with the job of looking after them. It is understandable, then, that when adults are pictured in real scenes being spoon-fed, they are pictured guying the action in some way, presumably so the self projected by the act of being fed will not be taken as a reflection of the real one.

\[\text{Admittedly there is the popular notion that members of the aristocratically inclined classes traditionally engaged personal servants to obtain body-connected care that members of the middle classes would want to provide for themselves, ashamedness here being a support of democracy. Of course, correlated with personal servicing was the non-person treatment of those who provided it.}\]
Which raises the questions of how males are pictured when in the domains of the traditional authority and competence of females—the kitchen, the nursery, and the living room when it is being cleaned. One answer, borrowed from life and possibly underrepresented, is to picture the male engaged in no contributing role at all, in this way avoiding either subordination or contamination with a “female” task:

Another answer, I think, is to present the man as ludicrous or childlike, unrealistically so, as if perhaps in making him candidly unreal the competency image of real males could be preserved.
A subtler technique is to allow the male to pursue the alien activity under the direct appraising scrutiny of she who can do the deed properly, as though the doing were itself by way of being a lark or a dare, a smile on the face of the doer or the watcher attesting to the essentially unserious essayed character of the undertaking.\(^\text{1,2}\)

The nuclear family as a basic unit of social organization is well adapted to the requirements of pictorial representation. All of the members of almost any actual family can be contained easily within the same close picture, and, properly positioned, a visual representation of the members can nicely serve as a symbolization of the family's social structure.

Turning to mocked-up families in advertisements, one finds that the allocation of at least one girl and at least one boy ensures that a symbolization of the full set of intrafamily relations can be effected. For example, devices are employed to exhibit the presumed special bond between the girl and the mother and the boy and the father, sometimes in the same picture:

\(\text{Correspondingly, when females are pictured engaged in a traditionally male task, a male may (as it were) parenthesize the activity, looking on appraisingly, condescendingly, or with wonder.}\)
Although in commercial scenes a unity is symbolized between fathers and sons and between mothers and daughters, there is a suggestion that different types of unity might be involved. In a word, there is a tendency for women to be pictured as more akin to their daughters (and to themselves in younger years) than is the case with men. Boys, as it were, have to push their way into manhood, and problematic effort is involved:

Girls merely have to unfold:

"Lights-Camera-Action"

(continued)
Often the father (or in his absence, a son) stands a little outside the physical circle of the other members of the family, as if to express a relationship whose protectiveness is linked with, perhaps even requires, distance.
The Ritualization of Subordination

A classic stereotype of deference is that of lowering oneself physically in some form or other of prostration. Correspondingly, holding the body erect and the head high is stereotypically a mark of unashamedness, superiority, and disdain. Advertisers draw on (and endorse) the claimed universality of the theme:

115-24

111 An interesting contrast is to be found in turn-of-the-century portrait poses of couples, wherein the effect was often achieved of displaying the man as the central figure and the woman as backup support, somewhat in the manner of a chief lieutenant. I cite from Lesy (1973):

Perhaps the contrast between past and current portraits betokens a change less in underlying social organization than in conventions of expression within the picture format.
Beds and floors provide places in social situations where incumbent persons will be lower than anyone sitting on a chair or standing. Floors also are associated with the less clean, less pure, less exalted parts of a room—for example, the place to keep dogs, baskets of soiled clothes, street footwear, and the like. And a recumbent position is one from which physical defense of oneself can least well be initiated and therefore one which renders one very dependent on the benignness of the surround. (Of course, lying on the floor or on a sofa or bed seems also to be a conventionalized expression of sexual availability.) The point here is that it appears that children and women are pictured on floors and beds more than are men.
The Girl Who Has Everything Plus

The Girt Who Has Everything Plus

Feels good on ye

Black Velvet

nights Move...And...Mate
Although less so than in some, elevation seems to be employed indicatively in our society, high physical place symbolizing high social place. (Courtrooms provide an example.) In contrived scenes in advertisements, men tend to be located higher than women, thus allowing elevation to be exploited as a delineative resource. A certain amount of contortion may be required. Note, this arrangement is supported by the understanding in our society that courtesy obliges men to favor women with first claim on whatever is available by way of a seat.

In such pictures as I have of actual scenes, the same tendency holds.
166-72n Women frequently, men very infrequently, are posed in a display of the "bashful knee bend." Whatever else, the knee bend can be read as a foregoing of full effort to be prepared and on the ready in the current social situation, for the position adds a moment to any effort to fight or flee. Once again one finds a posture that seems to presuppose the goodwill of anyone in the surround who could offer harm. Observe—as will be seen throughout—that a sex-typed subject is not so much involved as a format for constructing a picture. One female in a picture may perform the gesture and another serve as the support that allows the performance. So a two-role formula is at issue, not necessarily two sexes.
Having somewhat the same distribution in ads as the knee bend are canting postures. Although a distinction can be made between body cant and head cant, the consequences seem to be much the same. The level of the head is lowered relative to that of others, including, indirectly, the viewer of the picture. The resulting configurations can be read as an acceptance of subordination, an expression of ingratiating, submissiveness, and appeasement.

