THE CONSTRUCTING, MAINTAINING AND NEGOTIATING OF GENDER IDENTITIES IN THE PROCESS OF DECODING GENDER ADVERTISEMENTS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of the Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1994

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Approved by
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To my family
and in loving memory of my mother-in-law, Margaret Cawley Shields
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I express sincere appreciation and gratitude for the guidance, patience and wisdom that my advisor, Brenda Dervin, has brought to this research. Her involvement in every stage of this process, from inception to end, made completion possible. I'm grateful, also, for her continued research into human sense-making. Her methodology not only provided the tools for this project, it helped provide the author with alternative ways of seeing human communicating. Thanks go to the other members of my advisory committee, Drs. Joseph Pilotta and James Hikins, for their insights and support at the proposal stage and at the final stage of this research.

I am indebted to a group of fellow graduate students at Ohio State University who comprised a group called, "The Critical/Cultural Rap." Earlier versions of this research were critiqued by this group at their weekly meetings. These critiques were invaluable in helping the progression of this research. Of this group, particular thanks goes to Rob Huesca and Rich DiCenzo. I would like to thank my team of interviewers, Marc Conte, Rich DiCenzo, Lynn Hallstein, Michael Scarce, Pete Strimer, and Therese Wood, for an excellent job well done. The richness and complexity of the data is a positive reflection of their efforts.

Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my life partner and fellow colleague, Peter Shields, for enduring this process with me, and for offering me advice, love and support throughout. Further, I would like to thank my parents, Jeannette and
Norm Rutledge, for excusing my absence for so long and for their unending love and moral and financial support. indebtedness and gratitude go to my mother- and father-in-law, Margaret and Patrick Shields, who too have offered their love, and moral and financial support throughout this process. I thank my beloved daughter, Claire, for bringing sunshine into my life everyday and for reminding me why research for women is so important.
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PUBLICATIONS

Shields, V. R. & Dervin, B. (1993). Sense-making in feminist social science research: A
call to enlarge methodological options of feminist studies. Women Studies
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**FIELDS OF STUDY**

**Major Field:** Communication

**Studies in:**
- Critical/Cultural Studies
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  - Dr. Joseph Pilotta
- Gender and Feminist Studies
  - Dr. Brenda Dervin
- Rhetorical Criticism
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Advertising is a key institution of socialization in modern/postmodern society (e.g., Ewen, 1976; Jhally, 1987; Schudson, 1984). Fueled by the perennial struggle to market goods and services and by the development of a multimedia environment, advertising images increasingly pervade our everyday lives, bombarding us with snapshots of what we supposedly lack and what we need to fill the void. What we supposedly lack typically has more to do with the life styles, looks, and aspirations advertisers seek to associate with the products they are trying to sell than with the inherent qualities and attributes of the products themselves (e.g., Jhally, 1987; Kellner, 1990; Leiss, Kline & Jhally, 1986; Williamson, 1978). Images of ideal bodies, most often female bodies, are some of the most dominant and consistent messages produced by advertisers. These messages, used to sell everything from cosmetics to cars to beverages, provide prescriptions for how women should look and be looked at, how they should feel and be made to feel, and how they are expected to act. In short, these messages prescribe particular constructions of gender identities, for women, and for men in relation to women.

In this study, gender is not considered merely a demographic category such as "sex." Gender is defined as the term that describes the cultural and social basis of roles assumed daily by men and women. Gender is the effect of and is constructed in culture. Rakow (1986) explains:
Gender is both something we do and something we think with, both a set of social practices and a system of cultural meanings. The social practices—the 'doing' of gender—and the cultural meanings—"thinking the world" using categories and experiences of gender—constitute us as women and men, organized into a particular configuration of social relations. (p. 21)

In this sense, then, gender is seen as "cultural accomplishment." Assigning gender to others and "gendering" ourselves is work we do as members of a culture to convey information to others about our gendered identities. Gender, when seen as a culturally constructed process, also can be seen as a site of struggle over who defines the meaning of gender and whose experiences of the world will be encoded into symbolic systems (Shields & Dervin, 1993).

