

**WOMEN DECODING ADVERTISEMENTS:
IMAGES, IDEOLOGY AND READER-RESPONSE RESEARCH**

A Thesis

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by

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To Peter and Claire,
with a special thanks to Ed McLuskie
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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

In the past twenty years, feminist **approaches** to women in popular culture has comprised a growing literature of serious social analysis and rich social theory.¹ Feminist researchers in America and Europe have explored a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches in discovering the roles of women in consuming, creating and providing the "image" for popular culture. Mapping the literature of women in popular culture is an interdisciplinary endeavor that includes such subject areas as histories of women, **women** in magazines, women in television, women in film, women in advertising and theories of patriarchy.

Although the literature is extensive, Rakow (1985b) points out that feminist studies of popular culture **tend** to share two major assumptions:

The first is that women have a particular relationship to popular culture that *is* different from men. . . [w]omen **have** played central roles as consumers of certain popular culture products, . . . they are a central subject matter of popular culture for both men and women, and, . . . they **have** been significant creators and producers of popular culture. [S]econd, . . . understanding **how** popular culture functions both for women and for a patriarchal culture is important if women **are** to gain control of their **own** identities and change both social mythologies and social relations (p. 23).

Furthermore, Rakow suggests that this literature may be organized into four main approaches: Images and Representations, Recovery and

Reappraisal, Cultural Theory, and Reception and Experience.

Of these four categories, feminist scholars have concentrated more heavily on "images of women" in popular culture than the other three categories and for good reason. "[Women's] most significant role has been the largely passive one of providing popular culture with its major images. That is, the images of women, far more than those of men pervade the various forms of popular culture..." (Fishburn, 1982, p. 3). The Images and Representations approach has looked for answers to the following questions: what kinds of images are present and what do they reveal about women's position in the culture? Whose images are they and whom do they serve? What are the consequences of those images? How do such images have meaning? (Rakow, 1985b, p. 25).

Images of women in advertising is one of the areas of feminist scholarship that has gained prominence in the last twenty years. (see Millum, 1975; Williamson, 1986; Kuhn, 1985; Root, 1984; Winship 1978, 1980; Tuchman et al., 1978). A major preoccupation of scholars working within this approach is the notion that advertisements are cultural artifacts that have meaning beyond the sales message. Advertising is a form of social communication that carries with it patterns of meaning which are repeated and reproduced throughout the entire medium (Millum, 1975). When faced with the constant barrage of ads day in and day out, patterns of images become engrained in the daily lives of those within a

The Recovery and Reappraisal approach, according to Rakow, places a high value on women's culture as distinct from that of men. Rather than focusing on men's images of women, [this approach] focuses on women's images of themselves and women's stories about their own experiences" (p.

29). Recovery and Reappraisal research asks the following types of questions: how have women managed to express themselves in a male-dominated culture? Why has women's creativity been overlooked, ignored and thus, devalued? What are women's stories and myths? The approach is often referred to as the recovery of women's voices, silenced by patriarchy throughout history.

Rokow describes the Cultural Theory approach as a feminist critique which looks explicitly at the organization and production of popular culture. "Rather than looking at the content or uses of popular culture, . . . this feminist approach requires us to stand back from popular culture to see the larger set of social and economic arrangements that produce culture.. ." (p. 35). The major theme running through this approach is that men and women occupy separate social spheres, therefore they have different cultural experiences. Women have a symbolic function in relation to men's culture. This positioning of women, for example between culture and nature, has served to silence women's voices; forcing women to find separate forms of expression.

Socialist feminists consider patriarchy to be as central a social organizer as capitalism (see MacKinnon, 1982; Bland et al, 1978; Van Allen, 1984; Ehrenreich, 1984). Therefore, socialist feminist analyses concentrate on the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy in order to find ways to change social relationships. They posit the following type of question: "what is the relationship between women's oppression and the general features of a mode of production?" (Barrett, 1980, p. 97).

Finally, the Reception and Experience approach to women in popular culture focuses on the users, readers and viewers of popular media forms.

This approach is an attempt to let women speak for themselves about popular culture. The most prominent Reception and Experience studies to date have focused on those cultural forms that are the **most popular** with women; for example, Radway's (1984) ethnographic study of women readers of romance fiction, Ang's (1985) research about the viewer's of the American soap opera *Dallas*, and Hobson's (1982) study of viewers who watch the British soap opera *Crossroads*.

Many feminists consider this approach to central. Oakley (1981), describes the primary goal of feminism as the examination of the experiences of women as people. Furthermore, DuBois (1979) states that "to address women's lives and experiences in their own terms, to create theory grounded in the actual experience and language of women, is the central agenda for feminist social science and scholarship" (p. 5).

For these reasons the Reception and Experience approach provides a way to study women's experience in an egalitarian manner, congruent with the basic aims of the feminist movement. However, Rakow points out that approaching popular culture from this standpoint is not without tensions for feminist scholars. "That is, it presents feminists with the challenge of respecting other women's understanding of their own lives, though the understanding may be different from the feminist's reading of the situation" (p. 351).

This study is situated at the rather awkward interface of the Images/Representations approach and the Reception/Experience approach to women and popular culture. Awkward, only because so little feminist or critical research has attempted to bring together an interpretive analysis of images with an empirical analysis of women's reactions to those images.

On the one hand, feminist studies have concentrated on images of women found in popular media "texts."² These scholars analyze the content of popular media forms such as television programs or advertisements, often using semiotics and structuralism as the basis for analysis (Winship, 1976, 1985; Franco, 1986; Williamson, 1986). The primary concern in semiotic analysis is how meaning is socially produced from sign systems of

On the other hand, feminist reception research has often de-emphasized studying media forms as texts (Frazer, 1987; Radway 1984; Roberts, 1981). Instead, these studies emphasize how women use the media as part of their everyday lives. Furthermore, these studies emphasize the political, economic and patriarchal matrices underlying women's viewing of these media forms.

This study attempts to examine images in both a textual and an empirical way. This research project was conceived around a specific type of advertising image that feature women in often startling, erotic and even violent situations. These particular images first arrested my attention over two years ago while reading through the popular magazine *Rolling Stone*. It was my personal reactions to the ads that spurred my interest in this research. When confronted with these images, my initial thoughts were, why do these images make me as a woman feel uncomfortable? Do other women see these images the same way I do? Do some women like these photographs? Once I decided to conduct the research, it was these initial questions to which I returned.

First, I needed a theoretical framework from which to study the images themselves, and to explore the questions: how do still images, specifically advertising images, have meaning for viewers? How do these

particular images have meaning? The theoretical approach I chose was semiotics.

Second, I needed a different theoretical approach from which to study the uses, or "reception" of these ads. I wanted to know how other women saw these advertisements. Are they **offended** by them? Do they like them? Is it **my** feminist background that **makes** me view them this way? Would other women spend **as** much time critiquing them as **I had**? The empirical portion of the research is a reader-response study of **women** decoding advertisements.

From these **initial** questions and curiosities the **guiding** research questions for this study **were** derived: 1) How do images have meaning? 2) Is the context of the viewing situation influential on how images come to mean? Does the context and the genre, in this case magazine advertisement, effect our viewing of it? 3) How do women see aggressive and often startling advertisements?

It is my purpose **to** look at how these ads communicate to the viewer, the possibilities of meanings that are encoded into the ads and **also** how women decode those meanings. First, this study will provide **a** critical **reading** of advertising **images** themselves and the **social context** in which ads are **viewed** and meaning **is** constructed. Second, the study **will explore** women's responses and critiques of these advertisements.

Outline of Chapters

In order to situate this study in and among reception-response literature, chapter two offers a literature review of audience reception research. "Audience reception" is not a new concept; under other guises the fascination with how it is that audiences are impacted by the mass media has been the mainstay of communication research for several decades (McQuail, 1983). What is new, is a revitalized interest in how individuals "use" mass media to "make sense" in their everyday lives. Administrative as well as critical scholars of communication are investigating the relationship between media content and audience reception. This chapter will chart theories of reception through their two main origins: literary criticism and the humanities, and media studies in mass communication. Emphasis in this chapter will be placed on the work of Janice Radway (1984), James Lull (1980) and Dave Morley (1980, 1986).

Chapter three examines how advertising images have meaning. The major ideas from Judith Williamson, Roland Barthes and Bill Nichols, who have all written extensively on images, provide the basis for a semiotic investigation of advertisements. However, in order to develop theory from which to study women's responses to advertisements, we must look beyond the text to gender relationships which shape the way we "look" at ads. The second section of chapter three is a feminist glance at advertising images.

Feminist reception research in the past has concerned itself with cultural forms that women actively and often emphatically seek out. Such is the case with romance novels and soap operas. However, it is also important to understand how women experience cultural forms with which they are confronted, but do not necessarily seek out. In the case of

magazine advertisements, the reader generally does not seek them out, instead, she is initially hailed by the magazine. Although the reader expects to see ads there, the viewing of them is secondary to reading the magazine itself. This secondary viewing status afforded advertisements is a primary reason that women's experience with them should be studied as something quite different from, say, reading romance fiction or watching soap operas.

Chapter four sets the viewing of these advertisements in a political and economic context. This study discusses a particular type of advertisement, those that show erotic and often times violent imagery. The appearance of this kind of advertisement did not occur in a vacuum. This chapter attempts to "un-wrap" the political and economic context in which these ads are being produced and viewed. Particular attention will be paid to U.S. consumerism in the 1980s, the magazine industry and the advertising industry's defense of aggressive advertising strategies.

Finally, chapter five brings us full circle in answering the questions: how do women see these erotic and often times startling images? How do women critique this kind of advertising? Chapter five is an empirical study of women's responses to aggressive advertising imagery in magazines. This is an exploratory study of nine women's responses to, and critiques of, these ads. Stuart Hall's (1980a) model of encoding/decoding offers a critical base from which to interpret the responses.

Hall (1980a) points out that media consumption is a process of "decoding." Hall's encoding/decoding model proposes that mass media forms, specifically television programs, do not inherently possess singular meanings, but should be thought of as open texts that can be "read" differently by different people (Fiske, 1987). Hall proposes that television

programs encoded by the program's producers with a "preferred reading." Generally mass media texts are inscribed with a preferred reading that is in agreement with the dominant ideology of a particular society. How groups of individuals read these texts depends on how closely they are aligned with, or in opposition to, the dominant ideology of the program. This model places the reader, or in the case of television, the viewer, in the active position of negotiating with the text itself.

This model suggests that the production of meaningful messages (encoding) is a job that is often problematic in nature (Morley, 1980).

A news event, for example, can never be transmitted directly, but must be first structured and encoded within the framework of professional and social practices surrounding television news programs, and then must be decoded within various complex cultural and social contexts (Streever, 1984, p. 80).

Messages always have the potential for more than one reading; they are polysemic. Polysemy, in this context, means that although there is an infinite amount of meanings that can be read from any one symbol, the audience of a television program does not have an infinite amount of meanings to choose from. Instead, preferred meanings are encoded into television programs and the decoding of those programs will depend upon how groups of individuals, given their "shared culture" use and interpret the finite number of possible readings.

There is no necessary and ultimately predictable relationship between the encoding and the decoding sides of the communication process. Research guided by the encoding/decoding model is interested in uncovering decoding patterns of groups of individuals with similar cultural experiences. By comparing these decoding patterns with the encoded

messages of the media form itself, a better understanding is reached of how the concept of "shared culture" shapes the way in which we make sense of mass media forms in our everyday lives.

Hall's conception of decoding strategies is borrowed from Parkin's (1972) theory of ideological frameworks employed by groups in society. Hall transformed Parkin's ideas on the three types of ideological frameworks, dominant, negotiated, and oppositional to describe decoding strategies of mass media. According to Hall, because of their social positioning and the way they generally make sense of their world, viewers who give a dominant reading agree and align themselves with the dominant ideology (the preferred reading) of the program.

However, this is not always the case. In negotiated readings, viewers find the basic ideology of the program at odds with their material lives, but they are willing to negotiate between their material reality and the text in order to read the program along the lines of the dominant ideology. The viewer chooses to negotiate this contradiction rather than resist the dominant ideology.³ Finally, there are oppositional readers of television. These viewers, because of their cultural position, find the dominant ideology of the program irreconcilable with their own experiences of their material situation. According to this model, often times when it appears that a viewer has completely missed the preferred meaning of a program, it may be that his/her reading was oppositional to the encoding of the

The reader whose social position is one of ease with the dominant ideology, who works with the program, will use its foregrounded ideology to reaffirm [his/her] ideological frame. . . . Readings at (the oppositional end of the scale stop being negotiated and become oppositional when they go against

the text to deconstruct the dominant ideology (Fiske, 1987, p. 266).

It is my belief that Hall's ideas are not limited to the study of television programs. The strategies of dominant, oppositional and negotiated readings are useful tools with which to examine women's decodings of advertisements. The study to follow will employ Hall's ideas on "preferred readings" and decoding strategies in order to interpret how women view aggressive advertising.

The final chapter is a general discussion of the findings of the study. This chapter will examine the conclusions drawn from the study in relation to other reception studies. Finally, this chapter will discuss implications for future research.

Methodology

This study does not employ one method of inquiry. Instead it is a synthesis of several research strategies. This approach is not uncommon in feminist research. As Derrin (1987) points out,

...because feminist scholars are struggling to find a way to give women voice, to allow that voice to emerge, perhaps their greatest contribution is that they have turned everything into a problem. When you make everything into a problem, from how you ask the question, to how you collect the data, to how you make observations, to how you draw conclusions, to whom you work with and how you work with them, in essence you are breaking apart the constraints and the traditional conceptions of what science and observation are all about (p. 113).

Feminist scholars have written extensively on the inherent patriarchal bias of the social sciences. In fact, feminist theory and research

seeks to offer alternative **ways of** thinking about the fundamental premises of social science? However, the debates within feminist critiques of science and objectivity are too extensive to explore here. My purpose in this section is to justify the methods employed in this study. Therefore, the following discussion will be limited to an examination of feminist methodology.

Feminist methodology does not refer to one preferred approach to research. Feminist methodology cannot be compared to traditional social science method; feminist methodology can be conceived of as an alternative to traditional methods. Judith Cook (1982) explains:

... feminist methodology involves the description, explanation, and justification of methodological techniques used in feminist research. As such, the notion of feminist methodology can be more accurately understood as an abstract classification referring to a variety of methodological stances, conceptual approaches, and research strategies (p. 4).

Feminists contend that traditional social science methods exclude women's experience from analysis. This condemnation is not restricted only to positivist social science. Marxist and critical approaches have also been guilty of excluding the experience of women (Dervin, 1987). This patriarchal bias assumes that male is the norm, and that which is female is a variable to be treated outside of the norm (Acker et al., 1983; McCormack, 1981; Du Bois, 1979). Michael Zimmerman notes that "man's conception of himself as essentially cultural, non-female, non-natural, immortal, and transcendent, as opposed to the essentially natural, non-cultural, mortal woman, has continued in various guises for several thousand years" (quoted

in Spitzack & Carter, 1987). Feminism is an attempt to recognize the existence and experience of women. It does not attempt to be "value-free," "un-biased" or "objective" (Roberts, 1981). These are concepts built into the hierarchical and patriarchal premises of the natural and social sciences.

Feminist scholarship attempts to promote an egalitarian sisterhood among women who are striving to make their voices heard. Therefore, feminist scholars employ research methods that complement this commitment to equality and humanity. Dervin (1987) explains:

"feminist scholarship is usually conducted in a cooperative participatory, interdisciplinary, and nonhierarchical fashion, therefore being an exemplar of the very things it promotes. [It] is often pluralistic, using whatever method and perspective. . . . needs to be brought to bear in order to pursue its aims. . . . It is not rejecting of any methodology." (p. 109).

Although not rejecting of any methodology, feminist scholars on the whole do tend to embrace qualitative research methods over quantitative ones. Qualitative research methods generally allow for close contact between the researcher and the subject or respondent. The subject is allowed some say in the research process and is allowed to influence the path and the outcome of the research. ". . . [Q]ualitative techniques provide a wealth of fit-st-hand, in-depth, descriptive and analytical information needed to correct the [social science] discipline[s'] neglect of women's lives" (Cook, 1982, p. 10). In the fields of sociology, anthropology, literary criticism and history, some of the most frequently used methods are

participant observation, textual analysis, oral histories, ethnographies, open-ended questionnaires⁵ and face-to-face interviewing.

Feminists in the field of communication are just beginning to explore qualitative methods in order to examine women's communication.⁶ Dervin (1987) explains that there are two possible explanations for why the field of communication is a latecomer to feminist scholarship. The first, is the field's history of reliance on methods borrowed from the natural sciences. Second, because of the youthfulness of the communication field compared to the other social sciences, it is just now reaching a crisis stage where new perspectives must be sought.⁷

Despite some progress in this direction, feminist research remains marginalized in the field of communication. It does not fit comfortably into either the critical or administrative paradigms because "neither side has given feminism a prominent voice in the on-going discourses of the field" (Rakow, 1985a, p. 5). Nevertheless, feminist scholarship is emerging in this field, creating its own paradigm and developing its own alternative research techniques.⁸ Rakow (1985a) explains:

A feminist communication paradigm places women squarely in the center of its analysis; it has a commitment to recovering and understanding the voices and experiences of women; it seeks to replace patriarchal society with new social economic, and political arrangements; it uses whatever methodology is appropriate and useful for doing these things". (p. 7).

According to Cook (1982), feminist methodologies across the disciplines share four common characteristics: the first is the recognition that there are gaps in our knowledge of social process. These gaps were

created by researchers who have ignored women and women's concerns as research topics. Second, feminist methodologies emphasize the importance of the feminist researcher, and therefore recognize methodological bias. Third, feminist methodology recognizes the need to reformulate concepts borrowed from the natural sciences so they become meaningful and useful for women. Finally, feminists employ an awareness of how the kinds of research questions asked influence the research results (pp. 5-7).

Feminists adopt a holistic approach in examining the full complexity of women's experience. The researcher must take into account the personal and emotional elements of their subjects' lives as well as the public ones. Furthermore, the researcher is obliged to take into account the research experience itself as part of the analysis. The research experience includes the researcher and the researcher's relationship to the subject(s) (DuBois, 1979). The method I chose for the empirical portion of this study is the face-to-face interview. Many feminist scholars have found this method to be an especially useful tool in capturing the complexity of the research experience.⁹ However, Oakley (1981) points out that traditional interviewing techniques are contradictory to the ideals of feminist scholarship because of the artificial relationship that is set up between the researcher and the subject. Oakley explains that "text-book" interviewing is based on the following premises: interviewing is a one-way process "in which the interviewer elicits and receives, but does not give information" (p. 31). Interviewers treat subjects as objectified functions of data collection. The interaction of the interview itself has no meaning, just the data taken from it. Since the primary goal of feminism is the discovery of

the subjective experience of women as people, Oakley suggests that feminists should explore issues that traditional interviewing excludes, such as:

[The] social/personal characteristics of those doing the interviewing; interviewees' feelings about being interviewed and about the interview; interviewers' feelings about interviewees; and quality of interviewer-interviewee interaction; hospitality offered by interviewees to interviewers; attempts by interviewees to use interviewers as sources of information; and the extension of interviewer-interviewee encounters into more broadly-based social relationships. (p. 31)

Feminist scholars aim for a more egalitarian form of research that does not place interviewees in a subordinate position to interviewers. Subjectivity and personal involvement with interviewees is not considered bad or "unscientific." Rather, it is looked at as a more democratic and "real" way of doing research. Oakley contends that probing women's experience is best achieved when the interviewer and the interviewee have a relationship with one another; when the interviewee feels comfortable talking about herself. Only then will the interviewee invest her personal identity in the interview

This study represents the integration of many ideas from feminism, Cultural Studies, Critical communication studies as well as European theory in semiotics and structuralism. This fact is a reflection of my belief that the data should determine the method; method should not necessarily be imposed upon data.

NOTES

¹ Betty Friedan's (1963). *Feminine Mystique*. New York: Norton & Co., was one of the first studies to look at the disparity between women's images in popular magazines and women's real lives. This study is considered the forerunner of the proliferation of research on women in popular culture undertaken in the last 20 years.

² Texts, in semiotics refer to cultural forms that can be analyzed or "read." The term was borrowed from literary criticism, when it was theorised that other cultural forms could be read as texts as well as books. See Suleiman, S.R., & Crosman, I. (Eds.). (1980). *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

³ A good example of this is when a woman must take on a patriarchal subjectivity in order to produce a reading of a program that fits with the dominant ideology of the program.

⁴ For feminist critiques of science see Keller, E.F. (1984). *Reflections on Gender and Science*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.; Harding, S. (1986). *The Science Question in Feminism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.; Gregg, N. (1987). Reflections on the Feminist Critique of objectivity. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*. 11(1), 8-18.; Stanley, L., & Wise, S. (1983). *Breaking Out: Feminist Consciousness and Feminist Research*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.; Acker, J., Barry, K., & Esseveld, J. (1983). Objectivity and Truth: Problems in Doing Feminist Research. *Women's*

Studies International Forum, 6(4), 423-435.; Laws, J. L. (1978, September). *Feminism and Patriarchy: Competing Ways of Doing Social Science*. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Sociological Association, San Francisco, California.

⁵ For a discussion of the utility of essay questionnaires, see Hite, S. (1980). Toward a New Methodology in the Social Sciences: Is the Hite Report 'Scientific'? *Frontiers*, 5(1), 37-39.

⁶ The following are the germinal works in feminist communication research thus far: Special Issue on Feminist Critiques of Popular Culture (1986). *Communication*, 9(1).; The Feminist Issue (1987). *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 11(1).; Foss, K., & Foss, S. (1983). The Status of Research on Women and Communication. *Communication Quarterly*, 31(3), 195-204.; Steeves, H.L. (1987). Feminist Theories and Media Studies. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 4(2), 95-135.; Dervin, B. (1987). The Potential Contribution of Feminist Scholarship to the Field of Communication. *Journal of Communication*, 37(4), 107-120. Spittack, C., & Carter, K. (1987). Women in Communication Studies. A Typology For Revision, *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 73(4), 401-432.

⁷ The edition of *The Journal of Communication*, 33(3), entitled "Ferment in the Field," what has been coined the "critical/administrative" debates. For an analysis of where feminist researchers in the field of communication figure in this debate see, Rakow, L. F. (1985, May). *A Paradigm of One's Own: Feminist Ferment in the Field*. Paper presented at the meeting of the International Communication Association, Honolulu, Hawaii.

⁸ Rueben, E. (1978). In Defense of the Evidence: Notes on Feminist Scholarship. *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, 1, 215-218.

⁹ For other examples of feminist studies that utilize the face-to-face interview technique see McRobbie, A. (1976). Working Class Girls and the Culture of Femininity. In Women's Studies Group, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Eds.), *Women Take Issue: Aspects of Women's Subordination* (pp. 96-108). London: Hutchinson; Hobson, D. (1982). *Crossroads: The Drama of Soap Opera*. London: Methuen.; Oakley, A. (1980). Women Confined: Towards a Sociology of Childbirth. Oxford: Martin Robertson; Frater, E. (1987). Teenage Girls Reading Jackie. *Media, Culture and Society*, 9, 407-425.

CHAPTER II

AUDIENCE RECEPTION RESEARCH

In his (1987a) article, 'Qualitative Audience Research: Toward an Integrative Approach to Reception,' Jensen describes recent scholarship about mass communication audiences as a "trend" which employs textual analysis together with social science approaches. According to Jansen, this recent trend is an outgrowth of the "critical/administrative" debate in the field of communication. In particular, current reception research reflects the realization by administrative researchers that studying mass media audiences divorced from wider social contexts and political origins is unrealistic and unproductive. On the other hand, critical researchers have come to realize that theoretical analyses without empirical testing may serve to bankrupt the perspective's explanatory appeal. Although this explanation of the origins of reception research is perhaps the most interesting for communication researchers, Jensen's portrait offers only

Current reception research is the result of a nexus of academic scholarship converging on a common problematic: the relationship between the medium and the audience; the relationship between the text and the reader. The roots of this problematic are to be found beyond the administrative/critical debate in communication and the social sciences. Scholarship of equal influence addressing this problematic has come from the humanities, specifically literary criticism and film theory.

Current reception research is as much a convergence of mass communication research and humanities on the same problematic, as it is an integration of the critical/administrative debate. In fact, it is at the interface of these two traditions that some of the most germinal reception studies are located (see Morley, 1980a, 1980b, 1986; Ang, 1985; Hobson, 1982). This chapter is an attempt to trace the medium-audience problematic from its origins to its current status. Given the breadth of this task, the following is not an attempt at an exhaustive review, but rather a mapping of the course of reception research. Primarily, this chapter will examine three reception studies that have had considerable impact on the way communication scholars currently view reception: Radway's (1984) *Reading the Romance*, Lull's (1980) "Social Uses of Television," and Morley's (1980) study of *The 'Nationwide' Audience*.

