Chapter Twenty. Conclusion
Indian TV commercials do exhibit sexist and gendered representations. An Advertisement is but an alleged impression of a social experience. Over the years with the coming of age of the Television, the textual elements of an advertisement have gone down and the pictorial elements have gone up. And advertisers are increasingly dependent on that iconic image, that visual shorthand to connect with the audience. So how do these Ads that do not run for more than a minute make a connection with the audience? McLuhan says that Ads work on the principles that ‘a noisy redundant barrage of repetition will gradually assert itself’ (MacLuhan, 2001). If the audiences’ level of tolerance of this barrage wavers, so does the scheme of presentation, and the principles on advertising. As an economic activity, there is an ever more pressure on the producer/ the advertising agencies to grab eyeballs, grab the viewer’s attention. Sale eventually comes out of it. In this ever ‘time squeezing’, world of mass entertainment, straight messages sometimes often get distorted, sometimes deliberately, sometimes unintentionally. A straight message about the efficacy of a product or a service has to be couched in about every conceivable human relationship/emotion sometime even spoof another advertisement before it can make a discernible impact. People generally do not rush out to buy a product whose advertisement has appealed to them. Yet Ads are intended as a learned behaviour, ‘a subliminal pill for the unconscious’ (MacLuhan, 2001). Over the years, Advertising has been subjected to a
great amount of debate; especially in its alleged ability to distort reality, create a false sense of fulfillment, and promote consumerism and misrepresentation. Its alleged role in creating a distorted reality has been by far, its most interrogated function. Marshall McLuhan, Vance Packard, and Baudrillard amongst others have contemplated the ‘vicious’ working of advertising as a social practice oriented towards an economic goals. While on the other side of the divide, James B Twitchell, have pointed out that advertising generally doesn’t and cannot demands that weren’t already there. A general consensus has emerged however that advertising reflects our society in a distorted fashion, calling attention to and exaggerating some aspects of our lives and hiding others (Patterson, Malley, & Story, 2009). The sheer volume of content available on television ensures that television commercials get a fleeting glance. This makes it imperative on the advertisers to increase their chances of brand recognition through sheer number of repetitions. An Ad campaign especially on TV channels is spread out over a stretch of time to ensure wider dissemination of it message. Another technique that is becoming all the more of the essence of TV advertising is the resort to visual short hands. A visual short hand or the stereotype becomes the means through which advertisers tends to pass on meaning messages to the consumer. In that case, are Advertisers creating new meaning or merely reinforcing the already existing ones? Yes, Ads do resort to stereotypes as the findings of this research will attest to, but do they create stereotypes or merely reinforce them? The answer lies somewhere in between the two extremes of creating and reinforcing. TV
commercials reinforce stereotypes, and in the melee create a few of their own. Exclusively awarding the TV commercials with creating stereotypes is to stretch the reach their culpability beyond reasonable limits, and at once discounts the contribution that other factor might have. While TV Adverts do resort to stereotypes it didn’t invent them.

Do people model themselves and their behaviour on what they see on TV commercials? There is evidence to believe that other factors being constant people are likely to learn the behaviour of same sex model than opposite sex model (McArthur & Resko, 1975, p. 218). And since Ads resort to stereotype which serves as poor role models they inhibit sympathetic understanding of individual differences. Thus stereotypes should be a cause for major concern.

While ‘sex’ is a biological term, ‘gender’ has sociological connotation, and relates to the idea of masculinity and feminity. The idea of gender is a social construct. This social construct is a learned experience. Quite early on, right from childhood, proper and improper behaviour is ingrained through social practice and parental admonition.

Indian TV Advertisements present a gendered view, pigeonholing and straitjacketing identities. Advertising and TV commercials is a man’s world not just in terms of production, not just in terms of what is produced content wise but also in terms of what is shown and represented. Men dominate the TV commercials at both the connotative level and the denotative level. So what is a male identity in a TV commercial in India?
Men were shown being involved in ‘big ticket purchases’ like electronic and automobiles etc. That it is the men folks who make important long term financial decision isn’t lost when females played no significant role in financial products. Despite the introduction of male specific products like fairness creams and lotions and other appearance enhancing products etc, TV commercials put on premium on appearance on the women folks more than they do on the men folks. Men’s body profile showed greater diversity than that of the females, who were shown only in the fit/slender or the average body type.

The findings on women is closer to the findings of Nimet Uray and Sebnem Burnaz (Uray & Burnaz, 2003) who also reported that women are portrayed younger than men, are more likely to be married than men and are shown in non-professional roles. Gilly’s comparative study on TV Ads from Mexico, the US, and Australia also shown similar finding (Gilly, 1988). Mazzella, And Durkin’s study of TV commercials from Australia also showed similar conclusions (Mazzella, Durkin, Cerini, & Buralli, 1992). Indian TV commercials’ requires female leads to look younger, more slender than their male counterparts’. Women played more aesthetic roles and housekeeping roles alternating between ‘beauty’ and ‘home’. Women’s share for all body display, sexual behaviour, and sexual referents is higher than male leads. Women are also more likely to appear married and attractive than men. Most of the findings with regard to the characteristics of the principle characters are in line with international studies.
Gendered identity has breached and moved into the world of inanimate objects. Sometime back a TV commercial for a two wheeler proudly proclaimed itself as 'Definitely Male, hinting that with its 'sinewy look' and 'macho feel', the two-wheeler was definitely virile.

While this research concentrates on a content analysis, the author feels that research in the field of TV commercials should move beyond and into the realms of frame analysis, visual rhetoric, semiotics, analysis and ethnographic accounts of how various groups and categories of people 'negotiate' meaning. Empirical research is also needed to undertake a cross cultural analysis of representation by an analysis of representation of TV commercials across the regional languages to map the diversities of representation, if any.