It has been argued that when viewed cumulatively, images that promote an idealized femininity as an ideal for all women to attain, has harmful effects upon gender relations and hopes for gender equality. On a societal level, the ubiquity of the "perfect" female form, and more specifically, the objectification of the female body, has been linked to social pathologies such as sexual harassment, rape and subordination in the work place. On a personal and psychological level for women, this type of body objectification has been linked to such pathologies as eating disorders, obsessive dieting and low self-esteem (e.g., Brumberg, 1988; Chapkis, 1986; Chernin, 1986; Coward, 1985; Faludi, 1991; Gammon & Marshment, 1989; Gilday, 1990; Goldman, 1992; Kilbourne, 1978; Kuhn, 1985; Orbach, 1976; Pribram, 1988; Rakow, 1990; Seid, 1989; Wolf, 1991).

The pervasiveness of images of the ideal female body in advertising has called forth popular and academic discourses that foreground a number of crucial questions: How do these advertising images influence how women and men construct gender identities for themselves? When is gender used as a conscious reference point when viewing advertising images? Who among women and men are more influenced by these images? In what ways do these advertising influences manifest themselves? These questions will guide the study to follow.
The problem

The questions raised above all concern the impact of ads on audiences. Yet, surprisingly, almost all of the research to date has involved analysis of the advertising texts, and/or their political and economic production, and not analysis of audience responses. Certainly "textual analyses"\(^1\) have offered important clues to the ways in which advertising images are implicated in the construction of gender identities. They have done this in two ways, primarily. One has been to analyze the nature of the treatment of women in the content of ads. The second has been to infer from text portrayal to injurious consequences on audiences.

Taken together, these approaches tell us a great deal about the content of, or messages about, gender in advertising. Further, these rich analyses offer multiple perspectives on: 1) gender content as defined through the industrially produced and reproduced structures, such as the mass media and more specifically, advertising and 2) unequal power differentiations based on gender in our society. What they do not tell us, however, is how these images and/or messages of gender in advertising articulate with men's and women's everyday lives and experiences. Feminist textual analyses of gender advertising, especially, offer compelling evidence for power inequalities as structured in advertising messages, but they offer only deduced composites of real audience members, sometimes referred to as "ideal subject positions" (Jensen & Rosengren, 1990). Although the majority of these perspectives acknowledge that real audience members are "active" negotiators with the meanings in advertisements, the assumptive base of many of these theories close down a space for investigation of audience reception.

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\(^1\) Textual analyses use structural, poststructural and psychoanalytic techniques to map the structural and cultural grammars in texts.
While the study of audience responses to ads is not in the purview of these textual analyses, nonetheless, scholars doing this work make powerful inferences about audience behavior based on their conclusions. On the one hand, it is assumed that the construction of gender by audience members is impacted upon in a monolithic way by the pervasively homogeneous messages about women in ads. Yet, on the other hand, the few audience studies available do not confirm this monolithic impact and instead suggest that there is a bewildering diversity in audience responses and that expectation of monolithic effects are insupportable. Thus, this contradiction raises the question of where the "meaning" of mass mediated texts, such as advertising, resides -- in the "author," in the text, in the audience, or in a complex web of signification that links the three. This debate is referred to in this study as the interpretive freedom/structural constraint question. At a very fundamental level, these are some of the central questions raised in Hall's (1980, 1982, 1983, 1985, 1986a) concept of "articulations" in encoding/decoding and Gidden's (1984) concept of structure/agency.

This debate in actuality involves not just analyses of advertising texts but analyses of the entire range of media/communication texts -- film, television, music video, etc. In these research genres we find new interest in what is now being called "audience reception" studies. Although reception studies of advertising texts are rare, a considerable body of work has accumulated on other media (e.g., Bobo, 1988; Hobson, 1982; Morley, 1980; Radway, 1984; Seiter, Borchers, Kreutzner & Warth, 1989; Spitzack, 1988, 1990). Yet, the results have not illuminated the interpretive freedom/structural constraint question. In fact, current reviews of the state of critical audience research have concluded that the concepts of "structures," or "dominant readings" are all but disappearing from the central focus of this research (see Evans, 1990; Morley, 1993). This opus of research, according to Evans (1990), can be characterized by two prominent assumptions: a) audiences are always "active," being free to make any meaning they wish of media texts within particular
contexts, and b) media content are always polysemic, or open to interpretation. It is a major premise of this dissertation, one that will be developed in full, that the examination of the interplay between individual interpretive freedom (agency) and textual (structural) messages is necessary in order to move beyond this dichotomy.