The Lineage from Literary Criticism

In the past, literary criticism has sought to un-cover and unfold the "true" meaning of texts in much the same way as one can pick out the pattern in an oriental carpet.¹ This form of criticism assumes that texts have intrinsic meaning apart from the reader that can be excavated by the skilled critic. The critic can then interpret the meaning of the text for the layman or other critics who cannot see the meaning for themselves.

In recent years, however, the emphasis in literary criticism has shifted from excavating meaning from the text to examining the role of the reader in understanding and deriving pleasure from it (Allen, 1987). This fundamental observation that literary meaning is a result of a confrontation between text and reader, rather than the intrinsic properties of the text

itself, is now shared among prominent and theoretically diverse critics.² However, as Allen points out, this fundamental observation has had implications far beyond the field of literary criticism. The significance of the medium-audience relationship constitutes a theoretical framework across the humanities, most noticeably in the case of film, television and other popular cultural forms. The common strand that connects these disparate researchers and critics is the desire to examine the act of reading, and therefore placing it high on the critical agenda.

Film theory is just one of the approaches that has critically examined the role of the viewer. In what is now known as *Screen* theory (theoretical positions advanced by the journal *Screen*), the role of the "spectator" has been theorized extensively using both semiotic and psychoanalytic analyses.³ However, these theories have undergone harsh criticism from reception theorists. For example, Morley (1980a) points out that *Screen* theory has attempted to posit universalist theory on the constituting of the subject in the viewing process. According to *Screen* theory, films have the ability to "position the subject."

Relying heavily on Lacan's reading of Freud, *Screen* theory examines the relationship between one reader and one text, at once reducing the subject-text relationship to the fundamental psychoanalytic premises by which subjectivity is constituted, while at the same time advancing universalist theory from those premises.

According to Morley, *Screen* theory ignores the "constant intervention of other texts and discourses, which also position the subject" (1980a, p. 163). Although the reader may be focused on a particular text, other discourses from the reader's experience are always at play in the reading

process. instead of the subject being placed according to universal psychoanalytic laws, reading practices are dependent upon the subject's relation to discourses and practices, whether cultural, educational, or institutional at the time of this reading encounter. This perspective of "interdiscourse"⁴ or "intertextuality" posits that the reader is not the "subject of the text," as *Screen* theorists propose, rather, they are "social subjects" (Morley, 1980a, p. 169). Willeman explains:

There remains an unbridgeable gap between 'real' readers/ authors and 'inscribed' ones, constructed and marked in and by the text. Real readers are subjects in history living in social formations, rather than mere subjects of a single text. These two types of subject are not commensurate. But for the purposes of formalism, real readers are supposed to coincide with the constructed readers (quoted in Morley, 1980a, p. 169).

The "real reader" encounters texts within the context of their lives as social beings. The lived experience of the reader is not found in either textual characteristics or in universal psychoanalytic premises. It is this lived experience that the reader brings to the reading encounter. According to Neale (1980), "we also need to take into account... the use to which a particular text is put, its function within a particular conjuncture, in particular institutional spaces, and in relation to particular audiences" (quoted in Morley, 1980a, p. 071). Morley continues:

A text should also not be considered in isolation from the historical conditions of its production and consumption - its insertion into a context of discourses in struggle... Both the text and the subject are constituted in the space of the inter-discursive (p. 171).

This perspective **calls** into question universal premises explaining how the subject is constituted and at the same time it questions whether there is intrinsic meaning in a text which is isolated from the **cultural**, educational, or political placement of the subject, layman or **critic**. The reader brings **many** discourses to bear on one text, while at the **same time** the reading encounter is influenced by other texts. The reader, **in fact**, **has** the capacity to be many **different** audiences at once; different texts can **constitute** the reader **as** such (Hall, 1986).

Janice Radway's (1984) ethnographic study of the readers of **romance** fiction **belongs** to this lineage from literary criticism. Radway's investigation into the **popularity** of **romance** fiction came about in response to textual analyses of the medium previously conducted by fellow scholars and critics (Snitow, 1979; Douglas, 1980; Modleski, 1980). Radway was **unconvinced** by Modleski's assessment that because the readers of Harlequin romances are **superior** to the heroine and yet identify with her emotionally, they must experience feelings of hypocrisy and bad faith. Further, Radway **was skeptical** of Douglas' **condemnation** of romance readers for enjoying fiction that is at a disjuncture with their everyday lives. Also, Douglas states that these women are helping to **perpetuate** patriarchal notions of **the ideal** female: illogical, innocent, magnetized by male sexuality and

Both Modleski and Douglas attribute the popularity of this genre to the fact that the daily oppression the reader's experience in the home is **similar** to the oppression of the heroines in the **romance novels** they read. These readers identify with **the** central message of these novels, mainly that "pleasure for **women** is men" (Snitow, 1979, p. 150).

Radway (1984) is not skeptical of the feminist ideals held by her fellow scholars. Instead, she is disturbed by the theoretical implications of their critiques. These critiques place a single (negative) inscribed meaning on the text of the romance. The popularity of the genre can then be explained away by the ignorance and self-deception of the readers (1984). In the world of academic criticism, therefore, the readers do not have a voice.

Their statements about why they read romances become, in this theory, mere rationalizations and justifications, false consciousness, as it were, which masks their actual reasons for spending money on books that only covertly perform their proper function. The true, embedded meaning of the romance is available, then, only to trained literary scholars (p. 5).

Radway (1983, 1984) applauds the thorough and complex textual analyses of these studies and agrees that the findings are useful taken for what they are, analyses of the texts themselves. What Radway argues is that a purely textual analysis which treats the text in isolation, away from the cultural, economic and political context in which it is actually read, is inadequate in explaining reading behavior. Radway explains that this is a common ailment in most mass-culture studies. A critic picks a genre that appears formulaic and proceeds to analyze the ideological meanings of the genre based on random examples. Many of these analyses preclude the possibility for reader's resistance to the text or for oppositional or negotiated readings. Also, these interpretations do not account for the fact that these readers may be selective in their choices of novels. They may not read an entire "line" of books, or they may steer clear of an entire line altogether. Given this consideration, blanket assessments of the genre

would not take into account omission and resistance, on the parts of the readers, against particular texts (1983).

Radway's approach differs from her predecessors in two fundamental ways. First, her analyses are reader-centered as opposed to text-centered. She concurs with Fish (1980) who states that literary meaning is "the property neither of fixed and stable texts nor of free and independent readers but of interpretive communities that are responsible both for the shape of the reader's activities and for the texts those activities produce" (p. 322). This places the critic in an uneasy position. The critic who is writing about a media form from his/her own position within an interpretive community, is unable to speak for those who are using that media form in a different interpretive community. That is, unless the critic attempts to understand the dynamics of the interpretive community she is studying, she cannot properly investigate how readers use texts.

Secondly, Radway (1983, 1984, 1986) attempts to step back beyond the reader reading the text, to a starting place that asks the question, "why do these women pick up a book in the first place?";". Radway wanted to find out what women do with these texts; how they have meaning in the readers' everyday lives.

In *Reading the Romance*, Radway conducts her own empirical research of the readers of romance fiction. Her subjects consisted of a group of avid romance readers she identified as the Smithton group. This group of women from a small Midwestern community are the regular customers of a local bookstore, managed by Dot Evans. Evans is considered the local expert on romance novels. She publishes a monthly newsletter reviewing the romance novels currently in the shop. Further, Evans has become so highly respected

for her expertise that publishers contact her for advice on what novels to publish. Radway used as her sample Evans and sixteen of her most regular customers. First, through the use of lengthy questionnaires, and later through the use of individual and group interviews, she probed to find out how and why these women consume a phenomenal amount of romance novels (in some cases up to nine books a week) as a part of their weekly routines.

The women that Radway studied cited "escapism" as their primary reason for reading romances. Attending to the written page requires concentration that pre-empts the distraction of their everyday chores. Because reading is seen as a more "legitimate" activity than say, watching television, there is less guilt attached to retreating from responsibility into a fantasy of romance. These women find the act of reading romances not only liberating, but in many cases, an act of defiance against the pressures of being a wife and a mother.

By placing the barrier of the book between themselves and their families, these women reserve a special space and time for themselves alone. As a consequence, they momentarily allow themselves to abandon the attitude of total self-abnegation in the interest of family welfare which they have so dutifully learned is the proper stance for a good wife and mother (Radway, 1963, p. 61).

The Smithton readers are very aware that the characters in the books do not resemble real life, and that the main reason for reading these books is to escape into fantasy. They read the books to feel good; because no matter what the storyline, or the roles of the characters, there is always a happy ending. Radway points out that there is a certain sadness in these women that makes them need such an escape, a declaration of independence.

When staking that claim to an hour or two of independence from the pressures of the day, these women want the security of knowing exactly what to expect from their books. They want texts with certain set boundaries such as a happy ending, romance but no explicit sex, end no brutality or rape.

Modleski, Douglas and Smitow all produced textual analyses of a random sample from the genre 'romance fiction.' These authors identified some of the more negative themes found in this literature as rape, mental cruelty by the heroes and submission and naivete by the heroines. The implicit assumption being that all women hooked on romance novels read these books indiscriminantly and are therefore exposed to all of these themes. However, Radway found that the Smitow readers happen to be very selective about which books they read and enjoy. These women preferred a novel that: a) did not condone the hero having other women besides the heroine, b) presented a hero who was kind and thoughtful toward the heroine, and never unduly cruel to her, and c) starred a heroine who was independent and intelligent.

In the past, critics have assumed that simply because the novel has been purchased, that it has been "used" by those who purchased it. This, reports Radway, is not necessarily the case. Some women throw undesirable novels away and others finish them but find them unfulfilling. According to the Smitow group,

... the quality of the ideal romantic fantasy is directly dependant on the character of the heroine and the manner in which the hero treats her... A good romance involves an unusually bright and determined woman and a man who is spectacularly masculine, but at the same time capable

of a remarkable empathy and tenderness (Radway, 1983, p. 64).

These women actively reject romances that present the heroine as weak, dim-witted or victimized. They also reject infidelity in the romances they read. The hero cannot be actively pursuing two women at one time. Radway also points out that the Smithton women would often "reinterpret" a text that hinted at these undesirable characteristics. For instance, if a hero brutalizes a heroine in the first chapter, this early behavior may be attributed to a torrid love affair in his past. He will straighten out with the help of the heroine's love.

Radway's research suggests that the act of reading a romance novel is as meaningful for her subjects as is the text itself. These women are not simply passive females who identify with traditional gender roles found in romance novels. Many readers use romances to fill needs that marriage and raising a family have failed to meet. They often read romances out of a dissatisfaction with traditional women's roles. Although this form of resistance is admittedly subtle, it does show that readers use texts in ways that cannot be assessed solely by the content of the message. Only through rigorous empirical research into the act of reading, can we explain what meaning a text has for the reader.

The Lineage from Media Studies

Communication scholars, such as Jensen (1987), tend to think of reception research as an answer to the inadequacies in administrative as well as critical scholarship. However, this should not be taken as a sign that somehow the two paradigms are converging on a common problematic.

Critical researchers such as Slack & Allor (1983) state that any attempt at simple integration of the two paradigms is admitting to ignorance of the complexities of both. Before examining how each perspective has managed to arrive at a conception of audience reception, it may be helpful to first examine how the administrative and critical approaches fundamentally differ.

In the last thirty years, American mainstream (administrative) communication scholarship has been primarily concerned with media effects? "In the minds of many, including some communication scholars, the major - if not only - significant question, that communication research should address is what effect do the media have on the audience" (Fejes, 1984, p. 219). Research in the administrative paradigm draws on the dominant behaviorist ideas in psychology, sociology and political science to produce studies of human communication which utilize methods derived from the natural sciences. This reverence of objectivity, neutrality and the "scientific method" produces research that is ahistorical, apolitical and acontextual. Despite the sophistication of methods produced by communication researchers working within the mainstream, the majority of this research insists that communicative acts can be studied apart from the political, economic, cultural and historical context in which they occurred.

Administrative scholarship sees the political as somehow removed from the research situation. The critical researcher, on the other hand, sees politics and social power as central to research.

The major differences between the two streams of research extend from the basic assumptions about the nature and purpose of the research enterprise to methods, and finally

to the concepts **embedded** in scholarly discourse. In the behaviorist tradition such concepts as **ideology**, and hegemony are regarded **as** meaningless if not inherently polemical and anti-scientific **while** in the **critical tradition** they **are** central. (Fejes, 1984, p. 220).

However, the **differences** between the **administrative** and critical paradigms **cannot** be explained by **simple** dichotomies. The critical perspective is not **a** self-contained **paradigm** with defining **characteristics** that can be mapped as the **direct** opposite of the **administrative** approach. It is more useful to think of the **critical** perspective **as** a range of **alternative** approaches to the study of communication (Slack & Allor, 1983). The **germinal** theories and **research** which define **this** perspective are credited to **scholars** from Great Britain and the European Continent. Most European scholarship on media **has** been an interdisciplinary endeavor, drawing on theory **from** sociology, economics, semiotics, political philosophy, literature, psychoanalysis **and** history. However, **a** common strand in **critical scholarship** is its emphasis on social power and social change. Slack and Allor explain that

... media institutions and the processes of mass communication **are viewed as inseparably** intertwined with other social institutions and processes (e.g. the state, the family, and economic **organization**).
...[T]his is because human individuals are viewed as first and foremost members of **social** groups defined by material social **location** (**differentiated**, for example, by **class**, gender, race, **and** subculture) (1983, p. 214).

These assumptions, however they may be expressed, **are** acknowledged openly, and **viewed** critically.

Critical scholarship of mass **media** may be **divided** into three readily **identifiable** (although not necessarily **mutually** exclusive) "schools" of

thought.⁷ The first school may be described as "structuralist." Having roots in ideas from structural anthropology, linguistics, **semiotics** and psychoanalysis, this approach is concerned with **signification** of, and representation in, the media. Scholarship in this tradition considers language as the central social **organizer**.⁸ As **human beings** we know our world through language. We are never outside of language. "[S]tructuralist research seeks to examine the implicit **categories** of thought in media texts through which the individual experiences **the world**" (Fajes, 1984, p. 120).

The second school of thought is the "**political economy**" approach. This **approach** places the Marxist model of **base/superstructure** at the center of its analysis. Political economists are concerned with the structure of media ownership and control (e.g. see Garnham, 1986). Unlike the **structuralist** approach, which analyzes **the** signification of media through its content, political economists **consider** the content and the structure of the media to be **determined** by, and secondary to, the **political** and economic dynamics of production circulation and access (Slack & Allor, 1983). The messages of the media are simply elements of this larger dynamic. After all, if a popular media **form**, such **as a** television program, does not receive high enough ratings to remain on the air, then there is no longer **a** message to study. Finally, the British Cultural Studies school defines the media **as a** major cultural and ideological **force**. Unlike **American mainstream** media studies, **however**, this approach considers the impact of media to be inseparable from **the way of** life of the group under study. "In **this** approach, **class** and subcultural styles of **life are** studied as necessarily mediating levels **between** the messages of mass media and individual consciousness and behavior" (Slack & Allor, 1983, p. 214).

Furthermore, this approach to media studies can be delineated from both the structuralist and the political economy approaches in at least three ways. Cultural Studies challenges the notion that media texts can somehow be “transparent” bearers of meaning. Further, this approach challenges the notion of the passive audience. Instead, Cultural Studies looks at the relationship between the encoded message and the wide variation of audience decodings of those messages. Finally, Cultural Studies is concerned with the role media plays in circulating and reinforcing dominant ideologies within society (Hall, 1980).

Just as the critical perspective on media reception cannot be explained by neat and tidy categories, current reception research by administrative scholars is branching out and employing a variety of methodologies and approaches.⁹ Building on uses and gratification research, scholars such as James Bull (1980) are exploring ways to move beyond acontextual quantitative studies of media effects, to qualitative studies which explore how the media is “used” by people in social settings. The uses and gratifications approach posits that individuals use the mass media in a selective manner to satisfy individual needs (Katz, 1977 quoted in Lull, 1984). Lull suggests that “audience members create specific and sometimes elaborate practical actions involving the mass media in order to gratify particular needs in the social context of family television viewing” (p. 197).

Lull (1984) is primarily concerned with the “taken-for-granted” of television use of which the family members may not be cognizant. In order to observe family television viewing, Lull chose the methods of ethnography and participant observation. According to Lull, ethnography enables the researcher to first observe the patterns of the families viewing before

questioning them about their conscious reasons for using the media form. It is not enough to ask the subjects about the context in which they use a form of mass media. It is more useful for the researcher to observe the subjects within the natural setting and context in which they use the media before interviewing them about their conscious media use. "The ethnography of mass communication is meant to be a sustained, microscopic, inductive examination of the natural interactional communications which connect human beings to the mass media and to each other" (1980, p. 100).

Lull's study involved over 200 families from numerous social affiliations.¹⁰ Student observers entered the families' homes for three days during the late afternoon till late evening hours. The families were given minimal information about the purpose of the study. They were told that the students were interested in studying "family life." Observers took part in the daily routines of the family, but the family was instructed not to change their routine in any way on account of the presence of the observer.

Through the combined use of participant observation, informants, and in-depth interviewing, regularity in patterns of media use were obtained. Lull found that the family uses of television are of two types: structural and relational. Television can serve in a structural capacity as a generator of atmosphere or as a regulator of family activity, such as a point of reference for fixing bedtimes. However, Lull's research places emphasis on the relational aspects of television use by the family.

Lull suggests that the relational type of family television use can be described by a typology consisting of four categories. The first being, communication facilitation. Individuals, especially children often use television as a referent to discuss and explain real-life experiences.

Discomfort in conversation **can also** be reduced when the television **is** turned on and in view of those speaking. Television is used **as** entertainment for **guests**, and also **facilitates** validation and **clarification** of certain interpersonal attitudes and values.

Secondly, television viewing **can** be used both to **create commonality** among viewers **watching** together, or **it** can be used as a mechanism to avoid **interpersonal** interaction. Within the family, television viewing can **serve as** a distraction, purposively or unconsciously, away from active discourse.

Third, **besides** the more **obvious** educational values of the electronic media, Lull found that "more subtle learning experiences can be noted as well" (1980, p. 104). Families **may initiate scenarios** they have seen on **television for** problem solving. Also, many parents encourage **their** children to watch programs as a substitute for at-home education sessions.

Finally, often times television **programs** present characters in certain roles that can validate, reinforce **or negate** certain roles the audience takes on in real life. Parents often **encourage** their children to watch programs where **the** roles being played **are** in agreement with the **parents'** ideas of proper "role-models." **Often times**, viewers find it a particular boost to self-esteem when they can **correct** an error **on television**, especially in front **of** other family members.

Lull's research can be contrasted to critical reception research in at least two ways. Lull's conception of ethnography differs greatly from that of those doing similar work within the Cultural Studies school. Lull's **bias** toward "**objectivity**" and "neutrality" are evident **from the** fact that the **families** in this study were not told of the researcher's intent. **The** families, therefore, were **treated as** objects of **study** instead of subjects of

study. **Critical** ethnographers would consider these tactics manipulative **and** devoid of reflexivity on the **part** of the researcher.

Secondly, Lull fails to take into account the power relationships within the family that help shape television use. For instance, Morley (1986) found television viewing is shaped by tensions and negotiations which accompany decision-making in families. Gender **is** a central organizer of power in the **household**. Who chooses the programs and who switches the channel, are structured along power **relationships** within the family. Lull's research does **not** explore gender or power **relationships** associated with **family** television **viewing**.

Finally, unlike the medium-reader problematic found in the **literary** criticism, administrative reception studies such **as** the one **conducted** by Lull, virtually ignore the message content of the **media** under study. Although many critical researchers **can** be **accused** of placing meaning **solely** in the **message**, this research places **meaning** solely in individual's "uses" of television; which is an equally naive conception of response. Fejes (1984) describes the inadequacies of both approaches:

While **critical** researchers may **stress** the **analysis** of the type **and** range of meaning in media content, they **have** not demonstrated **what** difference it all **makes**. Behavioral researchers may **treat** the **media** message in a comparatively naive way. Yet they have successfully **demonstrated** that differences in media content **have** different consequences. At a **more** **fundamental** level lies the issue of where meaning is located. At the theoretical **level**, critical researchers **are** **aware** of the complex interaction between messages, meaning and receiver. Yet at the empirical **level**, their work suggests that **meaning** **is** located in the message. . . **Behavioral** researchers, on the other hand, assume that meanings **are** in people -- that in **themselves** **messages** have no meaning (p.

What is needed is a merging of two lines of inquiry that are generally conducted in isolation: "questions of interpretation and questions of use" (Hall, 1986b). Reception research needs to give equal weight to each side of the medium-reader problematic, exploring message content as well as social use.

A critical Response to Reception Reception

Dave Morley's (1980b, 1986) critical research on television viewing has been the most successful in addressing both sides of the reception problematic. An original member of the media group at the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, Morley's research is greatly influenced by Stuart Hall and other prominent Cultural Studies scholars including Paul Willis, Dorothy Hobson and Angela McRobbie. Morley's work reflects many of the theoretical concerns that distinguishes media research at The Centre from the approaches mentioned thus far.

According Hall (1980a), the media group at The Centre "broke" with the traditional debates between American empirical social science and the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, challenging both (then) dominant paradigms to a redefinition of media's role in social life. First, the media group abandoned behaviorist conceptions of media influence for concerns of the "ideological" role of media in culture. Secondly, the group challenged the notion that a media form is somehow the undifferentiated bearer of a singular meaning. Instead, media forms must be thought of as complex linguistic and Ideological structuratisns. Third, the notion of the passive audience, that underpinned much of the market survey research of American

mass communication studies, was abandoned. More active conceptions of the audience as decoders and readers were explored. Finally, work at The Centre was concerned with the media's role in "the circulation and securing of *dominant* ideological definitions and representations" (Hall, 1980a, p. 118). This was a concern entirely neglected in traditional mass communications research.

Morley's research in many ways reflects an attempt to come to grips with the text-reader relationship challenged in literary criticism. Although Morley's book *The 'Nationwide' Audience* is perhaps the better known within reception research, the first stage of the research had already been completed. Brunson and Morley (1978) conducted a semiotic analysis of the preferred readings of *Nationwide*, a BBC news program, two years earlier. From that analysis Morley and Brunson determined the dominant ideology encoded in the program by its producers.

The purpose of Morley's (1980) study, then, was to test empirically how groups decoded the program in relation to the inscribed preferred reading. Morley set out to discover how different decodings are generated by different groups and why. He wanted to examine the "fit" between such cultural factors as class, socio-economic and/or educational position and decoding strategies. To what extent do different audiences identify with the image of themselves in this regional news program? How do presenters secure the preferred reading of the material with different audiences?

Morley selected 29 groups whom he suspected would satisfactorily represent the three decoding categories of dominant, negotiated and oppositional readings. The groups were chosen for the following criteria: basic socio-demographic factors such as sex, race, age and class;

involvement in cultural **identifications** such as trade unions or **sections** of the educational system; and the **material** experience of **the** group with the topic of the program. The aim of this complex selection process **was** to identify not only the **differences among** the decoding strategies of groups but to **also** see where strategies overlap.

a crucial point here is that members of a group **may** inhabit areas of different codes which they operationalize in different **situations** and conversely, different groups **may** have access to the same codes, though perhaps in different forms (1980, p. 26).

Therefore, **traditional** sociological categories such **social class** and occupation **cannot** be considered reasonable predictors of decoding **strategies**. Instead, Morley suggests that the Ideas of **Parkin** (1973) provide a crude but essential departure **point from** which to explore the "fit" between such factors **as** class, socio-economic **and/or** educational position **and** culture¹ **interpretive** strategies (Morley, 1980). **It is** **Parkin's** three broad ideal types of ideological frameworks (**dominant**, negotiated, oppositional) that have been translated by Hall (1980a) into **actual** decoding positions within the **media** audience. Regardless of the shortcomings of **Parkin's categories**,¹¹ the three strategies present a way to conceive of the audience **as a socially** structured entity, instead of an aggregate of individuals. Further, these **decoding** strategies offer a point of departure from which to study groups whose interpretive codes cannot be **determined** solely by class or occupational affiliation.

Morley found that other cultural affiliations, such as **organizational** trade union memberships, may **actually** be **as** important for predicting decoding strategies as **class** or **occupation**. **These** affiliations often

constitute **communities** of meaning that complement socio-economic positions. "Interpretive communities and their members are **defined** both by their **social** placement and **functions** and by the cultural traditions, conventions, and meanings that unite **them**" (Jensen, 1987a, p. 29). Morley found that different groups decoded similarly, not due solely to class and/or political affiliations, but due to self-interest in relation to the dominant ideology of the program.

...bank managers and **apprentices**, for example **produced broadly similar readings despite class differences**; so too, did some **university students and shop stewards**. . .[T]he apprentices and bank managers were **similarly** constructed as subjects of **capitalist** ideology, . . .and thus **had** shared interests in its survival and success. . . Some **university students**. . .and **trade union officials**. . .were in institutions that provided them with ways of criticizing the dominant system. . .(Fiske, 1987, p. 268).

