**Text 1**

Van Heusen Print Advertisement (1950s)

**Text 2**

I decided I was a feminist and this seemed uncomplicated to me. But my recent research has shown me that feminism has become an unpopular word. Apparently I am among the ranks of women whose expressions are seen as too strong, too aggressive, isolating, anti-men and, unattractive.

Why is the word such an uncomfortable one?

I am from Britain and think it is right that as a woman I am paid the same as my male counterparts. I think it is right that I should be able to make decisions about my own body. I think it is right that women be involved on my behalf in the policies and decision-making of my country. I think it is right that socially I am afforded the same respect as men. But sadly I can say that there is no one country in the world where all women can expect to receive these rights.

No country in the world can yet say they have achieved gender equality.  
These rights I consider to be human rights but I am one of the lucky ones. My life is a sheer privilege because my parents didn’t love me less because I was born a daughter. My school did not limit me because I was a girl. My mentors didn’t assume I would go less far because I might give birth to a child one day. These influencers were the gender equality ambassadors that made who I am today. They may not know it, but they are the inadvertent feminists who are. And we need more of those. And if you still hate the word—it is not the word that is important but the idea and the ambition behind it. Because not all women have been afforded the same rights that I have. In fact, statistically, very few have been.

In 1997, Hilary Clinton made a famous speech in Beijing about women’s rights. Sadly many of the things she wanted to change are still a reality today. But what stood out for me the most was that only 30 per cent of her audience were male. How can we affect change in the world when only half of it is invited or feel welcome to participate in the conversation?

Men—I would like to take this opportunity to extend your formal invitation. Gender equality is your issue too. Because to date, I’ve seen my father’s role as a parent being valued less by society despite my needing his presence as a child as much as my mother’s. I’ve seen young men suffering from mental illness unable to ask for help for fear it would make them look less “macho”—in fact in the UK suicide is the biggest killer of men between 20-49; eclipsing road accidents, cancer and coronary heart disease. I’ve seen men made fragile and insecure by a distorted sense of what constitutes male success. Men don’t have the benefits of equality either. We don’t often talk about men being imprisoned by gender stereotypes but I can see that they are, and that when they are free, things will change for women as a natural consequence.

If men don’t have to be aggressive in order to be accepted women won’t feel compelled to be submissive. If men don’t have to control, women won’t have to be controlled. Both men and women should feel free to be sensitive. Both men and women should feel free to be strong… It is time that we all perceive gender on a spectrum not as two opposing sets of ideals. If we stop defining each other by what we are not and start defining ourselves by what we are—we can all be freer and this is what HeForShe is about. It’s about freedom.

I want men to take up this mantle so their daughters, sisters and mothers can be free from prejudice, but also so that their sons have permission to be vulnerable and human too—reclaim those parts of themselves they abandoned and in doing so be a more true and complete version of themselves.

Watson, Emma. UN Women Goodwill Ambassador. Speech delivered to the UN.

20 September 2014

**Sample Paper 1: Comparative Commentary**

Stereotypical representations and expectations of gender are issues of relevance both in the present and in the past. Text 1, a Van Heusen tie advertisement from the 1950s, uses the image of a working class white man to target such an audience. Text 2, a speech presented about a feminist campaign to not only the delegates present at the UN conference but also to the entire world addresses the topic of feminism and how society’s view of men is fueling the already existing gender inequality. Text 1 and 2 both juxtapose the social expectations of men and women to highlight the ‘powerful male’ stereotype and, in comparison, the submissive female in a male dominated world and the effects of this on both men and women’s lives.

Both texts expose the expectations placed on men by society and the media to be the powerful and dominating gender. In text 1, the ties being advertised are described with the alliterative phrase, “power-packed patterns.” Masculinity is packaged with products, such as the ties, encouraging the idea that even a piece of cloth hanging from one’s neck must somehow emit power. Supporting this idea, the speaker in text 2 offers an anecdote, saying she has “seen young men suffering…unable to ask for help for fear it would make them look less ‘macho.’” The ridiculous images of “macho” that are thrust before men as an example, like the “power-packed” tie patterns underline a severe issue with the representations of the male role. Text 2 emphasizes that ideas advertised to men in the media, as is done in text 1, are resulting in the suffering of both males and females. Text 1 has an image in which the subject is dressed smartly in work clothes: a button up shirt and tie. With both hands behind his head and a smirk on his face, the subject oozes authority. As text 1 is an advertisement, it is clear that the editors have chosen an image of the type of man they want to sell to the audience. In doing so, they are stating that the man the audience must want to become is one who is dominant and one who works. The speaker in text 2 describes such advertising as something causing men to be “imprisoned by gender stereotypes.” She states it as an issue “we don’t often talk about,” which may be interpreted as a reference to the media, as many people in the 21st century get their news and discussion topics from the media and internet. In such ways, both texts highlight the idea of the “perfect man” and the effect this can have.

Both text 1 and 2 juxtapose this aforementioned male stereotype with the often assumed incompetence of women in order to expose the socially inferior way in which women are perceived. This perceived gender hierarchy is demonstrated in text 1 through the positioning of the subordinate subject in the image. The female subject is kneeling before the male subject, presenting him with breakfast in bed. She is looking up at the man, using eye contact to establish the mode of address, and the main focus of the image. Her physical positioning, done purposefully by the editors of this ad, place her lower than the man. As the audience of this text is male, the ad is trying to create a collective consensus amongst men that women are inferior to them. The fact that she is serving him breakfast in a bathrobe, in comparison to the work attire the man is wearing, illustrates the belief that women are supposed to stay at home, as she is not capable of earning money as the man is. Although text 2 also addresses this global paradigm of female inferiority, it is done by listing opportunities the speaker was lucky to get. As a woman, she states that her life is a “sheer privilege” for having grown up in a community and family that recognized her talents, regardless of gender. Her privilege was that her “school didn’t limit [her] because [she] was a girl”, suggesting that many women did not get this equality. Schools are to educate, and as many women do not get this “privilege,” it is clear that women are viewed as intellectually inferior to men. Similarly, the word “man” is repeated numerous times in text 1 to enforce the exclusiveness of the product being sold, and limiting the target audience to only men. The product being advertised is a tie, a symbol of the working class. The fact that the symbol of work is specifically excluding women shows that the expectations of women were to stay at home and not hold qualities needed in a professional business world, such as ambition or perseverance. The noun “man” is often followed by an ellipsis, to further draw attention to the importance of the product being only for men. Similarly, the qualities required in the work space are outlined in text 2 as words contributing to the negative connotation of the word feminism. The speaker in text 2 says that she is viewed as being “too strong, too aggressive, isolating anti-men and unattractive” for being a feminist. Women are expected to be dainty, submissive and quiet, and are often shunned for holding such “qualities of a man.” By introducing the stereotypes of women, both text 1 and 2 are commenting on the way the patriarchal society has sculpted women as a gender inferior to men, and in comparison incapable of work.

Both texts describe the stereotypical and desirable traits society has placed upon men and women, and juxtapose these qualities to expose gender inequality in society. Though produced in different decades, text 1 in the 1950s and text 2 in 2014, both highlight an ongoing issue. Text 2 seeks to criticize the expectations text such as text 1 introduce. Whilst both texts have a different purpose, one to advertise and sell these stereotypical gender roles and the other to criticize and destroy them, both ultimately succeed in showing both male and female stereotypes and in juxtaposing the two to enlighten the audience about the ongoing inequalities in society.