In essence, attempts are being made in audience reception work to find pattern in audiences responses to messages, but only a stockpiling of unpatterned diverse responses has been reported. Included in this assessment are reception studies that deal specifically with gender decoding. These studies, almost exclusively, have been conducted with very specific communities who share an interest in a particular media form or share a specific geographic location. Although these studies have presented valuable findings, they have not been integrated into any systematic cultural theories of "reception," especially reception of mass media whose audience are dispersed throughout the society (e.g. Ang, 1985, Bobo, 1988; Brown, 1990; Katz & Liebes, 1984; Morley, 1980; 1990, Radway, 1984).

Need for study

According to Fejes (1984), "Critical research is organized around an examination of the role that the media play in maintaining and changing the structures of power in society" (p. 229). However, as partial as critical and cultural perspectives on media are to textual analyses of media content and context (and also political economic analyses of media control, ownership and production), much of the scholarly discourse over the past eight to ten years have voiced a common concern about the "disappearing audience" in critical research (Ang, 1990; Corner, 1983; Curran, 1990; Fejes, 1984; Jensen, 1987; Jensen and Rosengren, 1990; Lull, 1988; Moores, 1990; Murdock, 1989; Newcomb, 1984).

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Although there is an assumption in critical research that the media are powerful, "media effects" research has been left largely to more behaviorist traditions of social science.

In the past, critical research has subsumed media effects under broader notions of hegemony and/or ideology or has concentrated on small discrete groups of audience members, in essence stockpiling similar findings about pleasures of and resistances to texts, but failing to integrate these findings into a critical theory of reception (Ang, 1990; Jensen & Rosengren, 1990). In this research, "the style, manner and rules by which the audience incorporate, accommodate, alter or reject media reality as part of their own everyday reality is overlooked" (Fejes, 1984, p. 222). Many critical scholars fear that this inattention to media effects, or audience reception, may prove debilitating to the development of the critical perspective.

A similar concern can be found in feminist scholarship. Feminist scholarship that theorizes the gender spectatorship of popular media is most concerned with audience members who have been systematically undertheorized: the "female spectator," or the "female gaze." These scholars argue that feminist analyses credited with deconstructing narratives that continually place men in control of the gaze, with women controlled by it, have proved invaluable in advancing feminist theory.

However, recent advances in theorizing the "female spectator" assert that not nearly enough attention has been paid to the different ways in which women negotiate with those images constructed for the male gaze (Gammon & Marshment, 1989; Pribram, 1988). These scholars argue that any analysis of the effects of mass media images on female spectatorship must take into account the cumulative nature of these dominant images of gender in this society, and therefore, the taken-for granted nature of viewing them.

This "naturalized" way of seeing gender, especially idealized femininity, problematizes the concept of female spectatorship. In the past, feminist scholarship has classified female looking that found pleasure in dominant ways of seeing as a result of
"identification" with the male gaze (objectification) or a result of "false-consciousness." Recent scholarship on female pleasures in looking, however, conclude that these classifications lack sophistication and complexity (Betterton, 1985; Gamman & Marshment, 1989; Gledhill, 1988). Not only is female pleasure in viewing dominant images of gender not always a sign of identification or false-consciousness, these scholars argue, but women's disdain for certain dominant images of gender do not always result in the rejection of those images. For a woman to reject or stand in opposition to all images that are not constructed for her gaze is to reject most of the dominant images in our cultural landscape.

Feminist scholars of female spectatorship argue that what is needed are analyses of female pleasures in looking that are ideologically grounded. Like critical audience theorists, feminist scholars of female spectatorship want to forge a bridge between the macro structures of power and control of the mass media (specifically structures of gender as defined through patriarchy), and the micro-politics of everyday living (in, with and against patriarchy) (Waldman, 1989). Gamman & Marshment (1989) state that "[w]hat we need is an analysis which can begin to explain in more specific ways the relationship between our [female] pleasures and their ideological grounding, and how we might go about changing these relationships" (p. 6). Scholars like Belinda Budge (1989) believe that what is needed is a new vocabulary that better describes pleasurable and resistant associations women make when looking at images of other women. Further, Christine Gledhill (1988) argues:

[studies of] female spectatorship elides conceptually distinct notions: the "feminine" spectator constructed by the text, and the female audience, constructed by the socio-historical categories of gender, class, race, and so on. The question now confronting feminist theory is how to conceive their relationship. (p. 67)
For Gledhill, theorizing the concept of "negotiation," specifically, provides a positive first step to rethinking the relations between media products, ideologies and audiences and attempting to bridge the gap between textual subject and social subject.