In other words, dominant, negotiated, and **oppositional readings correspond** with the 'transparency' of the **encoded** ideology for those in the process of **decoding**. Those who share the **ideology** preferred in the program **do not recognise** that such an ideology exists. These **readings** are **dominant**. However, when a particular ideology is registered or questioned, but eventually accepted, the decoding **strategy** is negotiated. Finally, when the underlying ideology is consciously registered and rejected, the reading is **oppositional**.

Morley's research on the 'Nationwide' audience was not completed in the form Morley had originally envisioned. Following the **semiotic reading** of the program's preferred reading and the analysts of group decoding strategies, a third step was proposed: ethnographic studies of **group**

members watching the programs in the more natural setting of the home. This **last** step would **examine** the relationship between group **and individual** readings.

However, **even** devoid of this third **step**, **Morley's** empirical research on audience reception has **provided an** exploration of regularities and **variations** of socially **situated** group decoding **strategies**. This **research is also an** attempt to explain some of the cultural origins of these decodings. The meaning of a television text cannot **be read** straight off the text, but "must be interpreted in terms of which set of discourses it encounters in **any** particular set of **circumstances**." (Morley, 1983). **Morley's** research provides **evidence** that interpretations of **television** programs occur **within** **socially** constructed systems of meaning that are in **relationship** to larger ideological frameworks (Streeter, 1984).

Summary

The preceding **analysis** explores reception research through its origins to three prominent, **yet** significantly different studies. Janice **Radway's** research on the readers of romantic fiction demonstrates that meaning cannot be **excavated** from a text in **isolation**. **Meaning is** found in **the** act of **reading**. **Radway's** study makes an important contribution not only to reception literature but **also** feminist studies of **women's** experience with popular **media**. **She found that** the act of reading romances was **liberating** for her subjects. They used **reading romances** to declare a time alone for themselves, away from their responsibilities as **mother and** wife. **Radway's** research can be placed comfortably in the lineage from literary criticism.

James Lull's study of family television viewing, however, is reception research that draws on the uses and gratifications perspective, prominent in American communication research. Lull assumes a pluralistic conception of the audience. Individuals have the ability to use media in ways other than the original intent. Lull confines his analysis to these "uses." Unlike Radway or Morley, Lull does not address the content of the television programs being watched. His study supports the dictum that meanings are in people and not in the message.

A more sophisticated approach to reception is proposed by Morley. Morley considers the text and the subject to be at either side of the same problematic. However, unlike *Screen* theory would propose, the subject does not encounter one text in isolation from other discourses familiar to him/her. The text-reader relationship is a matter of encoding and decoding. The meaning of the text is encoded by the producers of the text. However, in decoding, members of groups bring many discourses to bear on the text. This interdiscourse can produce readings that are dominant, negotiated or oppositional to the preferred reading of the text.

The current trend in audience reception research is a recognition, of sorts, that both textual analyses and uses studies have revealed important findings about mass media forms. However by isolating one side of the relationship from the other, important questions have gone unasked and therefore, unanswered. The following study is an attempt to address both sides of this problematic and further explore the relationship between subject and text. In this case, the texts are advertisements and the readers are women.

NOTES

¹ Allen borrows the analogy from Wolfgang Iser who explains that the primary task of literary critics is finding the hidden, underlying structure of the text much like "finding the pattern in the carpet." See Iser, W. (1976). *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

² In order to appreciate the diversity of scholars exploring this problematic see: Iser, W. (1978); Fish, S. (1980). *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.; Eco, U. (1979). *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.; Foucault, M. (1969). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. A. M. Sheridan Smith (Trans.). London: Pantheon.; Tompkins, J. P. (Ed.). (1980). *Reader Response Criticism: from Formalism to Post-Structuralism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.; Holub, R. (1984). *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction*. London: Methuen.

³ See Mulvey, L. (1975). Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema. *Screen*, 16(3), 6-18; McCabe, C. (1984). Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure. In C. McCabe (Ed.), *Theoretical Essays: Film, Linguistics, Literature* (pp. 58-81). Manchester: Manchester University Press.

⁴ "A discourse is a socially produced way of talking or thinking about a topic. It is defined by reference to the area of social experience that it makes sense of, to the social location from which that sense is made, and to

the linguistic or signifying system by which that sense is both made and circulated." Fiske, J. (1987). *British Cultural Studies and Television*. In R.C. Allen (Ed.), *Channels of Discourse: Television and Contemporary Criticism* (pp. 254-289). Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

⁵ See McQuail, D. (1984). *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction*. Beverly Hills: Sage.; Rogers, E. & Balle, F. (Eds.). *The Media Revolution in America and Western Europe*. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex.; Gitlin, T. (1978). Media Sociology: The Dominant Paradigm. *Theory and Society*, 6, 205-253.

⁶ Power here refers to the power of the media to maintain a certain class structure, and to present a dominant ideology,

⁷ For an extensive description of the three schools in critical research see Curran, J., Gurevitch, M. & Woolacott, J. (1982). *The Study of the Media: Theoretical Approaches*. In M. Gurevitch, T. Bennett, T. Curran, & J. Woolacott (Eds.), *Culture, Society and the Media* (11-29). London: Methuen.

⁸ Language is the central organizing principle in the work of Levi-Strauss, Eco, and Propp.

⁹ For example one may contrast Katz, E. & Liebes, T. (1984). *Once Upon a Time, in Dallas*. *Intermedia*, 12, 28-323, with Palmgreen, P., Wenner, L., & Rayburn, J. D. III (1980). Relations Between Gratifications Sought and Obtained: A Study of Television News. *Communication Research*, 7, 161-

¹⁰ Two hundred families chosen from blue-collar, white-collar, and 'farm-types' were interviewed over a three year period.

¹¹ Morley explains that Parkin's categories have the following shortcomings: a) it over-simplifies the number of 'meaning systems' in

play. He locates **only** three: dominant, negotiated, oppositional. **b)** For each **meaning** system he locates **only** one source of **origin**. **c)** These sources of origin **are** derived, in each case, from **different levels of** the social **formation** (1980b, p. 21). Fiske (1987) claims that **Morley** found Hall's three categories of **reading** too simplistic. **Therefore** Morley replaces **Hall's** model with discourse theory. In fact, Morley claims that Parkin's conception of **ideological** frameworks is too simplistic, not Hall's conception of **decoding strategies**. Although simplistic, **Parkin's** model **is** a good starting place from which to look at audience decodings. Morley **did** not "reject" the ideas of **Parkin** or Hall. He simply pointed to this model's inadequacies and **attempted** to fill in the conceptual **gaps** with a variety of other **theoretical** frameworks including discourse theory.

CHAPTER 111
HOW IMAGES COME TO MEAN:
SEMIOTICS AND FEMINISM

This chapter is concerned with advertising images; the images that are ubiquitous part of advanced capitalist societies. These are images that stare at, and beckon to us from billboards, magazines, television, postcards; the kind of images that have been said to reflect and also represent American pleasure, leisure and desire.

I propose that the questions we should ask about advertising images is not so much *what* they mean, as *how* they mean. In other words, how is it that we as human beings construct meaning from images? Are images simply pictures? Are they the direct mapping of an object or objects? Do we shape the meaning of images or do images help to shape the meaning we take from them? My purpose in this chapter is to outline a way in which to explore how advertising images can have meaning for the viewer.

A View from the Theorists

One of the best known contemporary examinations of how advertisements come to mean is Judith Williamson's (1978) *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*. Williamson sees advertising as a ubiquitous part of our urban environment. Even if we do not read a newspaper or watch television, we see advertising on billboards, in subways and train stations. Advertising, for Williamson, is more than an

attempt to "sell things." Because they appear in many different media at once, **advertisements** seem to have an **independent** reality that is symbolically linked to our own **lives**. Advertising has the ability **to create** structures of meaning (pp. 11-12).

Williamson contends that advertisements both mold and reflect our society. "[A]dvertising forms a vast superstructure with an apparently **autonomous** existence and immense influence" (p. 11) On one level advertisements have a purely economic function, but **on** a second level advertisements are a structure **for ideology**. Williamson's **study** deals solely with this second level of analysis. **Advertisements** translate commodities to exchange values. They transform **statements** about things **into** statements about people. In so **doing**, they sell us ourselves.

Williamson's prime objective in *Decoding Advertisements* is to discover **what** advertisements mean by first examining **how** they mean. She does this **by** drawing on the central **ideas** of structuralism and semiotics **as** tools of analysis. Research **which only** examines the content of ads assumes that **ads** have the ability to be **transparent** conveyors of **reasoning**. Studying content in isolation denies that we see ads within a "form." Williamson replaces the concepts of content and form **with** the semiotic concepts of "signifier" and "signified," **therefore** reversing the **emphasis** of past research and providing a more useful analysis of ads:

Signifiers are things, while **form** is invisible; signifieds **are** **ideas**, while content implies materiality. **Furthermore**, while **form** and content **are** usually seen **as** separable and **their** conceptual unity is one of opposition (form **vs.** content), signifier and signified are materially **inseparable**, since they are bound (Williamson, 1978, p. 18).

This vocabulary makes it possible to emphasize both the materiality and meaning of ads at one time.

According to Williamson, the signifier is key in creating both manifest and latent meaning in advertisements. She illustrates this point by "decoding" an ad for Goodyear tires. The picture shows a car that is stopped at the end of a jetty. The water swirling around the jetty looks cold and harsh. The car, however, is stopped safely between two white lines painted on the jetty, one half way down it, and the other painted almost at the end of it. This ad contains a large amount of text at the bottom of the page. The text is in the form of a story that explains how the car was driven out on the jetty in order to test the braking ability of the tires which already had 36,000 miles of wear on them.

Williamson explains that the apparent signified (meaning) is that Goodyear tires have good brake performance. The jetty is supposed to represent risk and danger. The two white lines represent the highway code maximum braking distance. Therefore, it is a rational message that Goodyear tires stood up to the test of the jetty and saved the driver from peril. However, Williamson contends that the "real" significance of the jetty is not danger or risk, but actually works as the opposite of these symbols.

As a signifier (an object) the jetty works against the rational narrative of the signified. The outside of the jetty resembles a large tire. The large tire is encircling the car and making it safe. The jetty is tough and strong like the tires and it can protect the car and its driver. On one level the jetty is part of the structure that is signifying braking speed, but on a latent, or unconscious level, the jetty is actually connected

symbolically with the tire. It reinforces the positive attributes of a tire's function. In essence, the value of the jetty is interchangeable with the product (tires).

Interchangeability is the basis of currency. The transference of meaning can be thought of as a kind of currency: a currency of signs (Williamson, 1978). In order for their products to have value as currency, advertisers must make us think that there is a difference between products of the same type, such as brands of colognes or paper towels. Even if there is no qualitative difference between the brands, advertisers must create a difference. Saussure states that in the English language we know the meaning of a thing by knowing what it is *not*. We know that CAT is not HAT. It is through the *difference* between the phonetic sound of C-A-T and the sound of H-A-T that each has meaning for us (Hawkes, 1977). Difference between products is achieved not phonetically, but by investing particular products with their own "image."

Williamson points out that those products which are most likely to need strong image campaigns are those where the product *can* have no particular significance in the material world; such as is the case with colognes. It is virtually impossible to represent a smell with a visual image. Even scented ads rely on imagery as a "referent."¹ Images in advertisements do not achieve their meaning from within the sign system of the ad itself. Instead, meaning is achieved by knowing the referent system in which the ad appears. A cologne ad that shows a woman in a karate outfit has meaning in that it is differentiated from cologne ads of women in evening gowns, and so on.

According to Williamson, products such as cologne, cigarettes or

jeans initially have no meaning. Advertisements give the product a value by relating the product to a person or object that has value for us. In other words, Calvin Klein jeans are initially meaningless as currency.

Advertisers dress Brooke Shields in Calvin Klein jeans and the value Brooke Shields has for us will in turn be given to the jeans. The image of the young actress/model who wears the jeans becomes the value of the jeans. The signified is that beautiful, successful young women wear Calvin Klein jeans; Brooke Shields is the signifier.

However, ads do not have meaning in isolation from subjects. A sign "can only mean if it has someone to mean to" (Williamson, 1978, p. 40). Signs replace something for someone.² Ads themselves do not replace objects with feelings or images; we the viewer do that. The Individual is not a simple receiver, but a creator of meaning who is placed between the signifier and the signified. The individual creates the meaning of the object from his/her referent system, and a referent system is a social

We give signs value through recognition of what they replace. By transferring the significance of Brooke Shields to jeans we are acknowledging a value we place on Brooke Shields. Therefore, "recognition" is the first level of involvement we have with the meaning of ads. The second level of involvement is the ad's ability to signify the viewer to him/herself. Advertising helps us differentiate what kind of person we are in relation to a specific product. The product can be exchanged for the quality of a person, such as "the Pepsi generation." If you drink Pepsi, you are signified as something different than if you drink Coke; and if you wear Calvin Klein jeans you are signified as being a different quality of person than someone who wears Levi's 501 jeans. Advertisers assume that once in

the store, we will choose the product because we identify with the kind of person who will use a specific brand; we ~~are~~ that kind of person.

Williamson's ideas on how advertisements have meaning are extremely useful. She devotes more time to advertising images alone, than do other theorists who look at images in general. Her work, however, has a serious flaw. She speaks of advertising as if the "true" meaning of an ad can be uncovered by those enlightened by structural analysis. Williamson states up front that her's is an examination of what can be seen in ads. However, her analysis closes down the possibilities of what can be seen in ads, to a singular (albeit complex) meaning. In the end, Williamson is interested in what advertisements mean, which once again places meaning in the ad instead of in negotiation between the ad and the viewer.

Barthes (1964/1965) gives a quite different reading of the meaning of images from Williamson. Barthes' interest in images is in many ways a direct challenge to the theory of founding semiologist Charles Peirce (Hawkes, 1977). For Peirce, photograph (most ads are photographs) are "icons;" a sign that directly resembles its object. The iconic relationship of the signifier to the signified is said to be natural and "transparent." An icon is a direct mapping of the object. For the subject, a painting or photograph is merely the resemblance of the object. "The signifier represents the appearance of the signified" (Fiske and Hartley, 1978, p. 38).

For Barthes, the notion that images are a copy of the object they represent was far too simplistic. An icon or an analogic code, lacking communicative properties, is a "site of resistance to meaning analogy is perceived as an inferior meaning" (1964/1985, p. 21). Instead, images should be thought of as having linguistic properties of their own. Instead

of a site that is resistant to meaning, the Image is polysemous; it implies not a lack of meaning or even one meaning, but a whole chain of meanings.

Barthes contends that in theory, an image has an almost infinite chain of meanings. However, such images as advertisements and press photographs (see Hall, 1981) have an intentional signification. Signifieds are generally transmitted as carefully as possible, closing down the possibilities of readings. Signs are formed for a preferred reading. The producers of advertisements attempt to affix signifieds to signifiers. One of the easiest ways to do this is with the use of text. When words accompany an image, the number of meanings of that image are significantly

Barthes posits that the image has meaning at three levels: the linguistic message, the coded iconic image, and the literal image. The linguistic message is the text that affixes particular meanings to the image. The text helps narrow, as much as possible, the amount of meanings the image can have. The coded iconic message is the connotation of the image. For example, Brooke Shields in Calvin Klein jeans may connote leisure, glamour, youth, innocence, American lifestyle, and so on. However, to suggest that an image has connotation is to beg the question of whether or not an image is ever in a denotative state. Does an image ever have a "literal" meaning outside of signification? Is it possible to isolate the literal state of an image (the denotation) from the cultural meanings (connotation) brought to the image by the subject?

According to Barthes, we never encounter an image in a pure or literal state (1964/1985). Though, at a basic level the photograph is representational of an object (e.g. a person or an article of clothing), we never see that moment. What we see is the result of optic lenses, artificial lighting, make-up, airbrushing, etc., which come between us and the "literal image." The photograph, unlike the drawing, does require a model. However, the photograph is not the model (referent) it is a meaning system of its own.

Nichols (1981) agrees with Barthes, but takes his analysis a step further in order to more adequately take into account the reader in signification. Nichols agrees that it is of utmost importance that an image not be seen as the thing it represents. A still photograph is not the person it resembles. The sign is not the referent. Once we abandon our emphasis on the referent and begin to look at an image as a sign or sign-system made up of signifiers and signifieds, then and only then, can we begin to understand what the message of the image is about.

Nichols does not abandon calling the still image an iconic sign, but his use of the term is much different from Pierce. Signifiers reach our minds through our senses, if we can relate the signifier to our stored-up experiences and knowledge it becomes signified. The relating of the familiar to the new is true in all signification. For Nichols, there are two chains of signification in the iconic sign, one made up of signifiers and the other of signifieds. In iconic images signifiers blend into the other and signifieds do the same. In decoding, the signifieds must be "pinned" to signifiers to yield meaning. In other words, when viewing a photograph of Brooke Shields in Calvin Klein jeans, glamour (signified) is attached and is

therefore pinned down to the image of "Brooke in jeans:

Images should be read as signs that have polysemous meanings for the subject. However, the image-maker has control over containing the possible readings a subject may retrieve from the image by fixing, as much as possible, the meaning of the image (through linguistic text, placement of the objects in the photo, photographic technique, and so on). Meanings will be the most narrowed, the most fixed, for those subjects who share in the cultural experiences of the image-maker.

Nichols's theory, at this point, begins to resemble Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model. Nichols, in essence, has just described the dominant reading. For those who share in the same ideology as the image-maker, the meaning is narrowed down and directly resembles the intent of the image-maker. The more the number of familiar signifiers become signifieds the better the chance that the subject will read the "preferred" reading of the image. In an oppositional reading, on the other hand, the possibilities of meanings are not narrowed, but opened up. The oppositional reader does not share the ideology that is encoded in the message. Therefore signifieds are pinned to signifiers in an opposite way from that which is preferred.

Most advertisements involve an interplay of image and text. Ordinarily words serve to make an image redundant, narrowing the preferred meaning. However, sometimes advertisements are left ambiguous and the intersections of signifieds to signifiers are less contrived. For example, some fashion advertisements have hazy photographs with no text at all, simply a brand logo occupying a privileged position in the upper right hand corner of the page. In this case, there is no text to make redundant the sign.

Even the photograph itself does not actively pin signifieds to the signifier. Therefore, images that are softened, abstracted or distorted tend to defy a narrow reading. They are purposefully ambiguous, which widens and does not narrow possibilities for meanings.

Williamson and Nichols differ in their goals of analysis. Williamson is interested in what images mean, which assumes that a literal meaning can be found. Nichols, on the other hand, believes that images are polysemous. The possibility for narrowing the number of meanings of an image depends on the producer's intent to do so, as well as the reader's cultural codes. If left ambiguous, the meaning of an image depends almost solely on the cultural codes of the reader.

Meaning Structures in the Image

Williamson and Nichols both offer enlightening critiques of how images have meaning. Perhaps the best way to examine the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, is to analyze an advertisement in the respective styles of both.

Plate I (see next page) is an advertisement that ran in *Falling Stone* magazine in the fall of 1986. This ad is only one in a large series produced by the Georges Marciano company for "Guess" brand clothing. The photograph covers the entire page and is shot in black and white film. The reproduction seen on the next page is not significantly different from the original.

Williamson's analysis of this ad would involve two distinct stages. First, we derive the ostensible meaning of the ad. Secondly, we distill how additional signifiers in the ad might work against the signified in order to

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New York, NY



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offer other, "hidden" meanings.

Foremost, this ad promotes a product, denim clothing, that has no inherent meaning. Therefore, the advertiser must give this product a value by giving the product an *image*. It is the differentiation between the *image* of this product, and the *image* of another brand of denim clothing which gives the product value to us. Jeans do not equal currency; the differentiation of the images of jeans is a currency of signs.

The women in this ad appear young, wild and sensual. They are depicted as "natural." They are *caught* in the woods, their hair is messy, as if it has been tossed by the wind, and they do not appear to be heavily made-up. The ostensible meaning of the advertisement is that women who are "naturally" sexy and wildly sensual wear Guess brand clothing.; or, Guess brand clothing will make you sexy and wild.

The two women as signifiers, however, are anything but natural. Their "wild" hairstyles have been carefully coiffured in order to appear wind-swept. Their lips have been painted in order to appear desirable, kissable. But, perhaps the most "unnatural" signifier is the clothing. All made of synthetic fibers, even the underslip signifies a social world of commodities that is far removed from "nature."

However, we are used to ads selling us "nature." There are few better examples of ads selling "the natural" than in images of natural, female beauty. "Natural" female beauty does not signify a woman who is just out of her bed. In the world of advertising, natural is differentiated from "glamour." That is, what is sold to us as a natural face is one where the make-up is not apparent. It is the look we would have if we were lucky enough to be born flawless. Glamour photography, on the other hand,

depicts groomed beauty, "of charm enhanced by means of illusion" (Kuhn, 1985, p. 12).

The idealised notion of glamour is meant to be obvious. Features are accented and flaws are covered in a dramatic way. It could be said that glamour photographs are actually less deceptive than the ad we see here. At least the reader knows that this ideal of female beauty is put-on. Being sold the ideal of "natural" female beauty, on the other hand is far more deceptive. The boundaries between "made-up" and "real" are much more

Nature in advertising is a symbol that is far removed from the literal meaning. In this ad, the "naturalness" of the women enables the product. (the clothes) to be inserted among images of nature. The woman in the underslip is one step closer to nature than the woman in the denim clothing. We begin to believe that these women can be completely natural. On the conscious level the signifier of the clothing does not work against the signified. Only on an unconscious level does the clothing deny the setting.

Nichols, on the other hand, would read this ad quite differently. This image is ambiguous. There is not one manifest meaning or one latent meaning. The ad has been purposefully opened up to many possible chains of meaning. First, the text does not make redundant the sign. What the text tells us is that Georges Marciano sponsored the ad, that Guess is the brand of clothing and that the clothing can be found at Bloomingdales. These signifiers do not make redundant the image, but instead pin down a very small part of the chain of signifieds. This minor intersection of signifiers and signifieds yields the meaning that the clothes in the picture are Guess brand clothes. The text does not, however, narrow down the myriad of meanings that can be found in the image of the two women backed up against

The meaning of this ad is left almost entirely to the cultural codes of the reader. The ambiguity of the image is encoded into it. The **image-maker** has abandoned the traditional approach of trying to **narrow down the** possibilities of **meanings**, and has **instead** opened up the range of possible meanings. As **we** will see later on, the majority of Georges Marciano advertisements do not **pin** down the **meaning** as far as this ad does. Often **times**, no text is offered **the** reader at all, and more often **than** not, the ad does not **feature** clothing. Instead, these full-page spreads signify people in **relationships**.

In this ad, the coded iconic message is **emphasized**, while the linguistic message is **demphasized**. The reader must spend more time with this ad than more traditional ones in order to extract **meaning** from it. The **photography** in this ad helps to distant the referent even further from the **image** than in **more** traditional advertisements. The use of a soft-focus lens and black **and white** film, help to remove the photograph from the level of realism. This forces the **reader** to **consciously** enter at the level of signification of the "Imago." This **particular** technique for distancing the referent from the **sign** creates an image of **fantasy**. How this sense of fantasy is **signified**, depends on the individual **reader**; how **he/she** calls up the **familiar** to signify the now.

Therefore, **we** cannot say *what* this image means. What **we** can do is "tease out," as Nichols would **say**, the potential points where signifiers can be pinned to **signifieds**. For example, the open legs and **the** pouted **lips** of the woman in the underslip can be seen as **signifiers** for sexuality; a willingness to **participate** in **sexual** activity and a desire to be possessed. **On** the other hand, the some **signifiers** added with the signifier of the **messy**

hairstyle might signify a social deviance or a state of derangement. It is almost as if she is going to climb the tree, Taken together, these signifiers can signify a combination of deviance and sensuality. The image could connote a "wild" sensuality, a woman who is unconventional in her sexuality.

The woman who is clothed offers a number of signifiers also. She has the privileged position in the photograph. She is shown face on, and featured in Georges Maricano clothes. She also occupies a larger space in the visual plane of the photograph. Her hands pressed against the tree behind her can signify entrapment, surprise and perhaps seduction. Her facial expression is intentionally vague. However, the pouting lips signify sensuality. Also, the fact that her legs are crossed and not in a position of flight helps to pin down the meaning she may be startled but not frightened. The image connotes both mystery (because of its ambiguity) and a wild sensuality.

