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Perception and Reality: An Examination of American Print Advertising

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PERCEPTION AND REALITY:
AN EXAMINATION OF AMERICAN PRINT ADVERTISING

by

ANGELA ROSE RYCZKOWSKI

(Under the Direction of Onyile B. Onyile)

ABSTRACT

I contend current American print advertising relies on the objectification of the body, both male and female, in conjunction with the use of utopian ideals to sell products. The nature of the print ad and mass media is such that they gratuitously inform our culture's ideas on gender and normalcy. By depicting unrealistic images of normalcy and unattainable representations of beauty, advertising not only creates consumer anxiety to purchase products beyond economic means, but also to manipulate our bodies unnaturally, and it creates tension in relations between genders. As a Graphic Designer, I strive to not only reverse this process in my work but to inform and educate viewers on these issues using the same medium within which the issue lies, print.

INDEX WORDS: Objectification in Print Advertising, Sexism in Advertising, Contemporary views on Advertising, Graphic Design and Advertising

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by

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2005

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine American print advertising's¹ use of objectification, specifically sexist²/ stereotypical³ ideas, of gender⁴ in conjunction with the use of utopian ideals/ concepts⁵ of perfection beyond attainment. These two elements contribute to a distorted representation of reality by print advertising. Objectifying the body, be it male or female, carries with it the message of dehumanization and the concept of the body as a commodity. Current print advertising continues to contribute to the perpetuation of culturally gendered stereotypes and can cause anxiety in consumers to purchase unnecessary items. I discuss these points referring to recent historical and contemporary print advertising trends.⁶ Putting the ads in context -- discussing them with pertinent, current cultural facts such as social theories, consumer spending, with relation to advertising, and the discrepancies between representations of American life seen in print advertising and reality -- all will help illustrate the influence of print advertising on cultural trends. I will do so by analyzing the content and implication of current American print advertising, and by identifying stereotypical attitudes represented in images and

¹ This study examines American print advertising such as that seen most commonly in magazines, newspapers and billboards and does not include television, radio or internet-based advertisements.

² In this text, 'sexist' is referring to the application of gender to an action, feeling or object that is not intrinsically characteristic of only a male or female in such a way that narrowly defines what it means to be a male or female.

³ In this text, the terms 'stereotypical' or 'stereotype' refer to broad generalizations applied to genders in such a way that narrowly defines what it means to be a male or female.

⁴ In this text, the term 'gender' refers to male and/ or female.

⁵ In this text, the term 'utopian ideals' or 'utopia' refers to physical or mental perfection or enjoyment beyond natural human attainment that is often represented in American print advertising.

⁶ One noteworthy trend is the progressive use of the body, both male and female, in a provocative manner.

gender-specific ideals informed by American culture. Finally, I will take the next step, as a graphic designer, to discuss my solution to these issues, rather than simply pointing out faults I see contributing to the state of American culture today.

Structural Outline

Chapter 1 of this text, which accompanies the exhibition *Perception and Reality: An Examination of American Print Advertising*, defines the intent of this study. In addition, it serves as an overview of not only the issue but my proposed resolution of the conceptual issue.

Chapter 2 discusses a brief history of graphic design and its role in print advertising. This chapter illustrates the importance of understanding not only contemporary applications of graphic design but its historical uses as well.

Chapter 3 examines print advertising's use of the body. I will analyze print advertisements from each decade that depict women or men. This serves to illustrate a visible progression in American print advertising towards the provocative use of objectification of the body to sell products.

Chapter 4 discusses advertising's use of utopian ideals in print media and deals with the issue of representation of an unattainable reality in American print advertising.

In Chapter 5, the graphic designer's visual resolution of the design problem in conjunction with this thesis study is examined and justified by reviewing a selection of the pieces. Additionally, the series is discussed as a cohesive whole.

Chapter 6 concludes this thesis. This chapter discusses the graphic designer's conclusions and resolution of the proposed issue that have been realized through research and completion of the work for the accompanying exhibition.

CHAPTER 2

GRAPHIC DESIGN AND PRINT ADVERTISING

Graphic Design as Advertising: A Brief Historical Timeline

Graphic design is communication in visual form, and has the potential to be an extremely powerful mode of transmitting ideas.⁷ The art of conveying a certain message to a specific audience within some set limitations is the basis for design. Often, this message is used to advertise a product. Transcending verbal languages and social constructs, it is imperative to understand, or be aware of, all possible messages, verbal and visual, that are being conveyed. The use of images, graphic art or shapes and supporting text in print advertising, are the ways designers convey messages to the general public. Advertising messages can also be passed on through various media, not just print. According to Funk & Wagnall's New Encyclopedia, "in descending order of dollar value, the major media [within which advertising can be viewed] in the U.S. are television, newspapers, direct mail, radio, classified telephone directories, magazines, business publications, outdoor advertising, and farm publications" ("Advertising", 2).

Graphic Design as a practice encompasses a very wide range of creative production. Many forms of visual art and communication are produced in part or in totality by graphic designers, from logos, identity systems, posters, brochures, publications, printed advertisements, television campaigns as well as digital advertisements, websites and Fine Art.

My concentration concerns the use of graphic design in American print advertisements seen in magazines and, often repeated, on billboards. Even before the

⁷ This concept of graphic design as visual communication is a widely known view that has been instilled upon me throughout my collegiate education by various instructors.

advent and use of the first moveable, reusable type by Johann Gutenberg in 1454, people were utilizing some form of communication to generate sales of their products (Lester). In fact, archaeologists have uncovered outdoor advertising in the form of signs painted on a wall in ancient Rome and Pompeii (“Advertising”, 2). By 1704, America had seen its first newspaper ad printed in the Boston News-Letter, followed by the first printed ad in a magazine during 1742 in Benjamin Franklin’s General Magazine (“Advertising Age...”, 1). By 1841, American promotional needs reached a point that Volney B. Palmer opened the first American advertising agency to orchestrate a merchant’s marketing needs with the work of an agent of the media (“Emergence...”, 1). Advertising began to appear in nationally distributed magazines, by the 1860’s. Before this time, the development of the United States of America was not conducive to national campaigns simply because the idea of transnational communication or travel was not practical (“Advertising”, 2). Because the average person or product could not efficiently travel transnationally, the market was either nonexistent or inappropriate for national campaigns.

