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## Super Bowl ads drop the ball

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One of the fun facts football fans learned in the lead-up to today's big game is that 42 percent more female viewers tuned in to watch the Super Bowl last year than to watch the Academy Awards.

While this statistic sounds a little suspect to me (Could the Patriots really have been a bigger draw than Brad Pitt?), I don't want to argue with the NFL, which seems intent on proving that the Super Bowl, which has sometimes felt as welcoming to women as a stag party, has bridged the gender gap and become a fully family-friendly event.

According to the findings, women will make up 55 million of today's 130 million viewers, which is surely some compensation for losing Sandra Day O'Connor's seat on the Supreme Court. Earlier this week, USA Today enthused that female football fans had sparked a sales surge in women's themed NFL merchandise, jumping from 2 percent of total sales in 2005 to an estimated 15 percent this year.

While the little spaghetti-strapped camisoles they're offering at NFL Shop.com are a welcome development, female fans still are not convinced that the playing field is leveling where it really matters on Super Bowl Sunday — the commercials.

A recent survey by the Marketing to Moms Coalition finds that although 91 percent of American moms plan to tune into the game, 80 percent feel ignored by the advertisers, who will pay a record \$2.5 million for each 30-second spot you see today. While moms spend an estimated \$1.7 trillion a year in annual purchases and services, it's pretty clear they're not the target audience for the year's most anticipated commercials, which have, in recent memory, included flatulent horses, talking bullfrogs, butt-kissing chimpanzees and chesty girls busting out of their tops in D.C. hearing rooms.

Nor do women appear to be the desired demographic for this year's much-anticipated Burger King ad, in which swimsuit model Brooke Burke will appear with 92 dancing "Whopperettes," a scenario that seems ripe for another wardrobe malfunction.

No wonder 85 percent of the moms in the MMC survey say they wouldn't mind getting a little respect today, particularly because they're the only demographic that cares more about the ads than the game that interrupts them. (Some 53 percent say the ads are their top reason for watching, while 46 percent are more interested in the game.)

One might imagine that women, who are marketed to incessantly the rest of the year, might enjoy the break today. But I think what these numbers actually tell us is that they'd like to see the same brain power applied to ads targeting women as is dedicated each year to getting young men to drink beer, an audience that doesn't seem to need nearly as much inducement as marketers imagine.

After all, there are some conventions of mom-centered marketing that would be nice to see shattered. For instance, you can tell that an ad is aimed at a mom when it features a woman in khaki pants, sneakers and a pastel top, standing in her kitchen with a hand on her hip and a self-satisfied look on her face. I don't know where Madison Avenue gets the idea that childbirth suddenly makes you want to wear pastels because dark colors are actually better at hiding the fact you haven't done the laundry in days.

Speaking of laundry, I also don't know any moms who actually fold their laundry in gorgeous, sun-dappled utility rooms, where narcissus bulbs bloom in the windows, as they do on TV. Most of us toss the clean clothes on the first available bed, where, if not sorted immediately, they will be kicked to the floor by bedtime and cycled through the wash again.

In spite of these realities, the world of motherhood depicted by Madison Avenue is one where the minivan is always immaculate, the diaper pail is minty fresh and the panty-lines are nonexistent. The dog running through the house with muddy paws is just a fun excuse to get out the cleaning products we adore so much, not an occasion to kick the wretched mutt to within an inch of its life.

Who says that moms don't indulge in a little violence once in a while? Aren't we watching the Super Bowl?

Maybe if marketers chewed on these facts — along with the 14,500 tons of chips we're going to eat today — next year's ads actually might cater to the other 40 percent of the football audience.

Of course, if women want to feel really appreciated for their buying power, they could always take a pass on today's game and go where they know they're welcome.

It's called the mall, and on a day like today, it'll be wide open.

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