Judith Williamson's approach to decoding advertising offers us insights into the complexity of ads. It is important to realize that ads are not always what they seem. However, Williamson's approach does not easily lend itself to the discovery of how others might decode these ads. She places herself in the privileged position of the knowledgeable critic. How laymen respond to the same ads is not important. Her position assumes that the layman will read the ostensible meaning that is so obvious to her, making her real contribution the interpretation of the meanings under the surface of ads. But how do we know that there is this obvious, apparent meaning? further, although the critic can uncover significant hidden meanings, who is to say that these are the only, or most significant

Nichols' approach is much more useful for scholarship concerned with the role of the reader. Nichols suggests a **more** democratic scholarship **which** invests value in the reader **as well as** the scholar. However, meaning falls more **on the** shoulders of the reader than the text. Preferred readings can be encoded in the image, but ultimately **it is** the cultural codes of the **reader** that will determine the meaning for the reader.

A Feminist Glance

Semiotic and structural analyses offer invaluable **tools** by which to understand the advertising **image**. Textual analyses such as the preceding ones, offer a **systematic way** to study what **can** be seen in **advertisements** and how **those** advertisements have meaning. However, **a** feminist glance **at** the same image would confirm that a structural **analysis** leaves some **of** the most important questions about this advertisement unasked, such **as**: who is this ad meant **to** address? **If** the **ad** is **designed** to sell clothing to women, why **are** the women in the ad **posed** for the **pleasure** of the **male** spectator?

The following pages offer a feminist **glance** at **these** questions. This exploration is in no way intended to be exhaustive; the feminist literature on the representation of women in the **mass** media is **expansive**.³ Instead, the **following are** thoughts from feminists on "pictures of women" and how women and men **look** at them.

Advertising generally **portrays** women in one of two ways: as objects to **be** possessed by the male **gaze** (such is the **case** with the ad we have just **seen**), or **as** **asexual** housewives who live for domesticity.⁴ Many **feminist** scholars are committed to **challenging** these "dominant" representations of

women and seek possible productive **transformations** of them (Root, 1984). To do this, we must move beyond the text **and** discover how the referent system of the **viewer is** shaped and perpetuated.

With the resurgence of Western feminism in the **early 1970s**, feminist scholars began paying particular attention to **images** of women in **the** mass media (Root, 1964; Coward, 1962). Women **began** to complain that posters of **near-naked** women in subways, train stations and at the **work** place made them uncomfortable and even angry. The ubiquity of ads **selling** the female body, led feminists and non-feminists **alike** to **ask** the question: what is the relationship between **advertising** images **and** the way women experience the world?

In an **article** for *Spare Rib*, a British woman **describes** her feelings **about** the **advertisements** that **surround** her **everyday**:

I am alone in the underground waiting for **a train**. All around me **are** huge images of female **parts**: giant rubbery peach-tone **breasts**, wet **lips**, denim bums, damp looking stomachs, long legs in high heels... I don't know where to look that doesn't make me feel vulnerable or angry. A man **comes** into the tunnel and looks me **up** and down. **Ah** these ads **are** like his **gong** - **telling** him **I am** a cunt-thing, **a leg-thing**, a breast-thing and **that** **I am** waiting for him... (Quoted in Root, 1984, p. 56).

There is no proven causal **relationship** between advertisements and the **way** men look at and treat women in **real** life. 'Ways of seeing' **are** much more complex than simple causal relationships (a point to **which** we **will** return later). However, **advertisements** are not benign either; they **do** not simply reflect the **pre-existing** world. **Images** reactivate or put into circulation **definite** meanings such as sexual stereotypes **and** **attitudes**. Ads put **old** stereotypes into new **currency**. "Photographs... constitute a highly

coded discourse which among other things, constructs **whatever** it is in the **image as the object** of consumption - consumption by looking, as **well** as often quite literally by purchase" (Kuhn, 1985, p. 19).

Why do women's bodies sell products in this society? More importantly, **why** do men and women alike **take** this fact as a given? Kuhn (1985) points out that "whenever we look at painted, drawn, sculpted or **photographed** images of women, it is important for us to remind ourselves that images of women have traditionally been the province and property of men" (pp. 10-11). The definitions of good **photography** and beautiful art **have** **traditionally** been conceived by men, and men **owned** and managed their production. Representations of women in advertising is not unique in its address of the male gaze. The voyeurism of this gaze is engrained in this society; **it** is the norm.

In patriarchal society most representations of women **connote** 'other-ness,' difference **from** the male norm (Kuhn, 1985). Berger (1973) explains that the rise to prominence of the **female** nude in **European** oil **painting** depicts a turning point where women's bodies **became** the object of **the** gaze. At that time it was **considered** socially **unacceptable** to gaze at nakedness, but quite a different matter to gaze upon the nude. The nude **is** a form of **art**; a representation to be revered. It should be treated as something removed from the actual model, it is no longer the woman who we are staring at, but an object that we are spectators of.

The popularity of the nude was conceived and enjoyed **within** a particular material context. "In the art-form of the European **nude**, the painters and **spectator-owners** **were** usually men and the persons treated as objects, usually **women**" (Berger, 1973, p. 63). Berger continues that the

tradition of the nude in European oil painting has been instrumental in molding the acceptable way of viewing women today:

[T]he essential way of seeing women, the essential use to which their images are put, has not changed. Women are depicted in a quite different way than men - not because the feminine is different from the masculine - but because the 'ideal' spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him (p. 64).

However, the male gaze connotes significantly more than mere voyeurism; it is a controlling gaze. "To possess a woman's sexuality is to possess the woman; to possess the image of a woman's sexuality is, however mass-produced the image, also in some way to possess, to maintain a degree of control over, woman in general" (Kuhn, 1965, p. 11). Advertising images ask the potential buyer to enjoy the sensation of power and control which images of young scantily-clad women suggest to men in this society. Women and men are taught that the female body connotes something of which men have control.

Until very recently, women have had no options but to look at other women and ourselves by identifying with the male gaze, seeing ourselves as objects of desire which need to be improved and modified to meet artificial male standards of attractiveness. Advertisers need not bother addressing male and female audiences separately, because in this society women grow up learning to look at themselves in the same way as men do. In order to see men as objects of sexual availability, women have worked against the grain of how they have been taught to "see." (Root, 1984).

A good example of this point can be made with the image examined in

the preceding section. We are not particularly startled or surprised by the image of the two women against the tree. However, it is difficult to imagine the same picture of two men; one in his underwear, legs spread and hair messy, leaning into the tree. The second man would be dressed in a denim jacket, stomach exposed, backed up against the tree and staring with pouted lips into the camera. The substitution seems quite ludicrous. In fact, men are seldom pictured in passive roles of any kind, much less backed up against a tree. Men's images in advertising are generally active, social and professional.

Coward (1985) suggests that when women view images, especially in magazines, it is a rare opportunity to freely "look."

photography is permissible looking when the photograph is removed from the context where staring would be unacceptable. In our society, men do stare - at women. It is a look which confers a mastery. It represents a right to assess, pass judgement and initiate or invite on the basis of that judgement. Women do not stare at people in this way, we are not the subjects of the look but the objects. With photographs, we can look and look, not just at men, but at everyone (p. 52).

Women grow up with the social experience that their self-image is key to their success and ability to be loved. Sexuality is intricately linked to the visual image that men impose upon us and we impose upon ourselves. We have a preoccupation with watching ourselves through other's eyes (Coward, 1985). Berger (1973) explains that "one might simplify this by saying: *men act* and *women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. . . . The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object - and most

particularly an object of vision: a sight" (p. 47).

What most advertisements of women give women is a chance to enhance and improve their physical appearance by way of purchasing a product. "But unlike advertisements directed at men, this is not the power over people and things, but the power of becoming the perfect sight" (Root, 1984, p. 66). This type of power is limited. It is located in terms of sexual display, not in active subjectivity. Where men's sexuality is traditionally defined as active, seeking, and decisive. Women's sexuality has been defined for her as the opposite of these characteristics. Supposedly, female sexuality is responsive. Therefore woman is defined by her ability to elicit a response in men (Coward, 1985).

These defined cultural "ways of seeing" are a pervasive part of our referent systems for understanding the meaning of advertisements. Bearing this in mind, let us return to an examination of the image of the two women against the tree. Feminists such as Myers (1982) point out that fashion advertisements such as this one have incorporated conventions of "erotica" and pornography into their appeal.

The central motif of most pornography is the presentation of women's bodies, or parts of them, for consumption by men. The woman will be positioned in front of the camera in a way designed to produce maximum arousal in the purchaser by making her body accessible to his gaze (Root, 1984, p. 43).

For example, the poses in this ad, the woman's legs spread, the lips pouted, arms above the head, arms out to the side in passive submission, have all become a kind of short-hand for sexuality across genres of photography. In fact, Coward (1985) contends that the codes which characterize pornography are in no way confined there. "The direct look of

the woman to the viewer, who identifies with the position of the camera, for example, pervades not only fashion magazines and advertising images but is also characteristic of portrait photography" (p. 16).

The women against the tree are not only "caught" in submissive poses by the male gaze, they are posed in such a way as to suggest sexual availability. However, in fashion photography the ways in which these codes are incorporated are constantly changing. At first glance, this image may seem to signify defiance on the part of the women. These women are not impeccably groomed and manicured for the male spectator, nor are they openly happy with his stare. However, Coward (1985) points out that

The look of defiance, the pouting scowling faces are part of the current tendency to represent women as attractive *whether or not they work at it*. Indeed, the look ultimately says, 'It's not because of my invitation that you will want me. You will want me anyway.' We are meant to read off from the narrowing of the eyes, the perfection of the skin, the posture of the body, that this is a person confident of sexual response whether or not it is sought (p. 59).

In other words, the process of image production is an evolving process. The sites of exploitation in images is always shifting (Myers, 1982). The common strand is that good photography is defined by a controlling male

In pornography, the spectator can gain instant gratification from viewing the image. The pornographic image is defined by the sexual satisfaction that can be taken directly from it. The image is posed just for *him*. On the other hand, in fashion photography the spectator is positioned in such a way as to connect the pleasure of looking with the product being sold. Fashion advertising, on the other hand, works to displace the spectators' instant satisfaction. The fashion image promises satisfaction upon the

purchase of the product (Myers, 1982). For example, the woman who is backed up against the tree, is not placed in such a way as to offer immediate masturbatory satisfaction for the male spectator. Instead, her image of wild ~~sexuality~~, youth and beauty ~~make~~ us yearn for similar experiences, whether we want to be her ~~or~~ be the one controlling her. The clothes will, in ~~some way~~, help us realize those fantasies for ourselves.

Feminist debates on pornography are far too complex to examine ~~here~~.⁵ Many feminists ~~are~~ convinced that codes from ~~pornography~~ are the root ~~cause~~ of numerous social problems, such ~~as~~ rape and harassment, and therefore propose ~~that a solution is~~ anti-pornography ~~legislation~~.⁶ Feminists ~~such as~~ Coward (1982), on the other hand, are not so convinced that these images are the problem at all. The meanings that feminists find ~~problematic~~ in the images themselves are by ~~no means~~ confined to pornography. The codes of fragmentation, submission and availability are ubiquitous. ~~This is a time when~~ women should be exploring how to define their ~~own~~ sexuality, not concentrating on how to legislate against

As feminists, it is ~~important~~ to remember that ~~any~~ research that ~~involves women's~~ experience with ~~images~~, must take into account that the referent system of the subjects have been shaped and influenced by the issues that ~~we have~~ just discussed. Further, feminist researchers are not exempt from these sexist idioms. We must be reflexive to the fact that these are the ~~same~~ factors that have ~~also~~ shaped our viewing of images of women. This reflexivity must ~~be~~ brought to research on women's experiences. These ~~considerations~~ can only serve to ~~enhance models~~ of decoding ~~and~~ reception.

NOTES

¹ A referent is a real thing outside the world of advertisements. Williamson defines a referent in the following way: "Saussure says that with the word H-O-R-S-E, where the concept of the horse is what is signified, the referent is what kicks you. Thus the referent always means the actual thing in the actual world, to which a word or concept points. The referent is external to the sign" (1984, p. 20).

² The sign is the smallest unit of meaning. The sign has a particular meaning to a person or group of people. The signifier and the signified are the two parts of the sign, but can only be split for analytical purposes. In reality, a sign is always thing + meaning. See Seiter, E. (1987). *Semiotics and Television*. In R. C. Allen (Ed.), *Channels of Discourse: Television and Contemporary Criticism* (pp. 17-41). Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

³ For overviews and bibliographies of feminist literature on the images of women in the mass media, see Fishburn, K. (1982). *Women in Popular Culture: A Reference Guide*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.; Kuhn, A. (1985). *The Power of the Image: Essays on Representation and Sexuality*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

⁴ See Butcher, H. et al. (1981). Images of Women in the Media. In S. Cohen, & J. Young (Eds.). In *The Manufacture of News: Deviance, Social Problems and the Mass Media* (pp. 317-325), Beverly Hills: Sage.; Pearson, J. C. (1985). *Gender Communication*. Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Publ.

⁵ For excellent overviews of both sides of the feminist/pornography debates see Turley, D. (1986). *The Feminist Debate on Pornography: An Unorthodox Interpretation*. *Socialist Review*, 16(3), 81-96.; Ellis, K. (1984). *I'm Black and Blue from the Rolling Stones and I'm Not Sure How I Feel About It: Pornography and the Feminist Imagination*. *Socialist Review*, 14(3), 103-125.

⁶ The most influential sources that make the case for legislating pornography include Brownmiller, S. (1975). *Against Our Will*. New York: Simon & Schuster.; Dworkin, A. (1979). *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*. New York: Perigee Books.; Laderer, L. (1980). *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography*. New York: William Morrow & Co., Inc.; Griffith, S. (1981). *Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature*. New York: Harper & Row.; MacKinnon, C. A. (1984). Not a Mors? Issue. *Yale Law and Policy Review*, 6(2), 30-41.

⁷ The following sources are responses to feminist such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon who in essence joined forces with women of the right wing to fight against Pornography. The following feminists feel that this alliance is detrimental to the women's movement. Anti-pornography legislation addresses the symptoms and not the causes of women's oppression. See Vance, C.S. (1984). *Pleasure and Danger: Toward a Politics of Sexuality*, In C. S. Vance (Ed.). *Pleasure and Danger*. (pp. 1-27), London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.; Burstyn, V. (Ed.) (1985). *Women Against Censorship*. Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre.

CHAPTER IV
MAGAZINE ADVERTISING AND U.S. CONSUMERISM

Pateman (1983) suggests that some of the **most** influential semiological works on advertisements (i.e. Barthes, 1963; Williamson, 1978) have virtually ignored the **particular communicative situation** that **exists** when these advertisements are encountered. Advertisements are always encountered in a particular context; one in which the reader **is** expecting them to be present and in **more** cases than not, the **reader** is expecting to *avoid* them.

The type of advertising image **examined** in chapter three is a rich source of study in its own right. However, we must **remember** that magazine advertisements **are** always viewed within a particular context and not **as** isolated images. Magazine advertisements cannot **be examined** in the **same way as** say, a painting **or** an artistic photograph. These images are made to **sell a product** or a service to a **particular** audience of consumers. At the very least **they** attempt to involve the reader in what Williamson calls **the first level of** meaning, recognition. Through **differentiation**, the viewer recognizes a **particular** brand **among** the thousands of other brands competing for his/her attention. When a reader picks **up a** magazine, **he/she** enters the viewing process **aware** of the purpose of advertising and **aware** that the magazine **he/she** is reading will **feature** advertisements. Furthermore, because of mass over-exposure to **advertising**, the average reader is tempted to **flip past** or to view advertising in a non-critical

fashion.¹ In recent years the primary task of advertisers has not been how to show their product in the best light, but rather, how to capture the consumer's attention in the first place (Rutkowski, 1987; Rava, 1987).

While the primary concern of this chapter is to examine the political economy of advertising in the U.S. magazine industry, this examination will be placed in the wider context of U.S. consumerism in the 1980s. In doing so, the following three questions will be addressed: Whose attention are advertisers trying to catch and hold? In what context are the advertisements viewed? How are advertisers attempting to catch the attention of their target audience?

The Targeted Audience

Today, advertisers who buy space in popular magazines are targeting affluent consumers young and old. But, perhaps the most appealing market for advertisers in such magazines as *Rolling Stone*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Cosmopolitan*, *GQ* and *Elle*, are the increasing numbers of young urban professionals, commonly referred to as "yuppies." Yuppie is an acronym making reference to a subsegment of the generation of baby-boomers, those born between 1945 and 1964. According to Burnett & Bush (1986) "yuppie" refers more to a life-style within a certain age range than to a professional affiliation.

Yuppies can be characterized as individuals that tend to rely primarily on himself/herself, are secure, and do not necessarily exhibit or aspire to traditional American values [such as the Protestant work ethic]. Furthermore, they are interested in satisfying their personal needs regardless of price. These needs

tend to be materialistic, as reflected by their strong interest in entertainment, fine food, high tech products, sporty cars, and a desire for convenience. Rather than relying on spiritualism or emotionalism for support they take care of themselves through wise investments and careful money management (p. 33).

This growing group of "over-consumers" earn an average of \$30,000 and fall between the ages of 25 and 45.3 The majority of this group occupy the "new middle-class" of managers, professionals, entrepreneurs and rentiers (Davis, 1986). As a group they make up a market segment that is affluent, lives a fast-paced lifestyle, tend not to be traditional in ethics and most importantly, buy big and buy often. It is a lifestyle of material consumption and self-absorption.

Although it is quite obvious why advertisers would want to target this group of consumers, it is less obvious where this group of consumers has sprung from in such large numbers. The category of consumer called "yuppie" did not develop in a vacuum. Rather, this group emerged as a result of the interplay between various socio-economic and political dynamics.

Davis (1986) explains that the U.S. labor market is currently at a stage of "overconsumptionism." He points out that in the 1970s the U.S. economy was already well on its way to being structurally transformed; the emphasis shifting from production-intensive industries to service or "tertiary" industries such as health care, business services and fast food. These industries demand a large, low-status and low-wage work force (many times made up primarily of women) to keep them operating, which in turn demands a large managerial staff to supervise the work force.

Of the 3.6 million manufacturing jobs added to the American economy since 1948, 3 million were filled by non-production employees and at least 1/2 of those were managerial posts... Blue-collar employment has fallen by 12% - and there are nearly 9% more managers (Davis, 1966, p. 213).

According to Davis, this shift to tertiary Industries is not the only reason the U.S. economy has seen a decline in production labor. A decline in trade union organization among blue-collar workers, coupled with a decrease in social activist efforts to re-integrate minorities, especially Black males,⁴ into the work force, has led to a gradual disappearance of the "old" working, and to some extent middle classes. It is not that blue and white collar production industry jobs no longer exist, it is simply that their numbers pale in comparison to "tertiary" industry workers and managers.

Davis posits that "overconsumptionism" is the result of two dynamics. First, the "adaptation of American industry to new conditions of industrial consumption," and second, "the fetter that over-consumption has placed on the productive economy and structure of the job market" (p. 219). The new economy has been likened to an hour-glass, with the high wage earners on top, the low wage earners on the bottom, and the middle disappearing. Davis predicts that the consumer market will become increasingly polarized; on the one hand, those at the low-wage, low-status end frequenting K-Mart's and other low-budget department stores for merchandise and on the other hand those in the managerial strata will increase their consumption of "... luxury products and services, from travel to designer clothes, to posh restaurants, home computers and fancy sports cars" (p. 216).

Overconsumptionism. . . signifies both state-originated transfers to the middle class and the conditions of extra-economic coercion or menialization which now nurture the luxuriant growth of super-exploitive small businesses geared to the 'affluent' market. It also involves a politically constructed stratification of occupational categories in the tertiary sectors that disqualifies and deskills the majority of workers to the advantage of a credentialed or managerial minority (Davis, 1986, p. 219).

Magazines: A Context for Consumerism

The new middle strata of professions are also consumers of magazines. Most U.S. popular magazines target young, affluent and generally White audiences. Popular magazines such as *Rolling Stone* target a readership that is between the ages of 18 and 34.5. The advertising industry relies heavily on magazines to reach a readership that has the cash or the credit to buy their products and services. Magazines are a major, and for some companies primary, means of introducing products to the U.S. consumer. To fully appreciate the relationship between American consumerism and the magazine industry we need to briefly examine the history of magazines and magazine advertisements.

The following general history of the U.S. magazine industry is taken primarily from the work of Compaine (1979, 1982). Because Compaine's analysis is one of the few sources that has looked at the magazine industry and its history in depth, his work can be looked at as a valuable reference. His main points of explanation and criticism are useful and informative. However, Compaine's work suffers from many of the ailments of mainstream media studies conducted around the same time. Compaine's analysis is a gross over-simplification of the make-up of the American population and should be treated as such. He assumes that Americans are a homogenous

mass of individuals whose history of magazine use and production can be charted in evolutionary progressions. Furthermore, Compaine's analysis implies that magazines offer a democratic and ideologically neutral form of information and entertainment. For example, Compaine explains that today, magazines are an:

inexpensive and open marketplace for an exchange of ideas, opinions and information, as well as a forum for debate. . . .
Magazines play a role in public enlightenment. . . . [T]he magazine has long been the communicator and sometimes initiator of popular culture. . . . [They] have provided a wide range of diversion. . . . Finally, they are instructors that help with daily living" (1979, pp. 130-131).

Granted, magazines can be these things, but they are not *always* these things for their readers. Individual magazines have ideologies of their own. They are not a politically neutral source of information, but rather, a highly ideological and specialized message system. Each magazine offers its own consistent preferred reading of the world that is centered around a particular subject matter and aimed at a particular audience.

As a mass media form magazines are barely a hundred years old in this country. They have evolved from being a source of general information (such as television is today) to a source of specific information for a particular portion of the population's needs and interests. Magazines, along with newspapers, were one of the first mediums to offer national coverage to advertisers. They have always allowed space to advertisers, but advertising as well as the magazines themselves have had to change to accommodate changing social patterns. For example, as the U.S. population became a more affluent consumer society in the post W.W.II era of the

twentieth century, educational opportunities changed for many, and for most, leisure time increased.

The 1950s brought about social programs which encouraged men and women to marry young and become a traditional nuclear family consisting of the male breadwinner and the female housewife.⁶ The magazine industry responded to this flux in readership climate by offering more specialized and diversified publications (see Landers, 1386).

The magazine industry has survived, essentially, by attempting to keep pace with a changing, fragmented society. One of the major reasons that the magazine industry has been able to change so successfully in a changing society, is because getting started in the business has always been relatively easy and inexpensive. For this reason it is a highly competitive business, with new small publications constantly battling for a space in the market already established by the giants, such as Time Inc., whose publishing revenues in 1980 exceeded \$600 million (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1981). However, explaining a medium's survival does not explain how readers use that medium, it simply explains that in economic terms the medium is popular and it is being purchased.

According to Compaine (1979), the following factors relating to the changing U.S. magazine readership forced the magazine industry to change and diversify: First, as the society became more economically and socially complex, there became a need for job specialization. The subgroups in these specialized areas of expertise needed a forum in which to discuss and explore their area of skill and interest. Therefore, a demand arose for professional and trade periodicals. Second, magazines have often shown a reflection of changing American freedoms and tastes.

For example, the woman's magazine *Ms.* was started in the 1960s as a voice for the Women's Liberation Movement. *Ms.* is a magazine for women, but it differs significantly from the "women's magazines" made popular in the 1940s and 1950s. *Ms.* was conceived as a feminist magazine involved in the personal and career growth of women. *Ms.* shifted emphasis from the private world of the emphasis home to the public world that women must face in their struggle for equality with men.

Compaine goes on to explain that the main reason magazines have been able to so successfully diversify is because the U.S. is a consumer haven. For that reason advertising has always paid an important part in the life of magazines. In 1935 advertisers spent a total of \$136 million on magazine pages. This advertising was spread over 187 magazines surveyed. In 1978, advertisers spent \$2.7 billion on magazine advertisements spread over 4,120 magazines surveyed.

Revenues from advertising serve to subsidize the major expenses incurred in the publication of the magazine. Traditionally, advertising was the main source of income for magazines. Now, increased subscription and newstand prices mean magazine publishers are gaining a significantly higher amount of revenues from their purchasers. "In the late 1960s advertising accounted for 60% of total receipts for general consumer magazines. But by 1976 it accounted for only 45% of revenue, as publishers pushed up subscription and newstand prices and accepted lower circulation and slower growth rather than offer the discount subscriptions of the past" (Compaine, 1979, p. 141). In 1929, 61 magazines earned revenues of \$185 million from advertisement revenues. In 1978, 102 magazines reported advertisement revenues of \$2.3 billion. Today, advertisers compete for

space in hundreds of periodicals that comprise a multi-billion dollar magazine industry.

Rolling Stone: A Haven for Targeting Yuppies

The images that serve as the basis for this study all appeared in *Rolling Stone* magazine between August 1986 and December 1987. *Rolling Stone* is a glossy popular magazine that focuses on Rock music, "contemporary culture," and the personalities that are perceived to make up the Rock and Roll scene. The magazine also runs articles on politics (generally liberal, but far from radical), the arts and social commentary.