Along with this boom in the use and production of advertising came the need to place value on printed page space dedicated to advertising seen in newspapers and magazines, as well as the need to regulate all other forms of print ads, such as outdoor signage or posters. George P. Rowell provides advertisers with the first organized publication stating the estimated circulation of papers in an effort to standardize the value for advertising space within certain publications (“Emergence...”, 3). This listing was called Rowell’s American Newspaper Directory and originated in 1869. By the 1870’s, several states began to limit where outdoor advertising may be erected in response to the

high number of posters and signs painted on rocks, buildings, and the like (“Emergence...”, 3).

Only by 1891 were women first officially recommended as a proposed target of advertising by Nathan Fowler in *Advertising Age (How it Was...)*. This target market was formed much before the time of research field marketing and was based on the idea and tradition that many American women performed daily household duties, such as shopping, therefore making women a logical target for advertising at this time. By 1906, America was authoritatively initiated into the “age of advertising” with the opening of the First Annual Advertising Show in New York City (“Emergence...”, 4). Modern market research began in the 1910’s resulting in the increase in the targeting of specific audiences by manufacturers, now a very lucrative and common practice. At that time, American companies spent millions of dollars on advertising and public relations combined. The American Association of Advertising Agencies was formed in 1917, in response to the growing number of advertisers and agencies. In 1922, William Addison Dwiggins, designer and typographer, coined the term ‘graphic design’ to describe, “...his activities as an individual who brought structural order and visual form to printed communications....” (Wheeler, 1). Thus was born the relationship between the trades of graphic design and advertising as we know it today.

Advertising Today

The American Industrial Revolution brought with it not only the mass production of products but also the means in which to mass-produce advertisements for those products. Inventions such as electricity had an immeasurable affect on the production of

written materials, thus forever changing the value and volume of advertising. I argue that this, along with the culminated affects of the Industrial Revolution, marks the beginning of when America became the frontrunner in the production of and sophistication of advertising.

Today, America is the world leader in not only the volume of advertising, but also in organizational complexity (“Advertising”, 2). The evolution towards the current age of mass media, consumerism and consumption has been driven by desire -- the desire to fulfill voids in one’s life, on multiple levels (from monetary, physical, and intangible). It is this drive that has allowed advertising to reach the state it is in today: manipulative, misleading, stereotype laden, and devoid of realistic ideals of normalcy.

Looking closely at the funding of today’s mass media (magazines, newspapers, television, etc.) shows us that mass media is driven and supported by advertisements and advertisers: advertising is the reason mass media exists. Magazines are supported by proceeds from advertisers, in the way that television shows are supported by commercials. The idea that a magazine has now become the outlet of advertisements, versus the common belief that a magazine is the outlet for articles is a significant shift, the future of which may change the average consumer’s trust in the many articles we read on “How to be More Beautiful in 10 Easy Steps.” It is shocking to learn advertisers control to a large extent not only when and where in the publication a specific ad runs, but also the actual contents of the magazine. This issue of control has prompted the American Society of Magazine Editors and Magazine Publishers of America in 1997 to issue a statement calling for, “editorial integrity and barring magazines from giving advertisers a preview of stories, photos, or tables of contents for upcoming issues.”

(Kilbourne, 50)⁸. This concept of advertisers controlling magazine contents has been taken to extremes, despite the efforts of the American Society of Magazine Editors and Magazine Publishers of America. Advertisers contribute to more than 60% of all magazine publication's income (Kilbourne, 34). Without these contributions most publications would possibly fold or be too costly to the consumer. In fact, there needs to be an exploration of the correlations between the power of the companies affording the advertisements within a print publication and what the consumer or reader of that publication are exposed to and influenced by. For example, companies such as Revlon, Versace, Bacardi, and so on, spend large amounts on print advertising and are in the business to make sure their investment is profitable. These investments in advertising have been increasing in recent years from \$20 billion to \$200 billion, according to Jean Kilbourne, an authority on advertising and its affects on women and girls.

Monitoring the contents of the magazine is one way a corporation can protect their advertising investment. Large, powerful (wealthy) companies know ahead of time the articles that will be published and are given the chance to confirm that the contents do not conflict with their advertisement. The articles, especially in fashion or popular culture magazines, often are censored or manipulated; articles are tailored in some way to support the statements of the advertisements. In one case, at the prompting of Chrysler, Esquire magazine pulled an entire article, one with a homosexual theme by accomplished author David Levitt, for fear of losing Chrysler's lucrative account (Kilbourne, 50). The manipulation of magazine articles can be as simple as including a product tie-in and assertion of implications made in ads or as invasive as censorship/omission of entire

⁸ It is important to note that this act is a statement, not requirement, law, or doctrine. According to Jean Kilbourne, many times magazine editors will impose self-censorship on their publications in the favor of advertisers deeming such aforementioned pressures from corporations unnecessary.

articles if topics conflict with advertisements. Knowing the magazine depends on the advertiser's funding writers have no choice but to indulge the ultimatums, leaving the consumer unaware and vulnerable to the manipulation of advertisers that goes much farther than the print ads we view. The following chapter discusses a progression of American print advertising and further examines messages in advertising that have informed our culture.

CHAPTER 3

EXAMINATION OF PRINT ADVERTISING

Women in Print Advertising

The ways in which American print Advertising delivers graphic and literal messages differ in style. Cultural evolutions and advances in technology inform the changes seen in the styles, format and production of graphic design and advertising. For example, there are influences seen in areas of art schools such as the German Bauhaus⁹ that affect graphic design.

The following examination of a sampling of American print advertisements starting with the 1920's will illustrate an on-going theme: the body as commodity; the body as an item to be bought, sold, traded, or possessed (Kilbourne, 1999). The body has long been dissected, scrutinized, and displayed. Historically, this practice has been imposed on women, with a recent expansion to include both sexes.

