ABSTRACT
POWERFUL OBJECTS FOR POWERFUL WOMEN?
FEMININE REPRESENTATION IN ITALIAN HIGH-TECH PRODUCTS ADVERTISING

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Context
Over the last few years there has been an increasing number of advertising campaigns that, while focusing on goods traditionally belonging to a man’s world (such as mobile telephones, cars, and computers), showed female subjects and were explicitly directed at a female audience.

Objectives
By analysing a wide range of commercials of technological products aired in the period of time from December 2002 to April 2003, the present research (still partly underway) aims to understand the way in which women are talked about and constructed visually on Italian television.

Novelty
This paper is part of a larger PhD research project on gender representation and sex stereotyping in Italian television advertising. As opposed to the great attention this subject has received within the anglo-saxon sociological and cultural studies debate, no comprehensive study on gender representation in Italian popular culture has been attempted so far.

Research questions
The assumption of this study is that technological products advertising is an extremely interesting case study to analyse changes in feminine representation. In so far their target is a full time working, outdoor living women market, these ads can no longer exploit traditional myths of femininity and are rather forced to pursue new paths in constructing gender difference. Besides, technological objects seem to evoke an asexual/unisex imagery in which power dynamics between sexes seem to vanish under the astonishing and powerful possibilities offered by the machines.

The paper will address questions such as: To what extent women representation in these advertisements can be described as new and unconventional? How is the relationship between women and technology portrayed?

Methodology
The work will be based on a sociosemiotic approach: a qualitative content analysis will be used to identify main themes and dominant models of femininity, while semiotic instruments will attempt to explore advertising codes and reinterpret their implied and latent meanings.