Rolling Stone has a circulation of 1.1 million and is sold in 96 countries (Audit Bureau of Circulations, 1987). The magazine celebrated its 20th anniversary in 1987, and that year proved to be a record-breaking one for advertising sales. Voted by *Adweek* as having the fifth best showing of any magazine in the U.S. for advertising performance (that is the increase of annual advertising revenues), *Rolling Stone* increased its advertising pages by 23.1% from the previous year, bringing the total advertisement pages up to 1,464 (Rayo, 1987). Gross advertising revenues, therefore, also rose to an impressive \$39 million, up 40.5% from 1986 (Gallagher Report, 1987).

These impressive figures are a far cry from the magazine's humble beginnings as the brainchild of current editor and publisher, Jann S. Wenner. Wenner describes the first issue as a Rock newspaper that was "not just about music, but also about the things and attitudes that the music embraces. ..." (Brady, 1986, p. 12). A 1987 column in the *New York Times* describes the magazine's beginnings: "The first issue of Rolling Stone, off the press in San Francisco 20 years ago, featured John Lennon on the cover,

24 pages of music news and criticism...and some advertisements for FM stations and albums. One issue offered a free 'roach clip'. . .to every new subscriber" (Rayo, 1967, p. 1D). The first copies were newspapers produced in Wenner's loft at 25¢ each. In the last twenty years, the magazine has moved steadily and successfully into the mainstream, both financially and politically.

Despite the fact that the original contents of the magazine were a voice for 1960s counterculture, the magazine has always turned a profit and Jann Wenner sees no contradiction between the magazine's roots and its financial success. He explains that the magazine is the most popular with the audience that is between 18 and 34 years of age who make up the bulk of the population and who are becoming increasingly more affluent. *Adweek* describes this following as gaining "the allegiance of aging baby-boomers with a fundamentally youthful product" (Rayo, 1987, p. 1D).

The adult demographic profile of the magazine's readership certainly supports these claims. A 1987 survey of the magazine's readership (notice that the readership figures are over two times the size of magazine circulation) showed that of a total readership of 5,208,000 adults, 3,060,000 (58.8%) are men and 2,148,000 (41.2%) are women. Of this population, 4,417,000 fall in the age range between 18 and 34 years with the median age being 25.1 years. 51.1% of those surveyed attended or graduated from college, the majority live in urban areas and the median income of the adult *Rolling Stone* reader is \$29,693. They not only fit the baby-boomer profile they often fit the yuppie profile as well.

The companies who advertise in *Rolling Stone* are targeting this large and affluent group of consumers. Advertising space costs \$33,405 for

a nationally run full-page 4-color ad in a regular addition and \$35,745 in special anniversary editions (*Rolling Stone*, 1987). These costs are relatively close to the cost of running full-page ads in *Cosmopolitan* and *Elle*, and are relatively inexpensive compared to *Sports Illustrated* which costs \$92,580 for a 4 color ad.⁷ A company like Georges Marciano advertising Guess brand jeans, who ran 1 full page black and white ad in every bi-weekly edition in 1987, plus a photographic essay of six full-page ads in one addition, spends approximately \$661,925 in one magazine in one year. Furthermore, these Georges Marciano ads ran just as heavily in at least two other magazines during that time.

Not all advertisers choose to run their ads in national circulation, however. *Rolling Stone* offers regional rates that are substantially lower than the national rates. For example, if an advertiser chooses to run a full-page 4-color ad in the mid-Atlantic region exclusively, it will cost the advertiser \$10,210 as opposed to the \$33,405 it would cost to run it nationally (*Rolling Stone*, 1987).

The expenditures of the Georges Marciano company seem small compared to many of their major competitors for the denim clothing market. For example, Levi Strauss & Associates of San Francisco, who are ranked the highest for expenditures of all fashion advertisers, spent \$71 million in total advertising in 1985. Approximately \$29.5 million of which was spent on promoting jeans alone (*Advertising Age*, November 23, 1987).

Levi Strauss spreads its advertising dollars across many media including, television, radio, newspapers, network cable, as well as magazines. However, magazine advertisements do comprise a major share of the Levi jeans and sportswear campaign. In 1986 the company spent \$5.1

million on magazine advertisements alone. In 1987 *Advertising Age* ranked Levi Strauss & Associates in the top 200 advertisers in the US, coming in at 106. The number one ranked company, Proctor and Gamble, spent approximately \$1.2 billion on advertising in 1986 (*Advertising Age*, September 24, 1987).

How Brands get Noticed

Because companies spend such large sums on their advertising, they employ advertising agencies to get their product(s) noticed. This is no small feat in a market as heavily saturated as the U.S. magazine industry. Art directors are constantly searching for new ways to present their clients' products. In the last few years the trend has been toward the presentation of big and striking photographs to sell images of products. "This year, photographers are being encouraged to fill entire pages with their best: The full page bleed [borderless] is today's format of choice. A discreetly placed logo or a tiny product shot is added out of necessity, but the picture is the star" (Madlin, 1987, p. D 12).

These ad directors report that they are instructing the photographers to "tap in" on new energy by interpreting ideas about the products, e.g. the sexiness of wearing tight-fitting jeans. The full-page black and white photography used in both Guess jeans ads and also Obsession cologne ads are some of the first and best of a larger trend in fashion photography. According to Jac Cloverdele, creative director of Clarity Coverdale Rueff in Minneapolis, "clean, dramatic, black-and white portraiture that's strong and realistic is very big right now" (Madlin, 1987, p.D12). Visual ideas expressed through beautiful photography, according to many art directors, is what is

now grabbing the attention of an audience that is becoming increasingly harder to impress.

Some art directors feel that the easiest way to hold a reader's attention is by startling them. One advertisement for Jacques Moret bodywear shows a woman in a straight jacket struggling to free herself. Once she is free, she is shown wearing Moret bodywear. A female account executive at the company that designed the ad describes it as "denigrating to women....It's [the ad] set up in a masochistic way. It goes way overboard in getting across the message of breaking free of constricting clothing" (Rutkowski, 1987, p. 22). Creative director David Wiseltier insists that the ads are simply the product of a particular creative strategy. "We did it within a concept -- the straightjacket is the opposite of freedom of movement in body wear....The [ad] shows a woman in the stressful pressure of today's life -- it could have been a guy. The woman gets a little freer. The body wear is the hero" (Rutkowski, 1987, p. 22).

Many ad directors, however, state that violence and graphic sexual imagery in advertising is increasing because "...the focus is to startle people, maintain their attention, even with a negative stimulus. It's like spitting on the table" (Rutkowski, 1986, p. 22). Bob Manley, creative director of Altman & Manley in Boston defends the Georges Marciano campaign as part of **this** trend to arrest the viewer's attention through photography and image. He states that, "it's sexy, it erotic, but there's also an attempt at getting a gut response from the reader. It's not a superficial presentation" (Madlin, 1987, p. 13).

Art directors such as Alberto Baccari, creative director of Armando Testa Advertising, defends ads with startling or sexually explicit imagery

on the grounds that "a strong visual image can rescue a product from obscurity. Any product without emotion is meaningless" (Rutkowski, 1987, p.24). Baccari goes on to say that he does not believe in violence, but if a violent image is what "works" to sell the product he will not hesitate to use that approach. Most of the ad directors interviewed in Rutkowski's article claimed they do not believe in violence, but they do believe in communicating "on the edge."

For better or worse, advertisements such as the ones for Guess jeans, that employ striking photography with often startling imagery, are getting noticed. In January of 1988, *Adweek* gave the Guess campaign a Best Advertising award for becoming "even more offensive, dropping what little pretense the earlier ads had of being something other than sordid...The ads give a gloss of chic to what can scarcely be interpreted as anything other than sick relationships between people" (p. 10). Furthermore, Norma Ramos, general council for Women Against Pornography warns that these ads "reinforce the role of women as victims. Also, the aura of sex is there, and it works to fuse violence with sex" (p. 22). However, in March of 1988, the Guess campaign was voted in an *Adweek* survey as the 5th favorite print ad campaign among Americans in 1987. This time the *Adweek* writers described the ads in this way:

The Georges Marciano Guess jeans ads, some examples of which crossed the Rubicon from the risqué to a new category all their own, attracted plenty of attention because they are much more dramatic than most fashion advertising....They reveal women in disarray, in obsessive, exciting, compromised or dangerous situations. The ads work because they convey the message that these clothes are worn by people who take chances, whose lives



are anything but conventional. They were a natural to score with women looking for adventure and glamour (March 7, p. 36).

Just ~~who~~ these women might be will be explored in the next chapter. The Calvin Klein Obsession cologne ads, also used for this study, were voted number one in this survey. *Adweek* describes these ads as a campaign that:

...has consistently delivered an artful mix of sex and mystery, and that's the main reason for its success. Style-conscious audiences enjoy puzzling over meanings of the ads, one of which shows what look to be living statues in a garden of obelisks. The shapely, bronzed models facing in different directions raise questions: With whom are they obsessed? What are their secrets? Whether the ads are for clothing or cologne, these images stop readers in their page-turning tracks (p. 32).

It is readily apparent from the discussion above, that advertising agencies must go to great lengths to capture the attention and Imagnatlon of a advertisement-worn Yuppie readership. It is also painfully apparent that what "works," that is, what gets noticed and hopefully increases sales, often times has very little to do with what the art director personally finds tasteful or offensive. The encoding process of advertising is driven by monetary value. If an ad campaign is "badvertising" but it "works" the campaign is a success. Art directors are paid to "turn people on" to the product or the product's image and they are willing to push the limits as far as they can to re-invent "the sell."

Whose attention are advertisers in the 1980s trying to catch? The increasing number of affluent young professionals who make up the manager91 strata of the "tertiary" industries. The context in which advertisers are going to great lengths and great expense to catch this audience's attention is in popular and trade magazines. Finally, art

Calvin Klein - Obsession 2010, the #1

Obsession
FOR MEN
FOR THE BODY

Calvin Klein

FLUORIDE TALCUM POWDER
SHAVE FOAM
DEODORANT
SHOWER GEL
BODY TALK

The advertisement features a large, stylized white letter 'M' on a dark, textured background. Inside the 'M', the word 'Obsession' is written in a large, serif font, with 'FOR MEN' and 'FOR THE BODY' in a smaller, sans-serif font below it. The bottom of the 'M' contains the Calvin Klein logo. Below the 'M', there are several black silhouettes of people in various poses, including a couple embracing, a man standing, and a man sitting. At the bottom of the advertisement, the Calvin Klein logo is centered, and below it, the words 'FLUORIDE TALCUM POWDER', 'SHAVE FOAM', 'DEODORANT', 'SHOWER GEL', and 'BODY TALK' are listed in a small, sans-serif font.

directors claim that the best way to get their ads noticed by an ad-weary public is to startle them, using artful full-page photography and sexual, often violent imagery. The next chapter explores what women think of advertisements, advertisers, and startling imagery. Do women see advertisements the way the art directors would like them to?

NOTES

¹ See: How Consumers See Advertising. (1987, December 7). *Adweek*, pp. 34-37. For a critical view of how consumers understand advertising see Pateman, T. (1983). How is Understanding an Advertisement Possible? In H. Davis, & P. Walton (Eds.), *Language, Image, Media* (pp. 187-204). Oxford: Blackwell.

² Over-consumers in this case refers to those on the affluent end of the manager/low-wage non-production earner- dichotomy. The term does not necessarily mean that these individuals consume more than they "need," it means in comparison to the low-wage earners they make up the majority of luxurious consumption.

³ The age categorization of yuppies can vary with different reports, although Burnett & Bush describe them as a group between 25 and 45, some reports lower the bottom end to 22, while other reports consider a 45 year old yuppie to be a contradiction in terms.

⁴ "The American economy has signally failed to re-integrate Black male workers, whose participation rate in the labor force... has fallen from eighty percent in 1945 to barely sixty percent today" (Davis, 1986, p. 207).

⁵ Rolling Stone Media Marketing Facts: Adult Demographic Profile. (1987) New York, N.Y.: *Rolling Stone*

⁶ See Hewlett, S. A. (1986). The Abberant Fifties. In *A Lesser Life* (pp. 231-286). New York: William Morrow and Co. Inc.

7 *Elle* magazine is a monthly with a circulation of 600,775 paid and 31,790 nonpaid. A one-time black and white full-page ad costs \$15,400. A 4 color ad costs \$23,100. *Cosmopolitan* is a monthly with a circulation of 2,873,071. A one-time full page black and white ad costs \$34,100 and a 4 color ad costs \$45,890. *Sports Illustrated* is a monthly with a circulation of 2,975,000. A one time full-page black and white ad costs \$59,345 and a 4 color ad costs \$92,580. All information found in Gill, K., & Boyden, D. P. (Eds.). (1988). *Gale Directory of Publications* (Vol. 1). Detroit, MI: Gale Research Co., Book Tower.

CHAPTER V
HOW WOMEN SEE ADVERTISING IMAGES:
A READER-RESPONSE STUDY

The following is a study of how women decode advertising images. Specifically, I interviewed women about advertisements fitting the profile described by art directors in the previous chapter; those that are full-page photographs, often with startling or erotic imagery. The main purpose of this study is to determine how the women interviewed decode these advertisements compared to the preferred meaning inscribed by the art directors. My intent is to discover whether the respondents employ dominant, negotiated or oppositional readings (Parkin, 1972, Hall 1980) of these ads.

This study is strictly exploratory. It is not intended to be representative or predictive of how women in general use images. Due to the restrictive size of the sample, there will be no attempt to generalize my findings to other women. Instead, the aim of the following study is to follow-up the various theoretical analyses of images offered in the previous chapters with reader-responses from women.

A total of 9 women were interviewed, ranging in age from 19 to 53. Since all the advertisements for this study were taken from *Rolling Stone* magazine, the women chosen for the study were those who fell within the age span of *Rolling Stone* readership in general, although two of the women are somewhat older. Due to faulty tape-recording on two of the interviews,

only 7 transcripts will be reproduced here. However, comments from the lost interviews, recorded in note form, will be included where appropriate.

An initial sample of five women was chosen as a result of a questionnaire (see appendix A) that I circulated in a night class of adult students that I was teaching at a large mid-western university during winter of 1988. In an attempt to avoid conducting a study comprised solely of university students, I decided that I would only interview two women from my class. The rest of the sample consists of women from varied walks of life.

The final sample of nine women consists of the following sub-sets:

- 1) One of my 19-year old students who is also a part-time bank teller, her friend, also 19, who is a reservation clerk, and her sister, 26, who is a homemaker and procurement clerk.
- 2) A 22-year old graduate student.
- 3) A 38-year old receptionist who is a friend-of-a-friend of mine.
- 4) A 37-year old executive secretary and her 40 year-old friend who work together at the same company.
- 5) A secretary of 53 and her daughter, 28.

The women were interviewed either in their homes or dorm rooms and at their convenience. All interviews were conducted individually. As it turned out, all the women were interviewed around 7:00 p.m. after the work day and dinner hour. Some of my hosts offered me tea, coffee and/or soft drinks while others chose to make the interviewing session an informal party, ordering in pizza and Coke.

The interview sessions began with the women filling out a brief questionnaire on themselves (see appendix B) while I explained that I

wanted to know their feelings and opinions on the advertisements that they were about to see. If there was more than one interviewee at the house, these preliminary steps were accomplished as a group. All of the interviews, however, were conducted on an individual basis.

I chose the focused interview technique to assure that each interviewee was shown the same advertisements in the same order. However, the questions that the women were asked were left unstructured. Each interview began with questions about the respondent's magazine reading habits, such as when they first began to read magazines for pleasure, what kinds of magazines they read now, why and when they read them, and so on.

Next, each respondent was asked if she was familiar with *Rolling Stone* magazine and if I needed to explain the format to her (all the women were familiar with *Rolling Stone*). Finally, I asked each woman to address the following questions when viewing an image: would this ad catch your attention when thumbing through a magazine; and if so, why? Is it for positive or negative reasons? How does this ad make you feel? Is the ad erotic for you personally?

After listening to each woman's response, I probed to see if there was anything else about the image she would like to talk about. After being shown the last advertising image each woman had the opportunity to express anything she wanted about the images, and/or advertising in general. She was also encouraged to talk about herself.

Once the tape recorder was turned off, the women I interviewed generally wanted to talk about my research and how their responses compared to others before them. Most thought it was a worthwhile endeavor

while others found it hard to imagine how their responses to magazine advertisements could result in a scholarly report. Each woman has been promised a copy of this chapter.

Initial Findings

It is difficult to talk about images as images. It is much easier to talk about the context in which an image appears. The women in this study were much more comfortable expressing their feelings about their relation to advertising than their relation to the images in the advertisements. It could be because, as lay-people, we have a limited vocabulary with which to assess the quality of images in a still photograph. Instead, our impressions of photographic images are generally expressed emotionally, and emotions are difficult to put into words.

One of the respondents, Nancy, had the easiest time expressing her impressions of the images themselves. Nancy is an artist. Most of her responses reflected her artistic training, such as references to the beauty of line, and the use of (or the lack of) artistic taste. However, even Nancy could not articulate the contradiction she felt when viewing an aesthetically pleasing image that is at the same time personally offensive. She questioned which property would impact on her the most, the message of the image or its composition. The question remained unanswered.

In addition to the problem of articulating impressions of images, there is the difficulty women face when expressing pleasure in looking. Women are often hesitant to admit that the viewing of an erotic photograph may be pleasurable for them. Because women are not trained to seek pleasure from looking in the same way as men,¹ they are often

uncomfortable describing their feelings about **looking at pictures**. I feel that **many** of the Women I interviewed think that there is **something** perverse or perhaps compromising in looking. While looking for pleasure is uncomfortable for **some** of the respondents, others find it **impossible**.

... I **have** a problem equating a picture (with eroticism]
 ... I can't make the connection. When you are in high school and someone sneaks a girly magazine **or a** guy magazine [in] and I could never understand [the **attraction**]. If you can't **live** it. . . I don't understand.

Approximately one half of the **women** in this study **described** the images they were shown as "erotic," but only one said that the images were erotic for her personally, and for this reason she tries to **avoid** them:

I think they very much affect our minds. Extremely. I know they have. **So**, I'm very careful about what magazines I **look** at now. **Yes**, I do **think** they mold **us** into becoming what a particular ad wants **us** to become. I **do** believe they affect people.

The women in this study **also** found it **difficult** to describe emotions concerning eroticism and erotic acts; often times resorting to **very** masculine vocabulary. For example, one interviewee, explains:

It is not okay to expose women like that, **I feel**. It makes men think that is the way we **should be**. The men expect that. They go out to **a bar** and they see a **woman** and of course *she wants it*. . . *Men think we are asking for it*. (my emphasis;).

The point I am making is that **distinguishing** dominant, **negotiated** and oppositional readings from the women's responses to magazine

advertisements is **not** a straight-forward task. Cultural codes, **such** as the constraint of the male **gaze**, must be taken into account when making **these** interpretations. The responses of these women need to be **examined** on **several** different levels, including emotional responses and aesthetic preferences. The **reader** must be careful not to confuse contradictions that **are** due to lack of vocabulary **with** true contradictory statements.

Bearing these considerations in mind, responses were **determined** to be dominant, negotiated or **oppositional** according to the **following criteria**:

A dominant response refers an **overall** reading of an advertisement that is uncritical of the representation of femininity, masculinity and human **relationships** in that ad. The dominant **ideology** of the ad is transparent for the reader. This **is** not to say that **she** necessarily "identifies" with the image. For instance, a dominant decoding **of an ad** which pictures two women undressing one another **does** not suggest that the reader identifies with lesbianism. **Instead**, the dominant reader **assumes** that **advertising** images have a neutral quality; that no matter what the **subject matter**, the images are **accepted** at face value, as simply advertising. The dominant **reader's** attention **can** be held by an "erotic" **image** without her becoming critical of it or negative toward the product. In fact, quite the opposite might be true. If the erotic **ad** catches her attention, she may indeed feel positive **toward** the product.

A negotiated reading of an advertisement describes a response that begins to be **critical** of an **ad** in terms of what the viewer **perceives** as normal for herself. She **cannot** conceive of herself in the **same** poses and **relationships** as these people. However, **she** is willing to negotiate with the **image** in order to make it **acceptable** to her world view. For example, she

may see an ad which shows the backs of six naked people and at first she finds the image startling, even offensive. The next step however, may be to attribute the appeal of the ad to a bold new concept in advertising. When the image does not fit her world view, she negotiates with the text in order to read it in a dominant way.

Finally, the oppositional reader works "against the grain" of the image in order to deconstruct its preferred reading. The oppositional reader cannot identify with the image and does not think that anyone else should. She is highly critical of the image. She contests the dominant reading of these ads, condoning either censorship of the ad campaign and/or a boycott of the product. An oppositional reader of an advertisement may extend this contestation to an entire line or brand.

As was the case in this study, reader's responses often fall somewhere in the middle of three decoding strategies. I prefer to think of the decoding categories as points on a spectrum. Responses can, and often do, fall somewhere in between the three points. However, for the sake of convenience and utility the remainder of the findings will refer to the three decoding strategies of dominant, negotiated and oppositional.

Only one of the women in this study, Tamie, gave a dominant reading of these advertisements. Tamie is insistent that advertisements are innocent in themselves; it is silly to take them too seriously. The women in these photographs are not really going through the situation prescribed in the photograph.

I would just think they are models posing. I wouldn't think there is any significance to them... That first picture of the girl standing

against the tree, no one would stand that way. It is more of a pose than anyone trying to put across a real message.

Tamie does not consider there to be any emotional value to the photographs. If the photograph catches her attention it is because it is aesthetically pleasing. When the coloring in the ad did not please her, she did not notice the ad, no matter what the subject matter.

Two of the women in this study, Nancy and Sabrina, gave negotiated readings of those advertisements. Although Nancy's interview did not record, a very strong theme ran through the notes that I jotted down by hand. Nancy reported that the subject matter of most the advertisements would generally be offensive to her, especially their representations of women. However, she did not find these ads offensive because "they did not speak to her." She found that she could not identify with the age and body shape of the models, the clothes, and/or the messages in the ads. In order to comment on them, she needed to negotiate with the text to produce an oppositional reading.

Sabrina, on the other hand, negotiated with the text in order to give a dominant reading. The nudity and sexual overtones of these ads did not offend her and she found a majority of the ads quite intriguing. Sabrina describes Calvin Klein's ads for Obsession cologne as "tasteful art." She does not consider herself a person who is easily persuaded by advertising, and therefore she judges the quality of advertising very much at face value, for its aesthetic appeal.

... I'm not easily persuaded by an ad. I like to test things out for myself. I usually take an ad for what it is, something to look at. I guess I know what to look for. When I look at an ad I really don't pay that much attention to what it is selling, who is in the

picture and what they are doing.

For these reasons it would appear that Sabrina's reading of these ads is dominant. However, when Sabrina is confronted with an ad which depicts an unfair representation of a woman, she tends to negotiate with text in a way that places the blame on the particular ad director that created it. For example, she might say the ad is probably directed toward men or that the art director must be a man. She also negotiates with the fact that magazines like *Rolling Stone* and brands like Calvin Klein ordinarily produce "bold" advertising presentations. Once she was aware of the name of the magazine or the brand of the product, the image was no longer startling, but somehow expected.

The majority of the women in this study (Laura, Elizabeth, Linda, Rosie and Heidi) gave oppositional readings of the images; although Laura did concede that when she was in her teens and early twenties these images may have appealed to her. In this sense, Lauren's reading could be construed as negotiated/oppositional. Elizabeth, on the other hand, thought that all of the ads were "cheap." She felt that this kind of advertising was "disgusting" because it undermines healthy sexual relationships.

... I think they are cheapening sex, and I happen to think that sex is a pretty terrific thing. I object to pictures that make it cheap.

Elizabeth described the pictures as pornography, which send out messages to young girls saying the way to get a man's attention is to "cheapen yourself." Rosie's reactions were very similar to those of Elizabeth. Rosie, however, carried her oppositional reading a bit further, calling for censorship of all ads showing nudity, sex or violence. Both Rosie

and Elizabeth insist that not only **would** they not buy this product, **they** would encourage others to do the **same**. Linda **also** suggested that a boycott was an **answer** to this kind of "sick" **advertising campaign**. However, where Rosie looked closely at these ads in order to actively protest against **them**,² Linda insisted that by not allowing herself to invest any **emotional time** in the **ads**, flipping passed **ads** which she found offensive, she could do **as** much **damage** to these large companies **as someone who** actively protests. **Linda's** is an economic solution, while **Rosie's** solution is more political.

Finally, Heidi's oppositional reading differs from the others in two significant ways. First, Heidi is the only **woman** in the bottom age range of the sample to give an oppositional reading. Three of the oppositional readings came from the women **37** years and older. Besides Laura, 26, the younger **women**, Sabrina 22 and Tamie 19, seemed more **tolerant** or even **oblivious** to the **sexual** and violent overtones of these ads.