Print advertisements from American history at the turn of the century tell us that women were expected to look young to please men, as illustrated in Figure 3.01. The text from this 1928 Vogue advertisement reads: "...for men demand youth in women's faces!" This declaration helped create anxiety in women to meet the demand stated in the text and confirmed the need for the product, Marie Barlow Cosmetics. Even without picturing a woman, the announcement features the product floating in a heavenly, utopian manner, which elevates its status to the consumer. A decade later, Mayfair prints advertising (Figure 3.02) that persuades the viewer to purchase the product by instilling

⁹ Bauhaus was a school in Weimar, Germany, founded in 1919 by Walter Gropius (1883 - 1969). The Bauhaus aesthetic, which encompassed architecture and the applied arts, was committed to an art allied with technology.

---for men demand youth in women's faces!---

EVERY time a woman looks in her mirror she remembers man's confessed admiration for youth in feminine faces.

Desiring an unblemished, clear skin that is independent of the flattering mask of cosmetics, she wisely devotes a few minutes daily to the careful grooming of her complexion.

Marie Barlow Facial Preparations afford a simple and effective treatment that fits well into the new-day woman's busy daily program. If you do not find them at your favorite shopping center write to Marie Barlow direct.

Marie Barlow
358 - 5th Ave
NEW YORK CITY

Marie Barlow
358 5th Ave, New York
Please send me my copy of "Youthful You", your common sense booklet on the care of the skin.

Name: _____
Address: _____

Figure 3.01: Marie Barlow advertisement

Mayfair, November, 1932 65

If your husband were as frank as your mirror, would he say:

"Don't grow old, Dear..."

Depend upon the famous, yet inexpensive home treatments of Dorothy Gray, long proven to be most effective, to insure your happiness.

It is the greatest crisis of a woman's emotional life? . . . that sudden, merciless message from a mirror's crystal depths . . . "you are fading, just a bit." Yet it is a crisis most easily met, if one acts promptly, wisely.

If you are in the critical thirties, Dorothy Gray provides preventive treatments of proven worth. If you are in the dangerous forties, she offers exercises which are your sole assurance of relief.

For both classes of worried women Dorothy Gray presents the results of her early scientific studies into the causes of facial aging.

These she found in the 5 telltale places where youth fades first, as pictured here.

Thus came her pioneer development of specific preparations in assembled treatments.

Now these time-tested measures have reached new levels of effectiveness, thanks to an exclusive and permanent staff of twenty expert chemists and consulting dermatologists.

Ten years ago, only a limited and distinguished group of patrons of Dorothy Gray's Fifth Avenue Salon received these precious benefits. Now, due to scientific control and exact instructions, they can be self-applied in the privacy and convenience of your own home.

Today, too, self-treatment has an appeal of economy, for one can duplicate the salon treatment at home. This is especially true of Dorothy Gray treatments, for their efficiency saves money frequently wasted on unproved preparations.

Go into your mirror this very day . . . now! Heed its warning counsel and seek for Dorothy Gray's booklet. It describes your individual needs and makes it quite simple to select, at your nearest fine shop, the exact treatment you require.

Dorothy Gray
351 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY

In Toronto, Dorothy Gray's consultant is at
"L'EXON Co., Beauty Salon, College Street.

As a guide to Dorothy Gray's treatment, the booklet is today's smart choice.

Figure 3.02: Dorothy Gray advertisement

AWAKEN LOVE...
Be utterly Irresistible

AWAKEN love with the lure men can't resist . . . exotic, tempting IRRESISTIBLE PERFUME. It stirs senses . . . thrills . . . sets hearts on fire. Use Irresistible Perfume and know the mad joy of being utterly irresistible. Men will crowd around you . . . paying you compliments . . . begging for dates. Your friends will envy your strange new power to win love.

To be completely fascinating, use all the IRRESISTIBLE BEAUTY AIDS. Each has some special feature that gives you glorious new loveliness. Irresistible Lip Lure is the new lipstick that melts into your lips leaving no paste or film . . . just soft, warm, ripe, red, indelible color that makes your lip beg for kisses. Four gorgeous shades to choose from. Irresistible Face Powder is so soft-fine and clinging that it hides small blemishes . . . stays on for hours . . . gives you a skin that invites caresses.

Be irresistible tonight . . . buy Irresistible Beauty Aids today. Ask at your 5 and 10¢ store for Irresistible Perfume, Lip Lure, Face powder, Vanishing, Liquefying, Cold Cream, Cologne, Billantine, Talcum Powder. Guaranteed to be pure. Full size packages only 10¢ each at your 5 and 10¢ store.

Irresistible Perfume and Beauty Aids
FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK

Figure 3.03: Irresistible advertisement

Emeraude... the jewel fragrance

Most hauntingly mysterious of jewels is the emerald . . . whose subtle green fire inspired Emeraude. Let this glowing perfume scent your day . . . in Emeraude Accessories.

Perfume \$2.75 (2.5) - Ointment Powder \$3.50 (3) - Bath Salts \$2 - "Kiss" Powder \$2
Vanilla \$2 - Saffron \$2 - Talc \$2, \$3.50 - Mineral Preparation Talcum \$2.50, \$3.75, \$5

Figure 3.04: Emeraude advertisement

worry or fear directly with text that reads, “If your husband were as frank as your mirror, would he say, ‘Don’t grow old, Dear...’” The image of the woman depicted in the mirror has porcelain smooth skin, defined eyes and thick, full lips and yet her facial expression appears one of dismay as she views her reflection. This particular product by Dorothy Gray should not only keep you looking young, which quells the anxiety created by the text in the ad, but it also, “ensure[s] your happiness.” Even by today’s standards, the implications of these kinds of statements are staggering. I argue that today’s consumer, in general, is more experienced and sophisticated in their choices of purchase and is skeptical enough to ask him or herself how a product could promise happiness outright. Today, consumers are courted by and submit to more subtle and complex insinuations of a promise of ‘happiness.’

The viewer can also witness objectification of women as objects to be desired, directly referred to in the 1935 Modern Romance publication featuring an ad from Irresistible Beauty Aids. Transforming a woman to “Be Utterly Irresistible” is as simple as purchasing the product (Figure 3.03). These, and other impossible standards for the ideal woman’s body, have permeated 20th century American advertising also seen in a 1941 issue of Harper’s Bazaar magazine that included an ad for Emeraude fragrance. This ad featured a very thin, tall model as decoration on the page. Arranged neatly at her hemline are the products, the text floating across her thighs while she stands in a slight sway with both of her arms up suggesting awareness she is on display (Figure 3.04).