Body cant:

Contrast a different kind of knee bend:

*From Darwin (1872:53, fig. 6).
Head cant:
187–91 Smiles, it can be argued, often function as ritualistic mollifiers, signaling that nothing agonistic is intended or invited, that the meaning of the other’s act has been understood and found acceptable, that, indeed, the other is approved and appreciated. Those who warily keep an eye on the movements of a potential aggressor may find themselves automatically smiling should their gaze be “caught” by its object, who in turn may find little cause to smile back. In addition, a responding smile (even more so an appreciative laugh) following very rapidly on the heels of a speaker’s sally can imply that the respondent belongs, by knowledgeability, at least, to the speaker’s circle. All of these smiles, then, seem more the offering of an inferior than a superior. In any case, it appears that in cross-sexed encounters in American society, women smile more, and more expansively, than men, which arrangement appears to be carried over into advertisements, perhaps with little conscious intent.

189–93 Given the subordinated or indulged position of children in regard to adults, it would appear that to present oneself in puckish styling is to encourage the corresponding treatment. How much of this guise is found in real life is an open question; but found it is in advertisements.

177See the comments in Weinstein (1973:49).
207–16 The note of unseriousness struck by a childlike guise is struck by another styling of the self, this one perhaps entirely restricted to advertisements, namely, the use of the entire body as a playful gesticulative device, a sort of body clowning:

Alfred Dunner: It fits

and fits.

Welcome to the boldless, pinless, fussless generation!
The special unseriousness involved in childish guises and clowning suggests a readiness to be present in a social situation garbed and styled in a manner to which one isn't deeply or irrevocably committed. Perhaps reflected here is a readiness to try out various guises and to appear at various times in different ones. In any case, in advertisements, at least, there seems to be an unanticipated difference between men and women. Men are displayed in formal, business, and informal gear, and although it seems understood that the same individual will at different times appear in all these guises, each guise seems to afford him something he is totally serious about, and deeply identified with, as though wearing a skin, not a costume. Even in the case of the cowboy garb that urban males affect recreationally, little sense that one's whole appearance is a lark would seem to be present. Women in ads seem to have a different relationship to their clothing and to the gestures worn with it. Within each broad category (formal, business, informal) there are choices which are considerably different one from another, and the sense is that one may as well try out various possibilities to see what comes of it—as though life were a series of costume balls. Thus, one can occasionally mock one's own appearance, for identification is not deep. It might be argued, then, that the costume-like character of female garb in advertisements locates women as less seriously present in social situations than men, the self presented through get-ups being itself in a way an unserious thing. Observe that the extension of this argument to real life need not involve a paradox. It is a common view that women spend much more of their time and concern in shopping for clothes and preparing for appearances than do men, and that women set considerable store on the appreciative or deprecative response they produce thereby. But, of course, so does an actor in a part he will never play again. A concern over carrying an appearance off does not necessarily imply a deep and abiding identification with that appearance. (This argument fits with the fact that women's styles change much more rapidly than do men's.)
Adults play mock assault games with children, games such as chase-and-capture and grab-and-squeeze. The child is playfully treated like a prey under attack by a predator. Certain materials (pillows, sprays of water, light beach balls) provide missiles that can strike but not hurt. Other materials provide a medium into which the captured body can be thrown safely—beds, snow banks, pools, arms. Now it turns out that men play these games with women, the latter collaborating through a display of attempts to escape and through cries of alarm, fear, and appeasement. (Figure-dancing provides occasion for an institutionalized example, the partners who are swung off their feet never being men.) Of course, underneath this show a man may be engaged in a deeper one, the suggestion of what he could do if he got serious about it. In part because mock assault is "fun" and more likely in holiday scenes than in work scenes, it is much represented in advertisements:
"We were walking downtown when we saw those huge girls. They were just beautiful!"
A male pictured with a female sometimes appears to employ an extended arm, in effect marking the boundary of his social property and guarding it against encroachment. A suggestion is that this miniature border patrol is especially found when the female at the same time is engaged in a pursuit which accords her authority.

There seem to be four main behavioral arrangements of pairs of persons which provide what is taken to be a physical expression that the two are a “with”—that is, together as a social unit with respect to the social situation in which they are located. (In all four cases, note, the work these dyadic tie-signs do in defining the relationship between figures in a picture would seem to be much the same as the work they do in real social situations.)

First, a matter of micro-ecology: sitting or standing close and alongside, with or without touching. This arrangement is symmetrical in physical character and social implication, no differentiation of role or rank being in itself conveyed:

The “arm lock” is the basic tie-sign in Western societies for marking that a woman is under the protective custody of the accompanying man. Although most commonly sustained between husband and wife, no sexual or legal link is necessarily advertised through it; father and grown daughter, man and best friend’s wife may also employ it. The sign is asymmetric both in terms of its physical configuration and what it indicates. However nominally, the woman shows herself to be receiving support, and both the man’s hands are free for whatever instrumental tasks may arise:

(continued)
The "shoulder hold" is an asymmetrical configuration more or less requiring that the person holding be taller than the person held, and that the held person accept direction and constraint. Typically the arrangement seems to be dyadically irreversible. When employed by a cross-sexed adult pair, the sign seems to be taken to indicate sexually-potential proprietaryship.