Second, Heidi was the only respondent in the **sample** to take a feminist oppositional **reading** to these **ads**. Her criticisms of **the** ads were based on the **belief** that these ads exploit women.

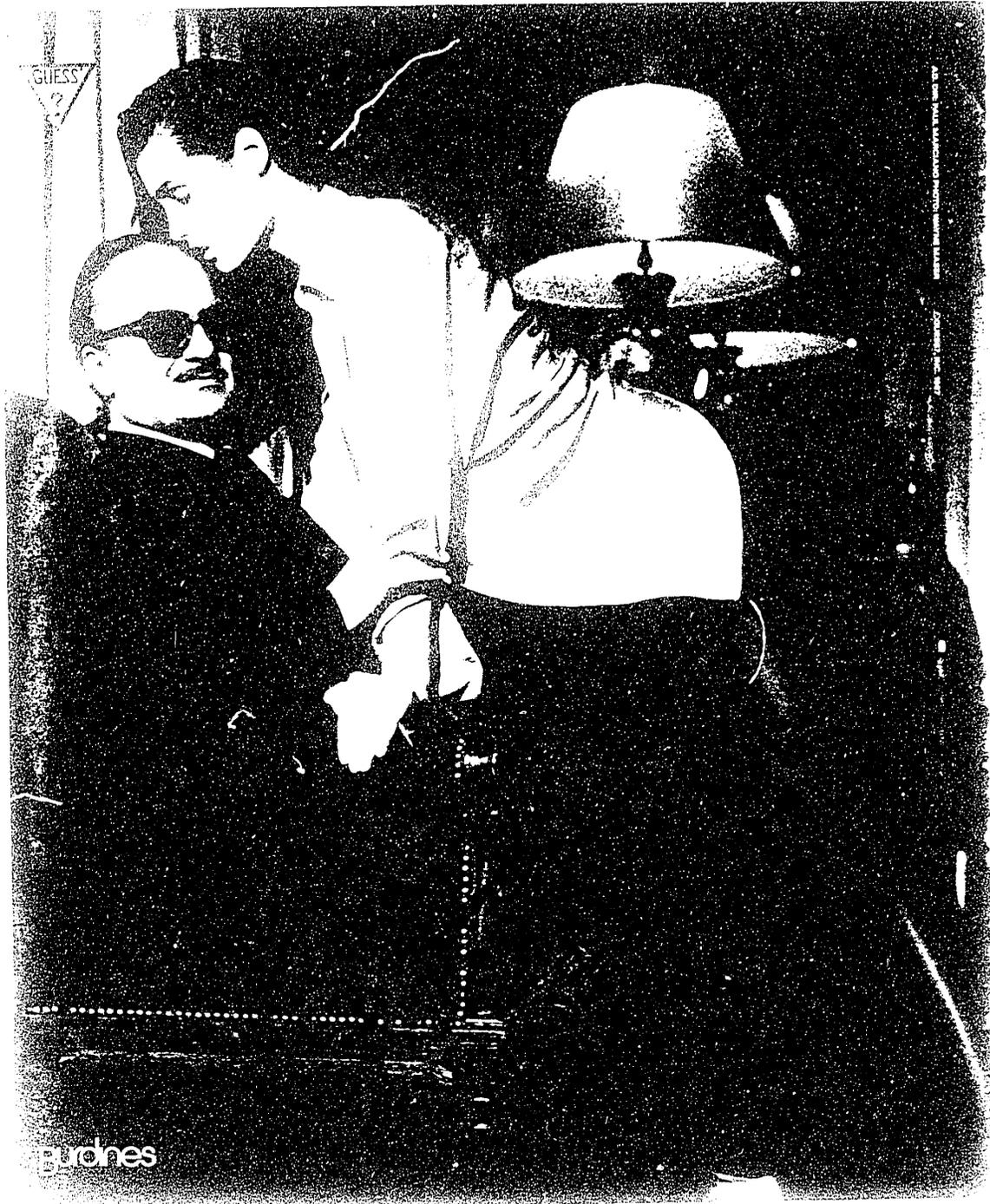
What I have noticed in all of **these** [ads] is that the **man** is extremely dominant and powerful. In all of these **he is** controlling the **woman** This isn't 'hot.' This is exploiting women. This is showing men in powerful positions. . . .

Heidi admits in her interview that she sees images **differently** now that she has been exposed to **feminist Ideas** in college. Before then, she was not **critical** of **the** advertising industry's **treatment** of women. Her oppositional reading is **due** in **part** to **feminist** consciousness-raising.

The Interviews

The following pages contain the images that the interviewees were shown, in the approximate order in which they were viewed. The Images are then followed by the transcribed interviews. Presenting the un-edited versions of the interview experience allows the women to speak for themselves on the written page. It also gives the reader the opportunity to agree or disagree with my interpretations.









FASHION

A love for real
NOT FADE AWAY

Oh, to be young, sexy, in love — and in denim. That is the stuff jeans are made of. Not to mention the motorcycle jacket worn here by Rodney Harvey or the miniskirt that barely covers his partner, Lisa Marie. Rodney and Lisa Marie are actors, but if they make an especially convincing couple, it's probably because they are lovers off camera as well. On camera, Rodney has been seen in Paul Murrisey's 'Mixed Blood,' and he'll be featured this summer in Tony Bill's 'Five Corners,' which stars Judi Foster, and the Australian film 'Initiation.' Lisa Marie will be making her motion-picture debut in Bruce Weber's upcoming film biography of jazz trumpeter Chet Baker.

BY LAURIE SCHECHTER
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREA BLANCH



This page: Lisa Marie's blue and white striped chambray shirt, \$39, by Papadimitriou America; bra by Pottery for Victoria's Secret; Rickie's stone-washed denim Frosted Rider jeans, \$39, by Gap.
Opposite page: Rodhe's stone-washed overalls, \$76, by Guay; Lisa Marie's skirt by JNY for Hugo; bra by Trish Lorenz.



Rosini's separated-overdye
denim jacket, \$75. One
of the two-pocket jeans
\$40 from the Color, counter,
the converse. Lisa Marie's
washed denim jacket, \$45. In
the Cup, dress by Uchek.





GUESS
?

FOLEY'S

George Michael









GUESS?
?

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WOODWARD & LOTHROP

World VI - Roman Num
George Marciano photo essay #2





Sub-Set #1: Heidi, Tamie and Rhonda

Heidi, Tamie and Rhonda were interviewed at the home of Heidi's parents one evening in April, 1988. Rhonda and Heidi offered me a Pepsi while I set up the recording equipment. While the women filled out the questionnaires I played with Rhonda's three years old boy. His needs interrupted much of the interviewing process and could explain why my interview with Rhonda did not record.

After the women were done filling in their questionnaires, I asked them as a group about their magazine reading habits. They all reported that they began reading for pleasure with teen magazines like *Tiger Beat* and *16*. Rhonda was about 12 and Heidi about 9 when they started reading these magazines together. Although *Tiger Beat* and *16* are Rock and Roll oriented teen magazines, Rhonda and Heidi did not look at them for the music, they looked at them for the pin-ups of their favorite teen idols. Tamie reported that she too read the teen magazines starting around age 8, but also read her mother's "women's" magazines that were around the house.

Heidi

Heidi is 19, white, and single. She is a college student majoring in physical therapy. She is also a part-time bank teller. She lives in the country in the out-skirts of the city with her parents. On her questionnaire Heidi indicated that her favorite kinds of popular magazines are fashion, news and women's magazines. She generally reads magazines with friends. She does not subscribe to any magazines herself, instead she generally buys them off the news stand. She reported that the main things that hold her attention in advertisements are attractive models, clever phrasing and sex.

Heidi is very thoughtful about the advertisements and takes her time to decide before giving a response to them.

V.: What do you think of this ad for Obsession cologne?

H.: I'm not offended by it. I'm not sure I want it in the magazine I look at. You can advertise cologne without showing people naked.

V.: What is the first thing that would draw your eye to this ad?

H.: Probably the woman. You see her breasts. you don't see anything exposed on the men.

V.: So, it is the bodies?

H.: Right. Definitely.

V.: You said you don't find the ad offensive. Do you find it erotic?

H.: No.

V.: Have you seen these ads by Georges Marciano for Guess brand jeans? (I then explain to Heidi the number of times these ads have appeared in the Rolling Stone over the past two years).

Would this ad catch your attention?

H.: Yeah, I think it would.

V.: What about it would catch your attention?

H.: We looks like an old man and she looks like a young girl. She looks like she could be his daughter.

V.: How does that make you feel?

H.: Wondering why. Why would they [Georges Marciano] do that? [It's] kind of sick.

V.: If this ad caught your attention, and you have gotten as far as to wander about the people in the ad, do you think you would go a step further and try to figure out what the product is?

H.: No. Never. If I was looking at this, I [might] say, 'Oh my god, look at this girl. She's kissing his head' and so on. I don't think I would look anywhere else.

V.: What do you think of this second ad for Obsession cologne?

H.: Oh my goodness. It looks like . . . an orgy or something. It looks gross. It's offensive showing women in that regard. I don't know.

V.: You said you have seen several ads like this one for Obsession. Would you buy the product?

H.: I haven't bought it yet.

V.: Would these ads keep you from buying it?

H.: I don't think I take it seriously. It is not the cologne they are advertising, it is the bodies. So, I don't take this product seriously. I wouldn't see it on the page.

(Heidi is then shown the "fashion lay-out" from *Rolling Stone*).

V.: Would this [the first photograph] catch your attention?

H.: Definitely. Now, these are all models?

V.: What would you think if you saw these for the first time in *Rolling Stone*?

H.: I would think it wasn't a *Rolling Stone* book. I'd be looking at the cover again, I think. I didn't know they were allowed to put this stuff in regular magazines.

V.: Do you think you would come back and read the writing on the first page?

H.: No, I don't think so. I'd be gawking at the pictures, wondering what was coming next. I never read the fine print in magazines.

V.: Do you like these pictures?

H: No. I do not.

V.: ~~Is~~ there something erotic about them even if you don't like them?

H: No. I really don't get anything out of them except to say, 'why are they here?' I don't think most people do. I don't care for this kind of thing.

(Heidi is then shown the first Georges Marciano photo essay).

V.: Would this catch your attention? Would you questionnaire want to flip through the whole series?

H: Probably. [I'd be] thinking it was a fashion kind of thing.

V.: How do you feel about this picture [of the women against the tree]?

H: I don't know. They look kind of wild, kind of untamed.

V.: Would you flip through the rest of the pages?

H: Yeah.

V.: Go ahead and flip through the pages, if you want.

H: It kind of tells a story doesn't it?

V.: What do you think of the story?

H: It looks like these girls are just there. The guy is making out with one [and] the other two look like they are about to. They are about to be intimate or whatever. The guy decides he wants another one. He's through with the one he had. This one looks like she was hit, or maybe she is sed. He doesn't look like he is even paying attention to what is going on. And then at the end, one is happy, whether the rest are or not. I don't know.

V.: Do you think this would bother you once you put the magazine down?

H.: I would think, 'I wonder what they **are** trying to advertise? I would look through it again and think what are they **trying to advertise** here. Are they trying to advertise **hair**, because the hair stands out a lot to me. **Is** it the hats? Is it the scenery? Least of all, jeans. She doesn't have jeans on. I **wouldn't** get a **jeans** advertisement out of this.

V.: **Would these ads catch your attention? *Young girl dancing with an older man.***

H.: Maybe. I don't know if I **would** look **herd** at them. It looks like his daughter **with him in** a bar. **[And]** here in a bar again. It looks like a father **and** daughter relationship to me.

(Heidi is then shown a Georges Marciano ad of a woman in a bar).

V.: How do you feel about this woman?

H.: She **looks** like she wants it [sex]. You know, she **is** waiting for a man to **approach**. All he has to **say is** 'hello.' It is very suggestive with her legs open like that. [It is showing] a lot of skin. The **look** on her face... she is not **smiling**. It is a look of passion. She is in a **bar**.

V.: Do you have any other feelings about the picture? **Is** it O.K.?

H.: It is not **okay** to expose women **like that**, I feel. It makes men think that **is** the way [women] should be. The men expect **that**. They go out to a bar and they see a woman **[and]** of course, she wants it. It's everywhere. It is hard for women to say 'no' because **[men]** don't believe them **[because]** it is not **what** the **magazine** says. [This kind of attitude] can lead to date rape and sexual assaults, because men think we are asking for it.

V.: If you first saw this ad, would thoughts like that come to you pretty quickly?

H.: Yes. I don't know how quickly they would have come to me if I hadn't taken my **women's** studies class. That is a **real** eye-opener to things. Now I see things differently. **Now** I **look** into the picture more.

V.: Now you **are** more sensitized to these things?

H: Now, stuff comes on T.V. and I'm griping about it, and my boyfriend says "shutup, it **is** just T.V."

(Heidi is then shown the final **Georges Marciano** photo essay. She glances through the sequence of photos).

H. What I have noticed in all of these is that the man is extremely dominant and powerful. In all of **these** he is controlling the women.. . The Guess jeans ads must be owned by men.

V: If you were looking at these ads with your boyfriend and he says, 'these are neat **and** these are really hot!' what would you say?

H: I would say, 'no it is not hot.' I would argue with him, definitely. This isn't hot. This is exploiting women. This is showing men in powerful positions. I argue with **him** about it all the time. Look at this one, it looks as if he is holding her **back** from something. I definitely would say something whether he would agree **or** not. I think I would point out the things that offended me. It looks like she doesn't want to go.. .That's what I get from these.

V: Say these **ads** were posed the same way, but the models **were** wearing things you really liked, is there anything about these ads **that** would keep you from buying the product?

H: The ads that appeal to me, that I would make the connection with are not like this. I like to see the whole product [**so**] I can see **what** it looks like **and** I **can** make a choice. In these I can't see the clothes. I don't think I **would** make the connection not to buy the product, but it depends on what the product **is**.

[Guess] are nice jeans. I have 3 pair. They **last** the longest. I love them. They are the only ones that fit me as a matter of fact. But I don't agree with the way they advertise. They would probably do a lot better if they **chose** another way, I don't know if **they could**, but if they could just advertise so that [you] could see them [the clothes], they need to show the actual product.

V: Why do you think advertisers spend so much time and money **for** these kinds of lay-outs?

H.: Probably first to grab your attention. You are going to look through the whole thing in hopes [the advertisers hope] that you will remember that name. When you go into the store, you'll remember that little logo. [If] maybe twenty people see the logo that would be good enough.

It seems like a real gamble.

Tamie

Tamie is 19, White, engaged to be married, and is a reservation clerk. At the time of the interview, Tamie had plans to begin college in the fall. From her questionnaire Tamie reports that her favorite type of magazines are fashion and women's magazines. She generally reads magazines alone and sometimes discusses interesting articles with friends or co-workers. She does not subscribe to any magazines. She buys them off the newsstand or borrows them from a friend. The two things that hold her attention in an advertisement are attractive models and romance.

Tamie's answers about the advertisements were very swift. She made up her mind very quickly about each ad.

V.: What kinds of ads would catch your attention in a magazine?

T.: I like nail polish ads [with] bright colors, and perfume ads; sexual or romantic things. No specific one thing, but mostly the models and romantic ads.

V.: So ads do catch your attention. You pay attention to them.

T.: Yes.

V.: Have you seen this ad for Obsession cologne?

T.: Actually I haven't. I've seen other [similar] ads for Obsession.

V.: Would this ad catch your attention?

T.: Oh yes.

V.: What about it would catch your attention?

T.: They have no clothes on!

V.: Can you remember where and when you first saw this ad or similar ads?

T.: Ads for Obsession I have seen in [Cosmopolitan]. This is the first time I have seen this ad.

V.: When you first saw this ad, did you wonder if it belonged in a popular magazine?

T.: When I first saw it, I took a double [take]. It was a lot more close up than this one. You kind of had to look at [it] a second time to see it was two naked people. I kinda looked at it again and thought it was kind of risqué.

V.: Have you seen the Georges Marciano ads for Guess jeans?

T.: No.

(I explained to Tamie about the amount of times these ads had fun in Rolling Stone over the past two years, and then moved on to the first ad).

V.: Would you stop and look at an ad like this?

T.: No. If you didn't see the little logo, you wouldn't know what the ad was for. Like in nail polish ads you see the hands, you know what it is for [selling]. Seeing this, you don't know what the ad is for. Plus, it is colorless.

V.: So, the black and white [coloring] does not arrest your attention, but would actually make you flip past it?

T.: Yeah.

V.: If you were to stop and look at this ad, what feelings would you have about it. How would it make you feel?

T.: I don't think the models are attractive and the whole thing behind them is unclear. The whole thing is unclear. I'd go right by it.

V.: Have you seen this second Obsession ad?

T.: I haven't seen this one either.

V.: If you first came across this ad, would you stop and look at it?

T.: Yeah, I would take a double look to see, to figure out what it is a picture of.

V.: How do you feel about the bodies?

T.: Well, it is two women. That's kind of kinky, I guess. [I don't have] any real feelings, It is typical of that product's [Calvin Klein] ads. I would look at it twice.

(Tamie was then shown the "fashion lay-out" from Rolling Stone).

V.: If you first came across this in *Rolling Stone* magazine, would you stop and look at it?

T.: I would probably stop to see what it was an ad for.

V.: Would you read the writing?

T.: I would probably read the big letters. I probably would not read the fine print. It says fashion at the top.. .

V.: What about this picture. Do you have any feelings about this picture or the people in it?

T.: I'd probably just look and go on. If I didn't know what it was for and it didn't say in the bold letters, I would probably just go on. If there were several pictures like that together I would probably try to figure out what it was for [selling].

V.: Would you find it odd to see these pictures in *Rolling Stone*?

T.: Yes, probably I'd pay more attention to the writing. Romance catches my attention, but not how it is supposed to [get me to buy the

product]. That has never affected me that way. I'll look at it as 'that's a neat ad' or 'that's creative or different' or whatever, but I won't think... I'll go out and buy the perfume now.

V.: Do you find these ads erotic?

T.: No, not particularly.

V.: What about the Obsession ads?

T.: Not particularly. Risque is the word I would use.

(I then showed Tamie the first Georges Marciano photo essay).

V.: If you came across this in a magazine, would you look at it?

T.: Probably. I have seen series like this where there is just the name at the bottom. Like in *Seventeen* in the August back-to-school issue where there is not even very good pictures of the clothes. It is more images, like this. So, I have seen this kind of thing before. There is not a lot to it. It probably would not catch my eye. The messy hair on the models would catch my eye more than the clothes.

V.: What about the relationships between the people in the pictures? What do you think is going on?

T.: I would just think they are models posing. I wouldn't think there is any significance to them.

V.: Is that generally how you look at ads?

T.: Right. That first picture of the girl standing against the tree, no one would stand that way. It is more of a pose than anyone trying to put across a real message.

(Tamie was then shown the Georges Marciano ads of the young girl dancing with the older man).

V.: Would these ads catch your attention?

T.: No.

V.: Not even the relationships of the two people?

T.: I probably wouldn't look that far into it. I'd probably just see that it was an ad for Guess jeans. Usually when I look at ads I just see what the product is [and] the variety of things they are advertising. I don't really think about the ads that much. I would see Guess jeans and go on. I would not think about the relationships between people. And seeing all these in black and whites, I realize how much color catches your attention. The black and white would not catch my eye.

(Tamie was then shown the Georges Marciano ad of the woman in the bar).

V.: Would this ad catch your attention?

T.: No. the girls are not even wearing jeans.

V.: Who do you think they made this ad for? Whose attention is it supposed to grab?

T.: Probably guys. [They are] advertising toward women to buy jeans, but it would be the guys that would look at the models. I suppose both [guys and girls]. I think of *Rolling Stone* as more [a] guy's than [a] girl's magazine. That could be a misconception.

(Tamie was then asked to thumb through the final Georges Marciano photo essay).

T.: The background would catch my eye more than the people. Maybe as far as relationships [go], he seems to be much older. These have little background. I'd look twice at this [the girl kneeling in front of the man]. It's kind of weird. If they are trying to portray the image of the female on her knees to the male it is kind of offensive. I wouldn't assume that that is necessarily what they are trying to do. But I probably wouldn't look at it close enough to analyze it. This one looks like what a jeans ad is supposed to be. She is wearing jeans and a jacket. The other pictures don't make sense. It is kind of absurd. If it is trying to get across a message, I don't see one.

V.: You said earlier you do not feel there is any connection between the ads you notice and the things you purchase.

T.: I think a lot of people are drawn in by ads. I guess I am just aware of the advertising pitch or what they are trying to do. Maybe some people are not [aware], I can see their [advertisers'] angle, where they are going. I look at ads like I would window shop. I don't ever go out and buy something I see in a magazine, unless the product appealed to me, not the ad.

Ψ.: Why do you think advertisers would go to all the time and expense to run ads that do not even have their name on them?

T.: The Guess ones did not have the name, but they had the little symbol at the top. They are trying to make that stick in your mind. Most people know that symbol. It doesn't make a lot of sense to me. Everybody advertises, it is obviously effective for most people. During the day there are diaper and cereal commercials. They are focusing on the woman at home. I guess I feel I can see through them.

Sub-set #2: Sabrina

I interviewed Sabrina in her dorm room in April of 1988. After she finished filling in her questionnaire, I asked her about her magazine reading habits. She explained that she was most intrigued by sports magazines when she was a young girl of 11 and 12. Then she and her sisters graduated to the teen rock star magazines. She recalls that they would sit around on the bed in her room and swoon over the male pin-ups. This activity always took place in a group or in pairs. Reading these magazines alone look all the fun out of it. She never read girls' teen magazines. She describes them as too dull.

After the interview was complete she introduced me to her friends from the dorm. We all had a good laugh over what they considered to be a very "pop culture" research topic.

Sabrina is 22, Black and single. She is a graduate student who lives in a graduate student dorm on campus. From her questionnaire Sabrina reports that now she reads fashion, music/contemporary culture and sports

magazines. She reads her magazines both alone and with friends. Although she does not subscribe, she reads a lot of magazines during the week, either buying them from the newstand, borrowing from a friend or reading them in the dorm lobby. She reports that the advertisements most likely to keep her attention are those containing bright colors, attractive models and beautiful photography.

Sabrina is very articulate and enthusiastic. Her responses reflect her enthusiasm and her quick sense of humor.

V.: Do you ever read *Rolling Stone*?

S.: No, but I thumb through it in the store.

(I then explained to Sabrina that all the ads she was about to see had appeared in *Rolling Stone* over the past two years).

V.: Have you seen this ad for Obsession cologne?

S.: Yes.

V.: Did it catch your eye?

S.: Oh, yeah. It did catch my eye.

Q.: Why? What was the first thing that caught your eye?

S.: It's got naked people, It's got naked men, geeze.

V.: Did the coloring of the ad catch your eye?

S.: No.

V.: What about the naked women?

S.: What about 'em? They are just there. It would be kind of crazy to have three naked men standing alone. They are just an added attraction.

V: Do you like the pictures?

S: Yeah. Its [the photograph] got style. Tasteful art is what I guess you would call it.

V: Is there any connection between ads like this and you buying their product?

S: No.

V: Is all advertising that way for you?

S: Yeah. I've been in situations where people talk about advertising, how it persuades, and all the things that it can do. I find myself being very careful. I'm not easily persuaded by an ad. I like to test things out for myself. I usually take an ad just for what it is, something to look at. I guess I know what to look for. When I look at an ad I really don't pay that much attention to what it is selling, who is in the picture and what they are doing.

V: The first time you saw this ad, did you have any particular feelings about it?

S: I thought it was very creative. I wasn't shocked. I probably said, 'Oh, that's really creative' and then looked up and said, 'oh, Calvin Klein.' I would expect something like that from them, That's their style.

V: Would this Georges Marciano advertisement catch your attention?

S: Yes.

V: What would be the first thing that would catch your attention?

S: Probably the glasses the man is wearing. The black glasses and the fact that it is in black and white. That's unusual. I don't know too many magazines that use black and white. There's always some kind of color thrown in there. It [the black and white] adds to the mystery.

V: Do you have any feelings about this ad?

S.: **It is** a mysterious ad. Kind of gloomy. It makes you wonder what is going on. What is she doing? Why does he have **on those** dark glasses? Who is he? Why **is** she standing over him like **that**?

V.: **Do** you have any feelings about the relationship of the people **in** the ad?

S.: Ages, yes. I don't think that **is** her fether. **Maybe [she is his]** girlfriend or mistress. It has that mistress air **about** it. He is hiding his identity and doesn't **want** anyone to know. Nice ad.

V.: **Do** you **think** **this kind** of advertising **is** erotic?

S.: I think **it** is supposed to be. **That's** the image they [the advertisers] want to formulate in your mind. It's so obvious. What does she **have** on there?

V.: **Is** it erotic for you?

S.: That wasn't my initial reaction.

V.: **Would** this second ad for Obsession cologne catch your eye?

S.: **No.**

V.: **What about it** would make you flip passed it?