The New York Herald Tribune featured a Dorothy Gray Salon ad in 1951 that is obviously meant to persuade buyers through fear. Here again, the viewer sees the continued focus on aspects of women’s beauty; but the topic is age defiance. The copy

reads, “Does Your Husband Look Younger than You?” In the foreground, we see a fairly young looking woman with a terrified look on her face. It’s as if she’s simply alarmed of the thought of aging in appearance more aggressively than her husband (Figure 3.05). Palmolive Soap joins in with a Times Weekly advertisement in 1953 claiming their product will guard your “Schoolgirl Complexion Look.” Not only does this ad use testimonials, but it also uses methods such as a man admiring the complexion of a very young looking model (Figure 3.06).

In the 1950’s and earlier, the products themselves were a bit unbelievable, besides the claims that were being made in the advertisements for the product. For example, an ad for Ayds Vitamin Candy in the June 1950 issue of Photoplay claims it will give you a “lovelier figure,” with an average weight loss of 10 pounds “with the very first box.” Ann Sheridan, featured in the ad, agrees with these claims “enthusiastically” – and besides, only “the loveliest women in the world take Ayds!” (Figure 3.07).

Also in this decade, we see confirmation that women are expected to be perpetually happy and cheerful, even if these feelings are induced by a pill. Midol’s advertisement in the 1959 issue of Photoplay for women’s menstrual pain relief infers that by not taking their product, you will be “blue” versus the opportunity to be “gay” by taking a Midol pill (Figure 3.08). Often, ads directed at men are the most overt in their use of a woman’s body to sell a product. A bikini-clad woman seen from behind is directly compared to a car in the October 1964 Fiat ad in Road & Track (Figure 3.09). The text in the ad supports the idea that women’s bodies are objects to be looked at, stating the Fiat’s body style is “the second best shape in Italy” compared to the human body featured in front of the car.

Gender stereotyping¹⁰ is about much more than objectification in its treatment of gender. By applying gender to specific tasks, advertising narrowly defines what it means to be male or female. One can see by viewing print ads from the past that advertising often defined a woman's place as in the home, excited to do daily chores, serve her husband and exist for display. This is seen in an Armstrong Flooring ad run in the May 1967 issue of Good Housekeeping (Figure 3.10). The tagline "For women with more exciting things to do than scrub floors..." is a good start, except for the fact that this ad is not in support of women doing something other than clean house, but to encourage the use of Armstrong brand floor cleaning products to clean. Thus only appealing to the idea that women could have more to do than clean! The ad displays a slim woman standing on a spotless kitchen floor, leaning on an archery bow with arrows jutting out unrealistically from the back of her skirt – as if she is going to engage in target practice on her recently cleaned floor (Figure 3.10).

A classic example of the body as decoration in advertisement is seen in the April 1977 issue of Car and Driver. The BAP/Geon Parts ad (Figure 3.11) features a woman in a T-shirt and bikini-style bottom lounging on the floor among spotless motor engine parts. Her sole purpose in the ad is to function as decoration or embellishment to the products themselves. She is not pictured with the product in the context within which it would be used, underneath the hood of a car. Maidenform produced an ad that ran in February of 1983 featured in Glamour depicting a woman in yet another unrealistic situation (Figure 3.12). Although the ad is for women's undergarments, she is shown on

¹⁰ In this case, 'gender stereotyping' refers to the application of masculine or feminine qualities to characteristics, activities or actions that are not solely distinctive of a male or female, intrinsically. For example, it is a gender stereotype to imply that an identifying factor applied solely to males is muscularity.



Figure 3.10: Armstrong Floor Cleaner advertisement



Figure 3.11: BAP/GEON advertisement

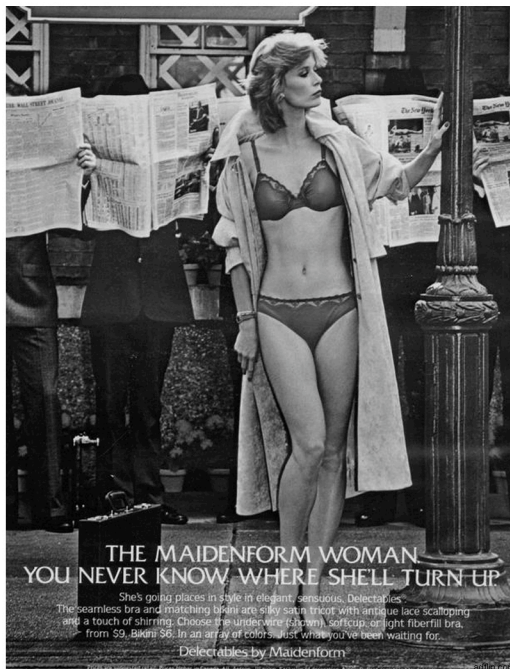


Figure 3.12: Maidenform advertisement



Figure 3.13: OGGI advertisement

a city street wearing only the matching bra and panty combo underneath an open jacket. The text calls her “the Maidenform Woman” thus turning her into an object to be looked at. In addition, her presence in this outfit is to be anticipated as the copy goes on further saying, “You never know where she’ll turn up.” In the 1990’s, women are still being told the most important things about them are outward qualities, as in the OGGI ad (Figure 3.13) showing a woman basking in the enjoyment of being wrapped up entirely in her hair with the text, “for the most important thing you wear.” Once again, confirmation that a woman’s appearance is extremely important and that she can be made more acceptably beautiful simply by purchasing the many products available as beauty aids.

In contemporary ads, one noteworthy progression is the presence of more provocative representations of the body, both male and female. This representation is characterized by the absence of clothing (even in ads promoting clothing lines) and the positioning of the body in suggestive stances. The beginnings of this trend were significant to the development of its use because of successes lent by shock value. These advertisements were created to gain attention not only from the viewer and but also from the news in an effort to extend the power of the print ad to other venues. Some advertisers and critics alike believe that any attention, be it in a positive light or negative, becomes free advertising simply because the ads themselves will gain additional attention and be exposed to a wider audience than the originally published ad could have. By rousing controversy, whether positive or negative, the ads create additional exposure within mass media outside of scheduled and paid for publishing parameters, giving the manufacturer more for their advertising dollar.

The concept of creating a print campaign that will stir controversy is not always considered to be negative; it is especially true with an ad campaign started by Calvin Klein in the 1990's that is now referred to as the 'pornography' series. These ads were inspired by and meant to emulate amateur pornography of the 1960's and 70's by truly mimicking it. This campaign featured young looking models positioned strategically to reveal undergarments or in the act of undressing paired with a discontented facial expression (Figure 3.14). In addition, the environment of the pictured scenes is reminiscent of the 60's and 70's seen in the wood paneling and shag carpet. Not to imply that Calvin Klein is responsible for the state of today's representations of American society in advertisements; but, it appears, they are a significant contributor of the misuse of the body and degrading representations of society.

Since the 1990's, several ad campaigns have been designed to shock the viewer in a similar manner by sexually engaging the viewer both directly, by means of visual imagery and supporting text, and indirectly by implication. Bacardi produced an ad seen in the December 2004 issue of Men's Health using the female body as an object to display the product's brand. In the image, the model is dehumanized by being visually used in several provocative ways. First, the viewer is only able to see a view of her mid-section from behind, as well as a partial profile. Her clothing hangs precariously as if the articles are sliding off of her visibly moist skin; her bare skin on her lower back is branded with the logo of Bacardi (Figure 3.15). She is portrayed as simply another object to be used or possessed; treated in the same manner as cattle or the side of a bus. This image is additionally supported by the text that implies her transformation from a member of society in daytime hours to becoming "Bacardi by Night."



Figure 3.14: Calvin Klein advertisement

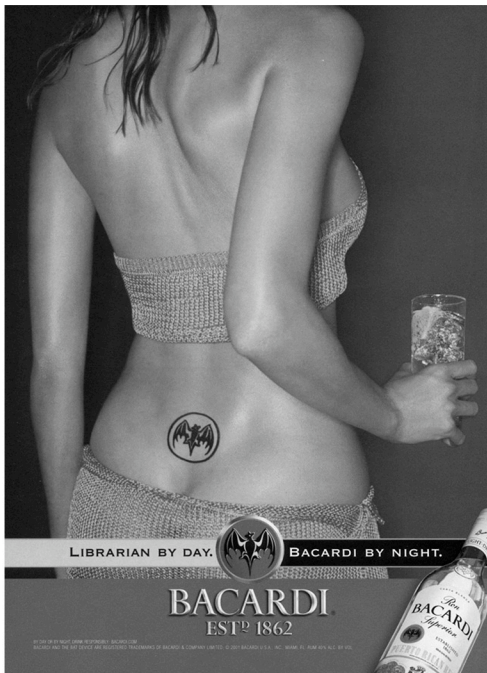


Figure 3.15: Bacardi advertisement

From this examination of each decade in the history of print media, it is clear that the theme of body as commodity is not only common today, but has been visible throughout 20th century American advertising. The use of the body has been progressively used as provocateur. In the first stages of advertising, the focus on women was a logical choice in order to appeal to the audience who performed the daily household tasks such as shopping. However, this practice was soon biased towards featuring women's bodies provocatively for the viewing pleasure of those who create not only the ads, but the products, and furthermore, those who have the most purchasing power and influence. Traditionally and currently, the majority of these positions of power are held by men – those who lead the practice, often unquestioned, of objectifying the female, and now male, body seen in print advertising time and time again.

Men in Print Advertising

Although the use of women in print advertising is more prevalent than that of the use of the male body, objectification and gender stereotyping of males is also a relevant, contemporary issue. Observation of representations of people in print advertising reveals that advertising uses an overall hyper-exaggerated version of gender by amplifying physical characteristics held by males and females. For females, focus is placed on large breasts (often implants), specifically shaped derrière (possibly implanted), a flat stomach (unnatural for a woman) and long lean legs. For males, muscularity is stressed through the biceps, shoulders and abdomen depicted as a washboard stomach (often achieved through steroid use). It is interesting to note that these exact characteristics (muscularity in the shoulders, biceps, forearms, etc.), now sought after, were historically indicative of

belonging to the working class or an indicator that the man was a physical laborer. This phenomenon of American culture's connotation of a physical characteristic completely changing meaning is also exemplified in society's current view of tanned skin. At one time, bronzed skin was an indicator that you were a laborer and not wealthy enough to hire out laboring tasks¹¹. Today tanned skin is sought after so much so that we, as Americans, subject ourselves to harmful, carcinogenic ultraviolet rays specifically to achieve the desired tan, even seeking these rays artificially from an electrically powered tanning bed.

We also see advertising playing on men's insecurities just as has been practiced on women. This type of persuasion utilizes utopia by relying on the possibility that one can imagine an improved or different version of some aspect of their life. The November 1969 issue of True featured an Old Spice cologne ad (Figure 3.16) that consists of a picture of a beautiful blonde woman kneeling in a park or other naturally grassy, wooded area. The page is devoid of any image of the product itself. In fact, there is also no sign of the product logo or company mark, only the text that states men wearing their product "...understand what women like." The dialogue goes even further confirming that this product will fill a void in the man's abilities to appear able to understand a woman: "Girls like it. Is there a better reason to wear Old Spice?" A decade later, we see masculinity implied through the use of a phallic shaped bottle of cologne called Macho by Faberge. The ad, seen in Gentlemen's Quarterly in 1977 confirms that it is "good" to be "b-a-a-a-d,"; here masculinity is defined by muscularity and a form of rebellion (Figure 3.17). A 1999 advertisement for Kahlua seen in P.O.V.

¹¹ This inference to tanned/ bronzed skin was learned through personal communication with my elders in years past, from those who experienced this bit of history personally.