S.: Its the coloring. It is awkward. The person **is** upside **down**. It would take too much energy to try **and flip** the **magazine** around. **When** you are flipping through magazines, you don't want to take the time. I want to look et it and **be able to** see what is going on quick.

(I then showed Sabrina the "fashion lay-out" from Rolling **Stone**).

V.: **Would** this catch your attention **and would** you **stop** and read it?

S.: **it would** catch my attention, but I don't think I would stop to read it. It would catch my attention **because** I would probably say 'what nerve! Gee! Its kind of **bold** and unusual.

V.: If you were flipping through the *Rolling Stone* would you **be shocked** to see this?

S: Yeah. Not **all** magazines can run ads like this and make it. *Rolling Stone* can do that. I don't think I would stop and **read**.

Y: Do you like these pictures?

S: Yeah. They are Q.K. I don't think the style is anything to write home **about**. I think the old sex concept is kind of... **basic**. When ads try to appeal to that sex side, to that animal **side**, it is kind of basic. **It is** the easiest **thing** to appeal to. Advertisers think that is the easiest way to get to someone. I guess I always **try** to resist. But I think they are clever. Very bold.

V: Are they erotic for you?

S: No. I **have a** problem equating **a** picture [with eroticism]. . . I can't make the connection. When you are in high school someone sneaks a girly magazine or guy magazine [in] and I never could understand [the attraction]. If you can't live it... I don't understand. No. I don't think that's erotic for me.

V: Do you think most men our age **would** look at these and find them erotic?

S: Sure.

Q.: What do you think the difference is?

S.: With these particular ads the emphasis is on the girl. The girl is the **focus** of whatever they [the advertisers] **are** selling. Whether it is an image or clothing. I find that distasteful, so I wouldn't stop and **gawk** at it. I don't feel these ads are particularly **trying** to **appeal** to women. I guess I would have to **read** the caption to see what they **are** selling. **Look**. she has **a** bra on here, and in this one her dress is up, of course guys are going to find these **erotic**, where as **a** female [I'm] not going to be **impressed**. The art work is pretty good, but as far as what they **are** trying to **sell**, I'm not impressed.

V: **Have** you ever **seen** the Geroges Marciano photo essays?

S.: Not in **detail**, just bits and pieces.

V.: If you **saw** that first page **would** it catch your attention?

S.: It would catch my attention. I would not read on because there are no men in the ad. It is two women. There is not enough going on to warrant further investigation. You've got two women **leaning on an oak tree**.

V.: Do you have any feelings about the way the women in this ad **are** positioned?

S.: I think there is a message there. **Their hair is all frizzled**. I don't know whether it is from the wind or whether this picture **is** insinuating that they just did **something** or whether they are about to **do** something. There is a slight sexual overtone there. What **makes** me say that I am not very sure. I think it is **this** first girl [the one in the slip], maybe it is her expression or the way they **are** positioned, or **her** dress. **Is** that **an underslip**? They've got that **stalking** air about them **like** a cat after its prey.

V.: **Does** this ad **bother** you in any way?

S.: Sure. ads like this, in **my** opinion, give females a **bad** rap, the old seduction concept. That ad is trying to seduce you to do something. It is sexual, [but] I can't quite put my finger on it. It **keeps** coming to mind, the way they are **standing**. That does bother me. **Too** many advertisements use women in that way. They **are** used to.. they **are** almost selling themselves **instead** of what the **product** is supposed to **be**. What is the product?

V.: Why do you think **Georges Marciano** would spend so much **money** on these ads **and** not put there name on it?

S.: I'm not sure. I think it is a clever ad. It is different. If their name is not on it they are gambling with recognition [of the **logo**]. Maybe they are **just** testing it out. Maybe they are afraid of a reaction. **Maybe** they just want to be mysterious and different.

V.: Do you **have** any feelings about the rest of the pictures in this **photo essay**?

S: Yeah. The first ad was neat and new, the rest become more trite as I turn the page. It is kinda like even though I think that the ad is kind of sexual, it is kind of negative. I think [the first ad] is neat, but I think the next ad...one girl is Jumbling with the other's shirt.. .I'm sorry. . .And what is she doing? [referring to another ad] Did he beat her? Is she crying? Is she laughing? There is such a thing as too much mystery. Whoever is looking at the ad, you [the advertisers] don't give them concrete facts. [They] just allow them [the ads] to manifest things in their [the viewer's] minds. Sometimes they can manifest the wrong thing. By not using words or not telling us what they are selling, they are just leaving it open so people can think all kinds of crazy things. Why risk that?

V: Do you think this kind of advertising can be damaging?

S: Sure it can. It is not always a good idea to leave it up to the consumer. Sometimes you [the advertisers] need to tell them [the consumer] what it is you are selling. I guess I could conclude that they are selling sex here. The [denim] jacket is not highlighted, it is what they are doing to one another. Which is irrelevant if they are trying to sell clothes. These ads are so open-ended. [I ask myself] 'What are they selling? why did they choose to do it like this? Why aren't there any words? Why is there so much mystery? Why the erotic overtones? and that theme just continues throughout.

V: If you were looking at these with a boyfriend or any male friend and they said to you, 'these pictures are really hot!' How would you react?

S.: You ditto, of course you think these are hot. Probably because guys are not necessarily the focus. They are not going to stop and think about what the ads are saying. They are thinking about what the ad is doing. What's going on in the ad. It is an immediate-type thing, not a long-term thing. Its not something they would ponder about. They are not going to bring ethics and morals into it. Guys just don't do that. Unless maybe the focus was shifted and men were the focus, then they would stop to ponder.

V.: But men rarely are the focus of these kinds of ads.

S: No, they never are, and therefore, they are not going to stop and ask the same questions I would ask. Because you are looking at it from two different viewpoints.

(Sabrina **was** then shown the ads of the older man **dancing** with the younger girl).

V.: **Is** there **anything** about these ads that catches your attention?

S.: Well, it's obvious that his clothes have changed **and** hers haven't. This **one** looks like the **old** father-daughter situation. But in this one **all** kinds of **things** come to mind. She looks kind of young to **be** with him. She **looks** enthralled, almost in **awe**.

V.: But not in a sexual way?

S.: **No**. Not **in** a sexual way. I **would** probably wonder about the age [difference] and go on.

(Sabrina is then shown the final Georges Marciano photo essay).

V.: Could you talk through the story as you see it?

S.: ...**There** he is again with another one of his ladies. He is in **awe** of her, like [she] is [his] creation. He's got that 'she belongs to me' **look** on his **face**. And there is **always** something in the story you don't understand. This is that part. It is almost as **if** he is the pimp and this is his stable.

V.: **How** do you **feel** about the **woman** who is kneeling?

S.: It is pretty **odd**... I guess they are giving him their respect or humbling themselves to him. They could have more **clothes** on to do that. **I mean, a jean jacket and underwear?** Is that what he requires of them? **Is** that what the master wants? Here he is again with his **#1** girl. This must **be** his favorite. It's just **him** and two **more** of his horses in his stable. These are so mysterious **and** open-ended. Don't warp my mind with these petty **little** scenarios.

Sub-set #3: Rosie

I interviewed Rosie in her apartment one evening in early May 1988. I had never met her before. She is a good friend of a friend of mine.' Although I had heard a lot about her, I didn't know quite what to expect from her

When I arrived Rosie had just gotten off the phone. The call had disturbed her. I explained that I was sorry she was upset and that the interview would probably be quite "light." Her reply to me was, "Oh, no. This 'is going to be deep!" Rosie put on a pot of coffee for us, and as she filled out her questionnaire, I set up the recording equipment. She explained to me that my questionnaire answer choices did not include enough categories such as one for Christian magazines and one for certificates earned after high school. She was set to challenge me, not in a malicious way, but in an intellectual one.

Before I asked her about the images I had brought along, I asked her about her magazine reading habits. Rosie's earliest recollections of magazine reading go back to reading *Highlights* in the doctor's office. She said her parents didn't subscribe to any magazines. In her teen years she read girls' teen magazines like *Seventeen*. She feels her personal style was greatly shaped by girls' fashion and beauty magazines back then. She remembers spending her first paycheck on clothes that looked familiar from the ads in these magazines.

Rosie is 38 years old, White, divorced and the mother of a 15 year old daughter. She is a receptionist and is very involved with Christianity and bible studies. On her questionnaire Rosie reports that her favorite kinds of magazines are fashion, Christian, interior decorating and science . She generally reads magazines alone but often discusses articles with friends. Advertisements hold her attention if they contain bright colors, attractive models, beautiful photography, clever phrasing, sex, romance, and the product itself.

Rosie has very definite opinions about magazines and advertising. Much of her observation is a reflection of her religious convictions, but more importantly, her **observations** are based on years of fascination with human beings as social creatures.

V.: Do you consider yourself a person who pays a lot of attention to advertising?

R.: Yes, for other reasons than to buy something. I like to look at them to see **what** they are saying to people. They **not** only **sell** their product, but what are **they** selling along with that product? That's **what** gets my attention, and the **words** they use.

V.: Do you think advertisements have an impact on **how** girls and women think and act?

R.: I think they have very much effect on our minds. Extremely. I know they have. So, I'm very careful **about** what magazines I look at now. Yes, I do think they mould us into becoming what a **particular** ad wants us to become. I do believe they affect people.

V.: Do you think it is because we see so many of **them** everyday?

R.: Yes, the way the press seems to be in the **last** several years. I can remember looking at magazines, [and] if there **was** a picture of Farah Fawcett on one magazine there was a picture of Farah Fawcett on every magazine. The magazines run it into the ground. When they run advertisements it is constantly hitting you in different places, so it does **have** an impact on your mind. To me, sometimes I think it is a kind of brainwashing.

V.: Have you seen **this** ad for Obsession cologne?

R.: Yes, I have. It would catch my attention **because** I am totally repulsed by it. The **reason** I am **repulsed** by it is, **number 1**, I think it [the ad] is in a lot of magazines it does cause people to be obsessed. If I see an ad like this I **will not** buy the product **because** I do not like how it is being presented, Obsession **is** a sickness and I do not want to be obsessed. The second thing is, I just do not appreciate how they

have the nude bodies everywhere. Our bodies are beautiful or God wouldn't have made them that way. . I have much more respect for my body than the people in these advertisements. I won't buy something if the ad is bad.

V.: Would you buy the products in ads you do like?

R.: If I like the ad and it is presented in a really nice way then I would probably buy it.

V.: So, there is a strong connection between advertising and consuming for you?

R.: Yes.

V.: Would the coloring in this ad catch your attention?

R.: The coloring doesn't really do anything for me, so to see it like that. . . If I saw something Victorian in that color or something vintage where that color would be perfect. But this color and the way they have advertised it, I would not buy Obsession. In fact, I probably wouldn't buy Calvin Klein, so it might extend to the entire brand.

V.: Are you familiar with the Georges Marciano ads for Guess jeans?

R.: YES.

V.: Would this ad catch your attention?

R.: It would in that it is black and white. That is interesting. And then there is the bright red lettering. I don't care for it so much. I would probably flip through the magazine and it probably would not catch my eye the way the Obsession one did. In a way I'm a little offended by *this* one because of the way she is posed and his look on his face.

V.: Do you think you would connect this advertisement with the Guess logo when you go into a store?

R.: I haven't really looked at magazines lately, so I haven't been bombarded and I wouldn't remember, but if I were looking through

magazines constantly, yes I would remember Guess jeans and these particular ads.

V.: Would you stop and look at this second Obsession ad?

R.: Yes, it would catch my eye. The reason it catches my eye is because it looks like there is another body right here. **Is that true?** I just think it is sad that they **would** have to resort to this kind of thing for **advertising**. **Because it is** not family-oriented and **it is** pornographic. **It is** pornography subtly done and it appalls me. **It is** sexually erotic and I think it is sad. Little kids and teenagers **will** see this ad. They [the general **public**] will wonder **what** they are going to **do** with teen pregnancies, [and] the AIDS problem, but they come up with these kinds of **ads**.

(Rosie was then shown the "fashion lay-out" for Rolling Stone).

R.: Yes, this one very much **offends** me, the reason being, most people who are going to be reading this are going to be teenagers. Especially in *Rolling Stone*, and its formulating an idea in people's minds that it is okay to be sexually active even though there is a problem with the AIDS epidemic and **morals** and everything. This one offends me because of the fact that my daughter is 15 1/2 and I know she is going to be looking at this. Its going to be like, 'oh, it is no big deal, Mom, he's taking her top off, so what.' I feel like they **have really** gone too far with their advertisements.

V.: Would you read on?

R.: Myself, I **would** never pick up an issue of *Rolling Stone*, but I might view it just to see what they are showing today.

V.: If you **saw** this in another magazine, would you go on and look at the other three pictures?

R.: Again, I would probably look for the fact of what they **are putting** in people's minds. Just so I know what I **am up against** when I have to explain things to my daughter; that this is not the way life should be. . . This isn't even a subliminal message. They [the **two** in the picture] are coming right out and fondling each other. . . I am shocked they have this in a magazine and they **are** allowed to print it and it is allowed to be **sold** to teenagers. Because **to** me, it looks like it should

be in *Playboy*. Instead of *Playboy*, now kids can go out and buy *Rolling Stone* and get very sexually stimulated visually. If you are used to seeing it, it really doesn't affect you too much. If you are not spiritually awakened it does not affect you too much. If you become spiritually awakened then it is appalling.

(I then showed Rosie the Georges Marciano ad of the two women in the bar).

R.: It nauseates me because the women look like they are very drunk and they have been partying, and her legs are spread, and... she has bedroommy eyes... The Guess jeans [approach] is very erotic, but it is not right for advertising; for kids and for families. It is not conducive for good family living.

V.: Do you think Georges Marciano are actively promoting anything other than their product?

R.: I think they are promoting alcoholism in this picture. I look at these women and I feel sorry that they have to do that to make a living. That they would lower themselves. This girl is a real mess. She looks like she has thrown up a couple of times and kept on drinking. I don't buy Guess clothes either.

V.: if you saw this first picture in Georges Marciano's photo essay, would you go on and look at the rest of the pictures?

R.: Every once in a while I will pick up a [popular] magazine to see what they are showing. No, I don't like this ad. In fact, I used to read *Elle* but I quit because the advertising is really strange, way-out, very erotic.

(About the the photo essay beginning with the two women backed up against the tree):

R.: She looks like she has just crawled out of a field there. This ad does not look as bad as the one we just saw in *Rolling Stone* [the fashion lay-out]. But I am still offended by the way they [these pictures] treat women. I don't like this one at all, it is like promoting lesbianism. And in this one it looks as though she is crying or hurt or something. It almost looks as though they are telling a story or two. These three people and sex between all of them. That's exactly what I see.

... When you try to raise your children to be decent human beings and then the records and the advertisements and the T.V. programs are all so contrary to what you believe and how you want to raise your children, you feel like you are bombarded and your lost... It is really a struggle to stay away from this stuff. It is addicting, very powerful.

V.: Is there anything else you want to talk about, about advertising?

R: I like it when it uplifts your spirit rather than when they are too sexy or too erotic. I'm not a prude. I view people differently than the way I used to. People are special. I think they have gone way overboard in doing whatever they want in front of children. There needs to be some kind of control, some sort of censorship, and people who say this kind of thing is art, it is not art. It is pornography. It is very emotional for me to see these kinds of ads. Because it just tears down the family. I believe it is a form of brainwashing, especially for kids who don't have much of a family life anyway.

Subset *4: Linda and Nancy

I interviewed Linda and Nancy at Linda's home in May of 1988. When I arrived at Linda's house I found a note saying that she and Nancy had gone for pizza, and would be right back. They soon arrived, toting pizza and Cokes. Linda and Nancy had had a difficult day at work and were both more than ready to have a party. In fact, the three of us talked, ate pizza and played with the dog for at least an hour before the interviews began.

During the interviews it was difficult to keep them on the subject because they were both in a very giggly mood. Somehow in the midst of all the enjoyment, Nancy's individual interview did not record. However, the portion of the joint interview about magazine reading habits did record. The following are excerpts from that portion of the evening:

V.: At about what age did you begin reading magazines for pleasure?

N.: It was before I was in school, probably around 4 or 5. I started by looking at my brother's magazines.

V.: What kinds of magazines did he get?

N.: He got boy's life magazines and I was always very interested in the color section in the middle. I would sneak in his room and read the color section.

V.: What kind of magazines did you read in your teenage years?

N.: The ones in the library on the back shelves.

V.: Which were?

N.: The ones with the most crinkled covers. National Geographic was big because it had naked people in it.

L.: You betcha. Those were one of things we used to read. and *Home and Gardens* because I always liked gardens and flowers and things like that.

Nancy

Nancy is 40, single, White, and is the director of communications in a marketing firm. She reports from her questionnaire that her favorite types of magazines now are music/contemporary culture, art, and news. She generally reads magazines alone. She lets her magazines pile up until she feels guilty, then she will sit down and go through them all in one night. She looks at magazines almost anywhere. Advertisements catch her attention if they contain bright colors and clever phrasing.

Linda

Linda is 37, single, and White. She is a part-time university student as well as a full-time executive secretary to the president of a corporation, and the president of a hot tub rental business. From her questionnaire, Linda reports that her favorite magazines are fashion, women's magazines, technical magazines and trade magazines. Advertisements that catch her attention are those with beautiful photography and clever phrasing.

Linda is a very confident woman who likes to elaborate on her answers, generally relating them to her personal feelings about herself and her life.

V.: Would this ad for Obsession cologne grab your attention?

L.: Yes.

V.: What about it would grab your attention?

L.: The fact that they have no clothes on.

V.: Does the coloring of the ad catch your attention?

L.: **No. It's not me.** I think it is done for sensationalism and I would remember the ad because it is unique, but I would not remember who it is for. Because no one is going to look at anything else [but the bodies]. **They're** going to look at this because it is a shock item, and they will go on to something else once they have looked at this. They won't remember it is Calvin Klein. I may look at the picture and say, 'geeze, they are really getting into different ads,' and I'll go on.

V.: Do you think this ad by Georges Marciano would catch your attention?

L.: I'd look at it. I don't think I would know it is an ad.

V.: Would the black and white picture stand out for you?

L: No, the red would catch my attention right away. Then I would look at the picture and then go on. All it looks like is a greasy old man to me. I don't know what they are selling. You said it was for jeans?

Looking at it, he looks sort of mafia and she looks like a cell girl.

V: Do you think you would stop long enough to think that out?

L: That is what hit me immediately. Then I would go away. It wouldn't sell me anything, I know that.

V: What do you think of this second ad for Obsession? Would you spend any time with this ad?

L: Yes, because it is sort of neat in the way it is done. Because of all the different angles and things it would catch my attention because I would be trying to figure out what it is. I can't see.

V: Is this ad erotic for you?

No. I like lines like this. That is interesting. Other than that, I guess I would just think it is just some more sensationalism. I am a firm believer that if you wear this, it doesn't mean you are going to feel like it at all. I just think they are doing it to catch your eye. Most of the time, you don't even know what they are selling. They probably do more by scenting it than anything else.

V: This is a "fashion lay-out" that ran in *Rolling Stone* in the Fall of 1987. What do you think of it?

L: I wouldn't stop and read it, but I would probably go on to the other pages.

V: What do you think of these pictures?

L: I just don't think they were done in good taste. I don't know what they are selling. They are getting a little cheap and sleazy.

V: Do you like these photos?

L: **Me? No.** I just think **people need to be creative.** I **don't** think that is creative. If that is what you have to do to catch someone's attention, you are not creative. That will catch **anyone's** attention.

V.: This is a Georges Marciano photo essay. If you saw this **first picture**, **would** you go on to look **at** the rest?

L: **Yes.** Because of **this [the model's hair and the landscape behind her].** I wouldn't look at **the** clothes, that wouldn't interest me a bit. I wouldn't consider buying it, I wouldn't even go look at things like that.

V.: Do you have any feelings about the women in this ad?

L: They always **look** like they do not have the upper hand. They **are** always sort of like scared little puppies or something like that.

V.: How do you feel **about** that?

L: **Oh, I don't like** it very well. **Business Is** business and they **do** what **sells.** They couldn't care less what anyone else thinks about it, just as long **as** it sells.

V.: What **do** you think **about** the rest of **the** photos?

L: That may be appealing to some people, but I wouldn't buy it. That looks like she just got beat up or raped or something. And I **would** definitely go right passed it because to me it looks like a picture of violence of some type.

V.: Do you think you spend that much time on it?

L: I would stop, because I don't know what it is for. I probably would stop to see if there was a gangster story or something.

V.: These pictures are not erotic for you.

L: **No.**

V.: I **want** to show these two ads [of the **older** man dancing with **the** younger girl]. Do you have **any** particular feelings about these ads?

L: No. None of these ads do anything for me. This kind of thing does nothing for me. I probably wouldn't spend more than a second on them.

V: What do you think of this second Georges Marciano photo essay?

L: There's that old man again. I just think of some old guy with a lot of money and a call girl. It looks so sleazy. It is not classy, it is sort of low-end.

V: Would you consider the Obsession ads to be classy?

L: Well, if you had to compare the two, and one had to be classy and one not, the Obsession ads would be classier. But, the ones I notice have clean-cut guys and women who are in evening wear. This one lurks, and that the others stand out in the open. This guy just looks sleazy no matter what.

This one looks like it is a slave trade or something. Normally these kinds of things offend me, so I won't even give them a glance. Let them spend their millions of dollars and I won't give them the time. Getting upset about it does nothing, but passing it over and not giving them any of my money the less they will make and perhaps the less we will have to see this.

Subset #5: Elizabeth and Laura

I interviewed Elizabeth and her daughter Laura in June of 1988 at Elizabeth's townhouse on the out-skirts of the city. I have known Elizabeth for two years and had met Laura on several social occasions. We discussed work, leisure activities and the state of area retail stores before actually getting down to the business of the interviews. We had iced tea before the interviews and cake and coffee during the interviews. The atmosphere was very relaxed and friendly.

I interviewed them together regarding their magazine reading habits. Elizabeth recalls reading *Photoplay* around the age of 10 or 11. She was particularly interested in the movie star pictures. She would cut them out

and keep a ~~scrapbook~~ on them. She used to look at these magazines with friends who would come over to visit. She recalls swapping cut-out pictures from different magazines with her friends. Laura recalls looking at catalogues and cutting out pictures of beautiful women in beautiful clothes.

When she was in her teens, Laura looked at both girls' teen magazines and teen rack magazines. She remembers reading *Seventeen*, *Tiger Beat* and *16*. She was interested in the Rock stars and the Rock and Roll scene. Laura recalls reading with her sister and with her female cousins, swapping magazines and cutting out pictures. In her late teens Laura switched her attention to glamour/fashion magazines. She feels that these magazines don't speak to her now, though, because she needs practical clothes and make-up ideas for her lifestyle.

Elizabeth, Laura and myself had a conversation about 'erotic' advertisements that preceded the individual interviews. The following are excerpts:

L: When it was just *Playboy* those [the models] were just fantasy-type people. They weren't the type of person you would meet on the street everyday. They were Miss June or Miss December and there was only one of them. These people [the models in popular magazines] are portraying everyday people. . . They are supposed to represent the average teenager today who wears Guess jeans or whatever. It's not 'Suzy, Bunny of the Month,' it is Suzy your daughter.

E: It is what all American girls should be wearing, and If you aren't wearing it you should be worried about it.

L: [Girls will say to their mothers] 'Mom, this is what the girls are wearing to school now, this is how we are supposed to look and this is how we are supposed to act, like this ad.

E: I think it puts pressure on **these** kids. If it is so readily **available** for kids to look at, a bunch of girls get together and they think this is the way they should be acting, and it just puts pressure on them.

L: They think they have to be sexy.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth is 53 years old, White, divorced, and is the mother of 3 adult children ages 22, 27, and 28. She is an administrative secretary. From her questionnaire Elizabeth reports that her favorite kinds of magazines are fashion, food, and women's magazines. She reads magazines alone, but sometimes discusses articles in the magazines with her children, friends and co-workers. Advertisements that most likely catch her attention if they contain beautiful photography, clever phrasing, and the product being advertised.

Elizabeth is a very warm and sensitive person and at the same time outspoken and confident in her own opinions. She reacts to images quickly, but is often thoughtful in her explanations.

V.: Have you seen this ad for **Obsession** cologne?

E.: No. It's yucky.

V.: Would it catch your eye if you were thumbing through this magazine?

E.: Yeah, it **will** catch my eye **because** everybody is **naked**. I don't think you need naked bodies to **sell** cologne.

V.: If you were thumbing through your son's *Rolling Stone* and you saw this ad, how **would** you **feel** about it?

E.: I **would** be shocked. I certainly **would**.

V.: Does the coloring or composition catch your eye?

E.: No, it [the coloring] is rather subdued. It is the naked **bodies** that really caught my eye and I think it is disgusting.

V.: What do you think of this ad for Georges Marciano? Would the black and white catch your attention?