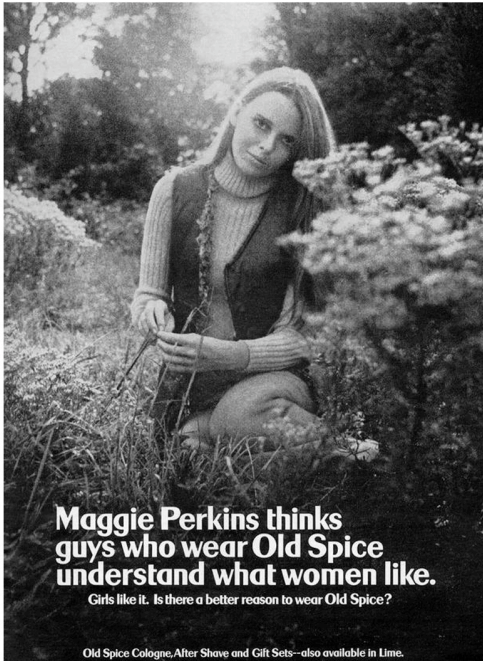


Figure 3.16: Old Spice advertisement



Figure 3.17: Macho Cologne advertisement



Figure 3.18: Kahlua advertisement

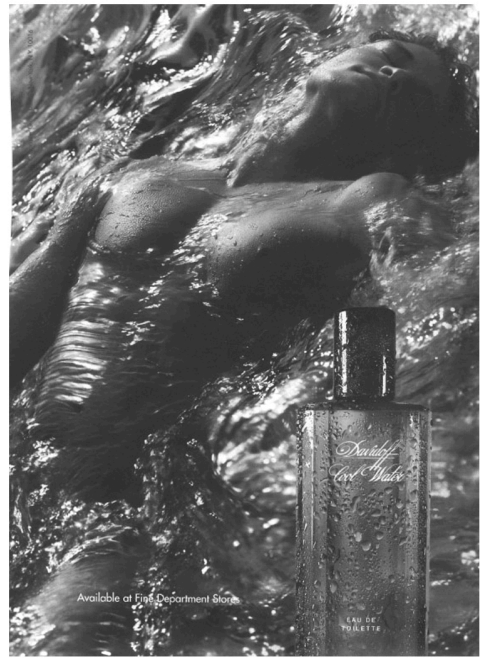


Figure 3.19: Coolwater Cologne advertisement

is the essence of the objectification of the male body. The ad depicts a scantily clad, extremely muscular man wearing a type of helmet, camouflaging his identity (Figure 3.18). Similarly, an ad for Davidoff Cool Water Cologne seen in the December 2004 issue of Maxim features only the nude, muscular midsection of a male model submerged in water (Figure 3.19).

Repetitively, we see the depiction of masculinity with characteristics intended to engage the viewer in a provocative manner, just as the female body has been used in advertising for decades. The specific characteristics are “namely an idealized and eroticized aesthetic showing a toned, young [male] body” (Gill, 2). In a way, the use of the male body in a manner that mirrors the use of the female body is drawing attention simply because it goes against the infamous John Berger adage that: men act and women appear, men look at women, women watch themselves being looked at (Berger, 1972).

Although men’s bodies are not scrutinized as meticulously and as often as women, it is visible in American culture. The male body is a commodity in some markets, but there is not yet as severe a consequence for males who do not conform to the new gendered stereotypes (Kilbourne, 1999). Men have much fewer issues with their body images than women and overall have much lower reported cases of eating disorders, according to the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Traditionally, men are held to monetary stereotypes; in order to acquire a beautiful woman, one must be wealthy. This model reflects utopian ideals as represented and informed by print advertising and is further discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

UTOPIA IN PRINT ADVERTISING

In general, we as a society know we do not live in a perfect world simply because we can imagine a better one. Advertising exploits this notion to the point that, “Utopian images are the very essence of advertising.” (Duffy, 6). This in itself is a problem. Utopian images can encompass many different aspects of life and although each individual has a unique vision of utopia, many ideas are similar. Utopian ideas on gender relations, gender roles, ideal body types, rural living, urban living, group membership, hope, empowerment, or fantasy are prevalent in advertisements. Often these ideas are shown connected or interdependent on one another; images of empowered people also overlap with group membership and ideal body type implications.

American print advertising encompasses many complex ideas. I have concentrated on utopian images that focus specifically on informing ideal body type standards and ideas of objectification of the body. Many advertisers have successfully organized entire campaigns based on the exploitation of utopian images objectifying and idealizing women and men, all of which illustrates that the American public has learned to accept and follow these ideals.

The extent to which advertising informs American culture is unknown, but it has been documented to have extreme effects on other cultures. Ann Becker, anthropologist, studied eating habits on the island of Fiji since 1988. She found that with the introduction of satellite television and Western, specifically American, media brought

with it a severe change in standards for Fijian body image (Nangeroni¹²). Within three years of exposure to American advertisements, there was a more than 33% increase in reported eating disorders, up from a virtually nonexistent issue before (Nangeroni). In addition, a survey of teenage girls at that time in Fiji found that 74% of them felt that they were “too big” or “fat”. The effects of American advertising in this previously unexposed culture are tremendous when one considers the traditional ideal body types of Fijians. In this culture, the established body type for both genders was curvaceous and solid; a very thin person indicated sickness, social neglect and deprivation (Nangeroni). Just three years of exposure to representations of normalcy in America reversed time-honored tradition in this island culture.

With the introduction of and widespread availability of digital enhancement tools, these images of Utopia are even less attainable for the viewer. Digital enhancement of images takes the image several steps away from natural human condition and deviates from the realistic average American body type, male or female. Simply stated, it is not humanly possible to naturally duplicate the effects a computer generated or computer manipulated image can produce. Digital photo retouching has greatly reduced the cost and time involved in manipulating the images used in advertisements, to which the average American is exposed more than 3,000 times per day (Kilbourne, 58). In fact, some companies have abandoned the use of real models all together to utilize a realistic, idealized, and entirely computer generated model.

The increase in the use of digital manipulation has contributed to the rise of public dissatisfaction with their body type. I argue it has contributed to the increase in the

¹² The Nangeroni reference is a radio broadcast accessed via online archives. At this time, there is not a written transcript available for the broadcast and therefore a specific page number reference cannot be made here.

number of people who are artificially altering their appearance through the use of plastic surgery. As a culture, we have become accustomed to instant, effortless customization supplied to us by numerous products. As a culture, I contend we are simply transferring this new standard to our physical bodies. A study entitled “Internalization, Social Comparison and Media Images” (Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 2004) found that not only do women have a, “...tendency to make social comparisons with media models...” but found also that this exposure to thin media models has a negative impact on the way women view their body image (Dittmar, 768). According to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, the number of cosmetic surgery procedures performed in America increased from 2 million in 1997 to almost 12 million in 2004 (American Society..., 1). In addition, growing numbers of men and women state they would consider cosmetic surgery procedures, percentages up in 2005 from just one year ago. Among men, there has been an increase of 50% and among women up 18% (American Society..., 1). This illustrates our continually increasing need to alter appearance to suit the ideal body type, represented and informed by retouched print advertisements. Digital manipulation is to print media what plastic surgery is to the living body.

As the image in print advertising becomes more perfect and less attainable, it is interesting that, at the same time, advertising encourages Americans to be more indulgent than ever. In the age of “Super-sized”¹³ or “Biggie-sized” portions, it is no wonder that on average, Americans in 2004 were 25 pounds heavier than in 1960 according to the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA), putting the average adult male

¹³ The term ‘super-size’ was made popular by McDonalds and refers to the size of a portion that exceeds the portion of a ‘large’ order of french fries or a soft drink. Several fast food chains have mimicked this same notion, for example, Wendy’s version is referred to as ‘biggie-sized’.

weighing in at 191 pounds and the average adult female weighing 164. This means the average American adult's body mass index (BMI), or relation of weight to height, is 28. Those with a BMI of 25 to 30 are considered overweight, 30 or more obese (United States..., 1).

This is quite the opposite when compared to representations of normalcy seen in print advertisements. The American Psychiatric Association reported that in 2000, models seen in media are underweight by 20% or more, quite the contrast to the average American who is overweight (Spitzer et al., 554). In addition, a study completed in 1986 shows that the bust-to-waist ratio of models appearing in Ladies Home Journal and Vogue have decreased steadily since 1949 (Silverstein et al., 524). To summarize this point, as Americans grow heavier on average, the represented ideal body type seen in print advertising is growing much thinner. I argue this is one way advertisers capitalize on human insecurities that center on personal imperfection and anxieties. As one ad creates anxiety in women to become thinner, prettier and more desirable, (or men to become more muscular, handsome, and more desirable) the next ad provides the products and insinuation that upon purchase, one will satisfy these desires – creating yet another level of anxiety to purchase more.

CHAPTER 5

RESOLUTION OF THE ARTISTIC PROBLEM

While many critics write about the visual elements of design and advertising, this study accompanies an exhibition entitled *Reality and Perception: An Examination of American Print Advertising*, that also addresses these design problems in print advertising. This will allow for a dialogue to take place on the same level as advertising and in turn will appeal to a broader audience.

A series of poster prints containing aesthetically arranged compositions made of sophisticated color palettes and beautiful imagery engages the viewer, including those most influenced by contemporary print advertising. Beautiful imagery combined with statistical data creates a dramatic impact that is more memorable to the viewer. Multiple levels of engagement exist within each piece and the exhibition as a whole. These levels exist on a visual, literal, and mental level. Visually, there exists a graphic design aesthetic that reflects a clear understanding of the principles of design. For example, using a grid lends a sense of structure and stability to each piece; pushing the grid to asymmetrical values lends to a less formal aesthetic and adds an underlying, overall slight dynamic rhythm absent of chaos. This aids in the unification of the series as a whole and creates for the viewer firmness to reinforce the factual elements while simultaneously encourages the eye to move about. The extent of the grid in each piece varies, but is proportional to the overall size of the piece.

To further affirm the no nonsense roots of the exhibition, I chose to apply colors that complement each other to some extent as seen in See (Figure 5.01). This will

theoretically lessen the apprehension felt by the viewer (in terms of color theory), allowing the viewer to experience the multiple levels of engagement in the piece without creating anxiety with color. Pieces that do utilize a higher contrast palette also have a more limited palette such as that seen in Body, are meant to visually communicate a message clearly, minimally and with memorable impact (Figure 5.02).

Each piece also carries a literal message such as that seen in Progression (Figure 5.03) stating, “While the average American woman under 30 has become progressively heavier, media images of women have become progressively thinner.” Many pieces in the exhibition utilize scale variation within the body of the text to create a hierarchy of importance. For example, closer examination of Progression reveals the sub-headline, “Most fashion models are thinner than 98% of American women,” a supporting detail to the main headline. By varying the scale of the text, I direct what the viewer reads first, second, and so on. This technique creates multiple levels of engagement for the viewer and mimics advertising’s use of various levels of conscious and subconscious communication. Individually, each phrase or set of data is intriguing because the information is not common knowledge, and when read collectively within the context of the exhibition, the data is thought provoking and shocking.

In total, the series relays a deeper message dealing with advertising’s gratuitous use of the body, utopian ideals, and expenditure in relation to American society today. I contend that advertising influences people to spend beyond economic needs in an effort to attain the representations of reality depicted in advertising. Advertising accomplishes this by playing on the very insecurities one feels that have been most likely developed and nurtured by advertising. This message is the cognitive aspect of the series as seen in



Figure 5.01 See



Figure 5.02 Body



Figure 5.03 Progression

each piece. For example, the pieces entitled Body (Figure 5.02) and Truth (Figure 5.04) visually depict how American women's bodies have changed over the past few decades in correlation to the average American female model's body type. This is supported by the literal facts attained from the FDA that are visible as well. Alone, these facts are intriguing, however, when viewed with the series, these facts are intended to provoke thought and illustrate how American advertising causes anxiety in consumers by consistently depicting an unattainable body type that representative of less than 5% of our population. For females, this representation encompasses less than 2% (American Society...). As one advertisement encourages us to over-indulge or, "Super-size it," the next entices us with a pill or surgery¹⁴ and the promise of quick and easy weight loss paired with an image of a body that has been digitally manipulated and most often surgically enhanced.