E.: It's the red. Probably the red lettering [that would have caught my attention] and then I would have taken a look at this. I wouldn't have spent any time on it. . . It's kind of an erotic pose, but everyone has their clothes on.

V.: This is another Obsession ad. Now, I've seen this one in department stores in the cologne section.

E.: You are kidding! With the naked [**bodies**]? Good God. I really think it is bad. It is in bad taste. I think they are trying to shock people into buying Obsession. It is the old shock treatment..

V.: If you walked into Lazarus [a local department store] to buy cologne and you saw this behind the counter, would it keep you from buying it?

E.: I would not buy it if they have to resort to that. I would be more drawn to buy something that has a display behind it of beautiful flowers and so on, but not this.

V.: This is the "fashion lay-out" that I told you ran in *Rolling Stone* in the Fall of 1967. Could you just flip through it and give me your impressions?

E.: What are they advertising? The clothes? I'd expect to see this in *Playboy* or *Hustler*, or one of those magazines. I wouldn't expect it in a magazine that has a Plymouth advertisement on the next page. I wouldn't expect to see that in an everyday magazine,

V.: Would you flip back to the front page and read what it is for?

E.: No.

V.: Do you think they are erotic pictures?

E: Yeah, and I think they **are** cheapening sex, **and** I **happen** to think that sex is **a pretty terrific thing**. I object to pictures that make it cheap.

V: Do you have any **feelings about** the two people in the **ad**?

E: They **are** too young to be posing for stuff like this. They are being exploited. Maybe I'm too old... maybe **younger** people look at this **and** they don't think it's **as bad as** I would think. **For** someone my age, I just think it is young people being exploited.

V: **Do** you think the **viewers are** being exploited **as** well?

E: Right.

V: Would you feel any different about your daughter hoking at these **as** opposed to your **son**?

E: I'd feel the **same** for both. There is no distinction. I think young men **as** well as **young women** need to have some values **and** I really don't think that all this exploitation of young bodies is **healthy**. I think sex is **very** healthy, but not the way it is presented in **magazines** like this.

V: What do you think of this **Georges Marciano** photo essay [beginning with the **women** backed up **against** the tree]?

E: I think **that** is ugly. Absolutely ugly. It looks like they are mentally deranged. And they [the advertisers] **are** making them look like **animals**. I think it is awful.

Elizabeth thumbs through the series of pictures.

So, this is promoting lesbianism? The **girls are** just ugly. They look like they **are** mentally disturbed.

You could read **almost** anything into that [woman crying]. It looks **as** though she **has** just been **raped**. They **are** **sick**. Very degrading.

Q: Why **do** you think **Georges Marciano would** go to this much **expense** and not even put the name **of** the products or the brands on the pictures?

E: I don't know. There are some **sicko** people doing this [putting together advertising]. They are projecting their sick psyche on the

general public. They are ~~real~~ off-the-wall, the people that are doing that. I don't think he [the advertiser] likes women.

V.: What would you say to your son if he said he thought these ads were "hat"?

E.: No. I don't think so. I think they are ~~sick~~. I don't think they look hot. Now, ~~that~~ other one [the fashion lay-out pictures] looked hot. This is sick. Here, she looks like she has been abused. That's not hot. Hot, to ~~me~~ is sultry and provocative.

V.: ~~Do~~ you have any feelings about these two ads [of ~~the~~ young girl dancing with the older man]?

E.: This looks like ~~an~~ old guy who is ~~taking~~ advantage of a young girl. She could be a young hooker. It is not healthy ~~looking~~.

V.: So it stikes you as a sexual relationship?

E.: Yeah.

(Elizabeth is then shown the picture of the two women in the bar).

V.: What do you think of this ~~ad~~?

E.: It's cheap-looking. She looks like she is on drugs.

V.: ~~Do~~ you think young girls looking at these ads think they need the whole image to look right in these clothes?

E.: Sure. This kind of advertising ~~can be~~ ~~damaging~~. It [the picture] shows this girl guzzling her booze. ~~What's~~ with all this stringy hair? Is that supposed to be sexy? It looks ~~as~~ if they need to have their heads shampooed. To me it looks dirty.

V.: This is a ~~final~~ photo ~~essay~~ from Georges Marciano. I would like you to look through It end just comment on what you think.

E.: There's ~~an~~ old guy ~~ogleing~~ a young body. Disgusting. It is hot-looking. She's ell boozed up and ready for whatever he is going to suggest. The older guy ~~is~~ telling the young girls 'you ~~are~~ going to do it my way, or ~~else~~.'

V.: What kind of a message do you think these pictures send out to women in general?

E.: That you have to throw yourself at the guys, pull your blouse down over your shoulder, cheapen yourself and maybe you'll make it. Disgusting.

It used to be that that kind of advertising was prevalent in European magazines. A lot of their advertising was like that. Now it is here. It is a European influence. Here, it is going to shock the American public and that is what they [the advertisers] are hoping for.

Laura

Laura is 28 years old, White, single, and is a toning inspector for the city. Laura enjoys magazine reading as a leisure activity and reports that her favorite magazines are fashion, contemporary culture, home and crafts, food and women's magazines. She reads magazines alone, often sharing interesting clips with family, friends or her boyfriend. Laura subscribes to magazines, buys them from the news stand, and borrows them from her mother. Advertisements hold her attention if they contain bright colors, beautiful photography, clever phrasing, and show off the product.

Laura is a very confident, warm and talkative woman. She makes up her mind about images quickly, but then tends to elaborate at length about her reply. Within her elaborations she tends to unfold interesting insights about what it must be like to be a young girl in America today.

V.: You said you have seen these ads for Obsession cologne. What did you think of this ad when you first saw it?

L.: I was shocked.

V.: Where did you first see this ad?

L.: It was in this magazine [*Rolling Stone*]. I thought, wow, they're really doing new stuff with ads now. But, I thought to myself, if it is going to be in any of the magazines it is going to be in one like this that I feel older people do not read. Young people read this and it is not going to bother them. A lot of the things said and shown in this magazine are real direct. They use a lot of slang and refer to terms that young people understand. It is a certain group that understands this magazine. The readers are probably a lot more relaxed.

I was shocked, but not shocked that it was in *this* magazine.

V.: What was the first thing your eye zoomed in on when you first saw this ad?

L.: At first I thought 'I can't be looking at this [right]. This can't be naked men's bodies.' After you look at it for a while you think, are they really showing the fronts of these people? They are so close to doing that. And then you say, 'I guess it is not so bad because it is just the backs. Had they shown the fronts, I would have thought that was offensive.'

V.: What about the coloring of this ad?

L.: I've never understood why they use such smokey-lense type pictures. They are all either black and white and blurred or a tint, like you would see if you were looking through a pair of sunglasses. Maybe by not using all the colors they are not emphasizing one person, they are going for a general mood.

V.: Does the coloring stick out for you personally?

L.: Yeah, because they are the only ones out right now that are doing it. So, you kind of get to recognize that in their ads.

V.: Would this first Georges Marciano ad catch your attention?

L.: Not really. I have gotten kind of accustomed to the ads. They always have a real pretty girl with a real natural kind of hair and real natural face. It's not like she is all done up to go out. A lot of them do look alike. What would catch your attention on this one is this old man. What is this old man doing here? He looks like the Godfather. Is this supposed to be her sugar daddy? That is kind of gross. Had

they put a younger, good-looking man in there, this would just be like a casual afternoon [scene].

They are trying to get you to think. It's mysterious.

I certainly wouldn't waste a lot of time figuring it out.

V.: Have you seen this Obsession ad?

L.: Yeah. This one I think was one of the first ones. Wasn't the first one a guy and a couple of girls? You really had to study to see what was there. This looks like, . . . maybe three bodies? And it looks like they are all women. This one doesn't make a whole lot of sense. I just don't understand what they are trying to get across there.

V.: It doesn't bother you.

L.: No, it doesn't bother me, it's kind of gross I think. I would probably flip by it.

V.: If this display were hung over the cologne counter when you went in to buy cologne, would the display keep you from buying it?

L.: It does offend me in a way. If I wanted that cologne, I wouldn't relate myself to the people in the ads. Is it supposed to be a fast-paced lifestyle? Are the people supposed to be really fast? They are trying to give the impression that skiri and good times go together. I wouldn't buy the perfume for the reason that I thought I was a very sexy person or something. When I think of myself wearing clothing or perfume, and how I'm going to look and smell when I go somewhere, I think of myself more as a professional person. I would first think about how I would like to look around people I want to impress.

V.: Do you wish cologne ads, then, would emphasize other things about a woman besides sexiness?

L.: Yeah, because there is not that much time to be sexy. If you are a working person and lead a realistic life, I don't have a lot of time to be sexy. If I am going to be sexy, I am going to be sexy in private. In that situation what I am wearing and my perfume is not going to make me any sexier. The sexiness is in me. I guess when I was younger and I was going out, knowing that there was going to be a lot of single guys there, . . . Now I am dating someone that I am really serious with. I just don't think any of this matters once you get to

know somebody and you really care for that person. I think more people are thinking about going to work the next day than going out and smelling sexy tomorrow night.

So, I think they are catering to a group that doesn't have a lot of cares or responsibilities yet.

V.: So, do you think that if young, single girls are looking at this stuff over and over, that it can have an effect on their behavior?

L.: I think that these kinds of things that you see in magazines and on T.V., as far as clothing [go], dictate to people what is fashionable. They create the trends. You can put anything in front of them [young girls], but if you see it enough, or just the right person wears it... Those people in school who are not only popular but who are trend setters, will put this stuff into action and pretty soon everyone else who wants to be popular [will wear it too].

Rolling Stone is really hot for these folks because of the Rock music. This magazine has the music, this is what you are supposed to be dressed like, this is what you are supposed to smell like; it definitely works.

V.: What did you think of this "fashion lay-out" in *Rolling Stone* when you first saw it?

L.: The first thing I noticed was the guy because he looks like Tom Cruise. I noticed this girl because, first of all, she looked kind of like a little Puerto Rican girl from the South side. It would have been better if they had used a more clean-cut American-looking girl. I also didn't expect to see him tugging so much on her shirt. I think it could have been a real good ad. She looks kind of cheap. Her breasts really look way too big in this picture. You just don't see guys like him with girls like her. She looks cheap, she looks too old for him, so that kind of ruined the whole thing.

V.: Did you look at all the pictures? There are four of them.

L.: Yeah, like this one is going too far. Her with her bare butt, and this kind of gear looks trashy. I don't even like bands that dress like that [in leathers].

V.: What do you think of this ad [the best of the sequence]?

L.: This girl just looks like she is in too much trouble for her own good. It makes the girls look cheap in all of these. It makes them look too fast **for their age**. **They could** have gotten the same effect with a real good-looking couple, They had to go too far with too much of her breasts showing. I relate that with trashy. I guess **I am** not used to seeing that much of a woman's body. She always has **less** clothes on than the guy. She is always made to look cheap. The old double standard.

V.: Have you seen the Georges Marciano photo essays?

L.: Yeah, I **always** thought these were kind of cool, I know Mom **doesn't** think so. But I think she is a really pretty girl and she is too. I like it because I think they are really trying to show you the clothes. They **are** not just trying to give you an idea. There is something to this skirt. She is trying to give some kind of sense of fashion in this picture. I don't know what his girl is doing, it looks like she just got out of bed. I don't know why they need two girls.

V.: You like the picture.

L.: Yeah. There is no guy in it doing anything filthy to the girls, so you don't feel like you are getting exploited here.

V.: What about the next picture?

L.: This one I don't **understand**. You start to think, **are** they lesbians? Why is this other girl who was in the slip unbuttoning her jeans jacket? It stops you, what is this supposed to mean?

V.: Do you think you **would** go on and look at the whole series?

Oh, yeah, just out of curiosity.

This one looks like a bunch of thugs used and abused this girl here. I think that **is** sick. If they want people to notice their clothes.. . I can watch the news and see people who have been beat up and killed and murdered, why **would** they get me interested back here [at the beginning], and then I get to this part. . .

What are they trying to promote there?

V.: Do you have any feelings about these two ads [the older man dancing with the younger girl]?

L.: I recognize this guy from the show Cheers. Just like on the show, he was portrayed as dating a very young girl. The girl that came to work at the bar was supposed to be his girlfriend and it turned out that it was his daughter. I got the impression that this guy could probably score with a young girl. He is a handsome older man.

I would definitely think that they are trying to portray him with that girl. In this one picture she really looks too young for him. Here she looks like the little girl who has a crush on him and in this one she looks like she may be old enough to handle a relationship with a man that age.

Maybe they are trying to get you to fantasize with your own situation.

V.: Or they are just trying to get you to stop and look.

L.: You know, if you pick up this magazine to catch up on the music scene, you are not going to waste your time trying to figure out if this is her dad, her lover or what.

V.: Have you seen this ad of these two women [the two women in the bar]?

L.: No. I am surprised I missed that one.

V.: Do you have any feelings about this ad?

L.: They look like trashed party girls. Used and abused party girls. Drunk, drugged out. These clothes don't look like anything he [Georges Marciano] would sell. I think so many times you are looking at the model. This girl has a really pretty face, and they figure they can put anything on her.

No matter how many ads they put in the magazine, if you have tried their jeans and you don't like the way they fit you, all the ads in the world aren't going to get you to go back and try them again.

V.: I want to show you this second photo essay.

L: Oh, that old man, we are getting the rest of the story now. They get you to wonder, and they know if you get this magazine often there would be a continuation. It would start to all come together.

So, the old man has got another young girl here. He looks like a disgusting old man with lots of money. Here he is taking her to Rome or something. Is she his little love pet? It disgusts me. Are they saying, okay beautiful young girls, if you are going to wear these clothes, you need to have a sugar daddy like this? If they want you to relate to these beautiful models, why do they put them with something that is disgusting?

V: Do you think young girls might get the message: from this that these women are really liberated, that they have power over their lives?

L: I would think that they would think that these are rich girls who are really grown up, who have a lot of control over their lives, and this is just something that they did one night for a whole lot of money and then they went off with their boyfriend or something. I think they look at all these people in these ads as having everything, they are beautiful, they wear beautiful clothes, they have the whole world wrapped around their finger. They want to dream about being them [the models].

I think it is all part of the fantasy. This turns me off because I understand what is going on here, where they might think the whole thing about doing "older" things is great.

NOTES

¹ For indepth theoretical analyses of "ways of seeing" see, Mulvey, L. (1964). Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema. In 8. Wallis (Ed.), *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (pp. 361-373). New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art.; Berger, J. (1973). *Ways of Seeing* New York: The Viking Press.; Betterton, R. (Spring, 1985). How Do Women Look? The Female Nude in the Work of Suzanne Valadon. *Feminist Review*, 19, 3-24.

² Rosie wrote a letter to Tipper Gore in support of her efforts to censor Rock and Roll albums by placing warning labels on the covers. She also made a phone call to a local radio station to protest the language the DJ. was using on the air.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

Advertisers would like us to believe that ads are neither harmful nor harmless. Ads somehow have a neutral quality. They are simply pictures with words, or a way to give the consumer information about a product. There are also those who say advertisements merely reflect society. In other words, an ad that pictures a woman kneeling in front of a man is simply reflecting power relationships that already exist in reality between men and women. Advertisers would also like us to believe that ads are exempt from aiding or hindering social change. After all, if ads are benign, they do nothing to shape social reality in the first place. Therefore, the transformation of sexual stereotypes and gender relations do not concern advertisers. Leave that messy task to politicians and educators.

Advertisers and art directors, such as those quoted in chapter four believe that "new" and dramatic ad campaigns "work" for women. In fact these ads simply re-cast the same images of women's availability and submission, although they are cloaked as something "new." The rich photography with the soft-focus lens helps distance the viewer from the referent. In this way, a sense of the unreal is created, making it more difficult to readily associate the content of the images with the material world. Further, poses of women that suggest unconventional sexual practices, may be construed as an appreciation of woman's new found sexual freedom.

However, these sophisticated techniques for recirculating images of women really say *nothing* new. The spectator is still male, the women are still submissive and available to men. What is new, is **that** some recent ad campaigns portray or **imply** a more graphic female submission; submission to sexual violence. These ads rely on equating female sexuality with **violence**.

Do these ads "work" for women? The limited study I conducted would suggest the answer is no. However, **this** answer deserves some **explaining**. What we are really asking is: from the point of view of the advertiser, do these ads work for women? Recall, that in chapter four *Adweek* describes Georges Marciano advertisements as dramatic, in a category **all** their own. The women in the images were described as being "revealed... in disarray, in obsessive, exciting, **compromised** or dangerous situations." **They** are a natural to "score" with **women** who are looking for adventure **and** glamour. These clothes are worn **by** women who like to take chances.

I do not recall one **woman** I interviewed that **was** not interested in either **adventure**, glamour, taking chances or **some** combination of the above. These ads ask women to view female sexuality through male eyes. These ads might "score" with women who **accept the male** definition of **what** glamour, **adventure** and taking chances **are**. However, the women I interviewed had **very** different **ideas** about these attributes. For Linda, glamour means models who are dressed **in** evening gowns and tuxedos. Heidi's idea of adventure **is** traveling to Europe all by herself. For Nancy an ad that takes chances, shows **women** as competent executives, like **she** is. Women may be trained to see images as a male spectator, but **many** women resist **that** way of seeing.

This ~~resistance~~, however, is generally uttered ~~at~~ the level of gut feelings more ~~than~~ at the level of ~~articulation~~. Sabrina, for Instance, struggled with why ~~she~~ felt the ~~Georges Marciano ads~~ have a sexual aura. She, ~~as a~~ woman, had trouble equating "looking" with arousal. When she saw these ambiguous images, she had feelings that ~~they were~~ meant to be ~~sexual~~, however ~~she~~ could not articulate why. Only Heidi, who had learned ~~about~~ media representations of women from her women's studies class, ~~could~~ articulate why she felt ~~these~~ portrayals of women ~~were~~ disturbing. Until alternative images begin to circulate, the "naturalness" of woman as *sight* will remain.

Implications for Future Research

It is my hope that this study ~~has helped to demonstrate~~ the interrelationship of audience ~~and~~ text. I must agree with scholars such ~~as~~ Nichols and Morley who feel that the text ~~and~~ the audience ~~are~~ two sides of the ~~same~~ problematic and cannot be adequately studied ~~in isolation~~ from one ~~another~~. The reader brings his/her cultural codes to the ~~reading experience~~. ~~It is~~ the reader's social position, background, gender, education ~~and~~ numerous other cultural factors that ~~secure~~ the meaning of the text for him/her. However, the text ~~is a~~ site of meaning ~~also~~. Preferred meanings are encoded into texts. Texts have a dominant ideology of their own. When this ideology is transparent to the reader, ~~he/she~~ will more than likely give ~~a~~ preferred ~~reading~~ of the text.

Perhaps a more troubling consideration for studies of popular media is how to adequately take into account the socio-economic context in which the media ~~is~~ produced and consumed. ~~Who~~ has access to the media in

question, and whose interests does the media serve? In the past, political economists (see Garnham, 1986) and cultural theorists (see Hell, 1986a) have gone about their business almost in isolation from one another. Except, of course, for the usual debates of which comes first, the base or the superstructure. It is time that each position moved to more adequately inform the other. Political economists must come to the realization that the message in texts can have a powerful impact on social organization and meaning construction. Cultural theorists, on the other hand, must be more willing to set their work on popular media in the economic context in which the media was produced and is consumed.

Admittedly, the political economy chapter of this study may be the weak link of the overall study. This fact reflects my own attempts to grapple with the pieces of the puzzle. What is needed is informed social theory which attempts to examine the interplay between base and superstructure, how we learn culture, how in turn culture is reproduced and how this learning is related to economic and political structures in society (see Bourdieu 1984).

Finally, considerations of gender need to be brought to the forefront of more research on popular media forms. Most media forms are produced by men, and reflect a male vision of social reality. They employ male "ways of seeing." Even the most culturally informed research about the polysemous nature of audiences misses half of the most important questions by not examining gender as a central organizing category.

Just how central considerations of gender are to a particular research project may very well depend on the media form under study. In this study, for instance, most of the advertisements examined were supposedly

directed toward women. However, their visual appeal was most definitely directed toward men. Also, Radway's (1984) study of romance readers involved a media form consumed almost entirely by women. Considerations of gender are perhaps more obvious in these two examples, then say, in television viewing. However, as Morley (1986) shows, gender is indeed a prime consideration in family viewing of television. Power relationships pervade family life. The power relationships are generally drawn along the lines of age and gender.

Continued scholarship on the relationship of women to, and in, popular media can help uncover negative representations of women and perhaps assist in offering transformations of those representations. Perhaps we will soon be recognizing a "female way of seeing," not just in the periphery of media production, but also in the mainstream.

APPENDIX A

The following questionnaire is designed to aid in the selection of interviewees for research being conducted by Vickie Shields, M.A., PhD candidate in the department of Communication at Ohio State University. Please fill out the questions to the best of your ability. You are not required to answer questions that you choose not to. Thank you for your cooperation.

1. Your name _____
2. Your age _____
3. Your occupation _____

4. Your sex M F

5. Would you describe yourself as:
(please circle)

Black
Caucasian
Hispanic
 Oriental
Asian
Other _____

6. Are you a member of any group(s) outside the university (please include work-related groups)?

Yes _____ No _____

If you answered yes, please list the name(s) of the group(s):

7. Do you have any children?

Yes _____ No _____

If you answered yes, please list the age(s) and sex of your children:

Age _____ Sex _____

Age _____ Sex _____

Age _____ Sex _____

6. Are your children members of any groups in school or outside of school?

Yes _____ No _____ Not applicable _____

If you answered yes, please list the group(s) they are members of:

9. Do you subscribe to any magazines?

Yes _____ No _____

If you answered yes, please list the magazines you subscribe to:

10. Are there magazines you read regularly even though you do not subscribe to them?

Yes _____ No _____

If you answered yes, please list the magazines you read regularly:

11. Do your children subscribe to any magazines (including subscriptions you buy for them)?

Yes _____ No _____ Not applicable _____

If you answered yes, please list the magazines they subscribe to:

12. Do your children read any magazines regularly even though they do not subscribe to them?

Yes ____ No ____ Not applicable ____

If you answered yes, please list the magazines they read:

13. Would you say that the people you listed in #6 read magazines?

Yes ____ No ____ Not applicable ____

If you answered yes, **please** list the magazines you believe these people read:

14. Do your other friends not listed in #6 **read** magazines?

Yes ____ No ____ Not applicable ____

If you answered yes, please list the magazines you **believe** these people read:

15. Would you be willing *to* participate in a person-to-person 30 minute to 1 hour interview about magazine advertisements at a time and place of your choosing?

Yes _____ No _____ Don't know _____

If you answered yes or don't know, please list your phone number(s) where you can be contacted:

Home _____ Hours you can be reached

Work. _____ Hours you can be reached

Thank you.

APPENDIX E

Interview Questionnaire

The following information is confidential. If the interviewee is referred to in the final report, it will be by first name only. Thank you.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Age: _____

Occupation: _____

Marital Status: A. married
B. single
C. divorced
D. separated

Any children?: A. yes
ages _____
B. no

How many years of education have you completed?

- A. less than 12
- B. high school diploma or G.E.D.
- C. some college
- D. completed college
- E. some post graduate work
- F. Master's *degree*
- G. Ph.D.

At what age did you first begin to read (or look at) magazines for pleasure?

- A. 5-10 years
- B. 11-20 years
- C. 21-30 years
- D. 31 or above

**What is your favorite! kind of popular magazine?
(you may circle more than one)**

- A. fashion
- B. music/Contemporary culture
- C. sports
- D. news
- E. food
- F. Women's magazine
- G. Teen magazine
- H. technical magazine
- I. trade magazine

When you look at magazines is it generally:

- A. alone
- B. with friends
- C. with significant other
- D. with a relative

Do you discuss with others interesting things you see or read in magazines?

- A. never
- B. seldom
- C. sometimes
- D. often
- E. always

With whom do you discuss things you read or see in magazines most often?

- A. mother/father
- B. daughter/son
- C. sister/brother
- D. friend
- E. other _____

**Where do you get the magazines you look at?
(you may circle more than one)**

- A. subscription
- B. newstand
- C. library
- D. borrow from a friend
- E. borrow from a relative
- F. other _____

**Where do you look at magazines?
(you may circle more than one)**

- A. home
- B. library
- C. newstand
- D. bus
- E. friend's house
- F. relative's house
- G. other _____

Do you pay attention to magazine advertisements?

- A. never
- B. seldom
- C. often I do
- D. usually I do
- E. always

Which of the following in an advertisement is most likely to hold your attention?:
(you may circle more than one)

- A. bright colors
- B. attractive models
- C. beautiful photography
- D. **clever** phrasing
- E. **sex**
- F. romance
- G. the product itself
- H. other _____

Can you think of any magazine advertisements you have seen lately that grabbed your attention?

yes _____ no _____

if yes, what was the product? _____

if you cannot **remember**, briefly describe the ad:

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