The piece entitled Manipulate (Figure 5.05) directly addresses the issue of perception in advertising and it's effects in our population. As the poster states, over the past few years, there has been an exponential amount of growth in the number of elective, cosmetic surgeries performed in America (American Society...). I maintain that this rise in our need to manipulate our bodies is due to the representation of the manipulated, retouched body seen in mass media. As advertising immerses Americans (more than 3,000 per day as illustrated in See (Figure 5.01)) in imagery of thin bodies that are hairless, pore-free, blemish-free, tanned, toned, wrinkle-free, and overall utopian, we of course are influenced to attain these depictions (Kilbourne, 1999).

¹⁴ These terms refer to the ever-growing array of weight-loss pills and cosmetic surgeries available, such as liposuction, offered by various companies that promise weight loss without a major change in diet or exercise.



Figure 5.04 Truth



Figure 5.05 Manipulate



Figure 5.06 Education

This series also examines aspects of American culture that go beyond the physical body and deal with budget expenditure. The piece entitled Education (Figure 5.06) reveals that in one year as a nation, the United States of America budgeted at least 200 billion dollars for advertising (Kilbourne, 1999) and a mere 40 billion dollars for education¹⁵. Considering the fact that advertising is not in the business of producing freethinking, educated citizens, but in creating consumers, it is shocking as one realizes how much faith Americans have put in mass media as a source of reliable information.

Overall, the exhibition allows the viewer to take the experience of viewing the pieces beyond a visual one that can be encompassed only in the gallery setting. Rather, the series induces a thought process that differs from the utopian and commercialized messages consistently pushed on Americans by advertising. The design of the exhibition is such that the posters are functional by providing a clear, noticeable message to the audience in a way that is visually pleasing and stimulating without becoming exhausting to the eye. The viewer will find themselves revisiting elements from the series that engaged them on some level of their social being. This will allow the viewer to examine their perceptions and expectations of reality along with the role advertising plays in forming these perceptions.

¹⁵ The 40 billion dollars spent on education by the United States of America includes not only states but territories as well; data provided by the United States Department of Education.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

As I have shown, advertising's use of utopia and portrayal of both sexes in stereotypical situations contributes to a number of public issues. The effects of viewing utopian images in print advertising are real, and it is visible in both men and women. Sociocultural theory reveals that the ideal representation for North American women is a thin body; for men it is muscularity (Morrison). An in-depth explanation of this theory informs us that dissatisfaction with physical appearance for women stems from:

(1) the thin body ideal that is promulgated in Western societies; (2) the tendency for women to adopt a "body as object" rather than "body as process" orientation; and (3) the thin is good assumption which emphasizes the rewards that are accrued by being attractive (i.e., thin) and concomitantly, the costs that are associated with being unattractive (i.e. fat) (Morrison, 572).

Print advertisements are now much less about the product and more about what the consumer lacks to be complete, which brings into play the depiction of utopian ideals in modern advertising. By implying that "...personal satisfaction and positive human relationships are for sale" (Duffy, 5), advertising suggests much more than product consumption. This practice creates a falsity within the message of the design by implying a particular experience or feeling will be bestowed upon the purchaser or will simply accompany the advertised product if purchased. In addition, advertiser's use of the body as a commodity effects relationships between the genders and in turn causes anxiety within the consumer. As a graphic designer, I contend it is the responsibility of advertisers to search for more unique themes in their work, rather than contributing to the

perpetuation of stereotypes or lazily selling the body. Children who grow up exposed to images that consistently objectify women accept these views as truths. These images inform women that women want to be viewed as sexual objects, that, "...she is a commodity to be bought, sold, traded and shown off," (MacCurdy, 40).

As Stuart Hall notes, images in print produce not only identification, but also knowledge of the world by producing representations of it. Some of these representations are stereotypical which gives us very narrow definitions of who or what a person can be (Hall 20). In addition, most images seen in print media are exaggerations of a very small aspect of life, retaining just enough of reality to be received as a possibility. It is interesting that many texts, some quite dated, review issues of objectification, sexism, and stereotyping in advertising that are still relevant and apparent today.¹⁶ In fact, a 1978 study by Whipple and Courtney concluded, among other things, that, "Advertising may influence women to devote too much attention to personal appearance; may influence men to view women as sex objects," (Whipple, "Social Consequences...", 339-340). In addition, a 1983 evaluation of the research from a wide gamut of methodology concluded that sexist stereotypes exist in print advertising, no matter what method of research is used (Whipple, "Sex Stereotyping...", 5).

It is the creative interpretation of each advertiser's design problem I contend to reform. As advertisements use blatant sexuality and objectify the body to sell an array of products, the same advertisers who wish to shake things up have actually created a disturbing norm. As the designer Paul Rand describes, "trite ideas or unimaginative translation of those ideas is the result not of poor subject matter, but of poor interpretation

¹⁶ This refers to the multiple texts reviewed in the course of this study, as listed in the Primary References and Secondary References portion of this text.

of a problem” (Rand, 36). Commodities must be properly packaged to sell and it is the designer’s task to decide and highlight what the true commodity really is in the ad – the product. Ideally, I would like to be able to state that for every ad that represents all that has been discussed in this study, there is one that epitomizes respectful use of the body or skilled application of the principles of design. Although this is not the case, some product advertisements have not been following their printed counterparts. For example, Tanqueray Gin is producing ads that feature expert photography of the bottle within a skillfully used grid system of color and line (Figure 6.01).

Change will not come from consumers who are under the influence of a collective life-long exposure to advertisements. I contend change must come from within the industry, starting with those that design the ads. Just as designers and artists have in

place copyrights and moral codes to abide by that respect the integrity of other artists and designer’s work, I believe the industry is capable of self-regulating the use of the body. Additionally, I believe this is possible without the implementation of official censorship. With creative abilities comes the responsibility to push the limits of designing, even when applied to advertising ordinary, everyday products. There is an intrinsic beauty found in all objects and I challenge designers to search for and use that beauty



Figure 6.01: Tanqueray Gin advertisement

when producing ads, rather than reverting to a reliance on objectification of the body and sexual innuendo. The physical body is only one aspect of life and I challenge designers to go beyond the clichés and hone creative abilities rather than exercise the recycled themes and methods discussed in this study.

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