This research addresses both the "disappearing audience" in critical research and the contradictions of the female spectator by offering a portrait of the maintenance of, and negotiation with, gender identities in relation to advertising texts. This study is not posed in opposition to textual analyses, but instead in complementary relationship to "textual" perspectives on the same issues. Furthermore, it will enter into a larger and hotly contested arena of debate concerning the impact of structures (in this case, messages or texts impacting on audiences) and agency (in this case, the communicating activities of audience members) (e.g., Giddens, 1984). This study attempts to explore the dialectical nature of the two.

**Theoretical framework**

The literature to be reviewed in chapter 2 and the analysis to follow is theoretically informed by a cultural studies approach to the study of media production, structure, circulation and reception. More specifically, the "communication circuit" model, elaborated most fully in Stuart Hall's (1980) theory of encoding/decoding, and later expanded to his theory of "articulation" (1982, 1983, 1985, 1986a), will serve as a conceptual frame for examining the various diverse arguments surrounding the textual structuring, the cultural circulation and the audience reception of gender advertising images.

The circuit, as model or as metaphor, is illustrative of cultural studies' attempt to elaborate a holistic view of the communication process (Halloran, 1970; Murdock, 1989). The circuit model was designed to combine the insights of the two competing and well-established schools of mass media research, "effects" and "uses and gratifications." The insights gleaned from effects research were certain kinds of structuring activities, such as
the power of the media to set agendas and define issues. From the uses and gratifications perspective comes the notion of the "active audience." The larger mission of the circuit model, however, was to move beyond the shortcomings of these two perspectives by incorporating interpretive and critical perspectives on how responses and interpretations are structured and patterned at a level beyond individual psychology. The model, therefore, is informed by semiological perspectives on how mass media texts "work."

Morley (1989), in his state-of-the-art review of changing patterns in audience studies describes the central purpose of the circuit model in this way:

It was concerned with matters of ideological and cultural power and it was concerned with shifting the ground of debate so that emphasis moved to the consideration of how it was possible for meaning to be produced. It attempted to develop the argument that we should look not for the meaning of a text, but for the conditions of a practice --i.e. to examine the foundations of communication, but critically, to examine those foundations as social and cultural phenomena. (pp. 17-18)

Recently, many critiques have been leveled against this model, especially its central concepts of "preferred readings" and "preferred subject positions" (see Pillai, 1992; Wren-Lewis, 1983). However, its usefulness as an organizing framework for this study remains, because the central focus of this model, like the central focus of this research, is those points of "mediation" and "negotiation" between texts and readers. The circuit model offers a complex and comprehensive middle ground between the perspective that the text has determinate meaning, and the opposite perspective, that the text is completely open, merely a site where the reader constructs meaning (Morley, 1989).

While attempting to "fill out" the picture of the processes of the production, circulation and consumption of popular media forms, research in cultural studies, out of necessity and for purposes of analysis, has concentrated on particular "moments" in that process and the links between those moments (Corner, 1983; Morley, 1980). For example, much serious scholarship has examined the process by which commercial commodities acquire symbolic meaning, or sign value (Barthes, 1974; 1977; Ang, 1985;
Williamson, 1978; Bennett & Woolacott, 1987; Hebdidge, 1987), or how lived cultures appropriate commodities from the dominant culture to produce new meanings for those commodities in everyday lives (Fiske, 1987; Hall & Jefferson, 1976; Hebdidge, 1979, 1987; McRobbie, 1980; 1984; Radway, 1984; Willis, 1977).

Because analysis often necessitates privileging certain communication practices over others, this holistic process is often discussed in terms of its constitutive parts. For purposes of analysis, the moments of the circuit of communication can be treated separately and the links that form the "articulations" between moments (communication or signification) can also be scrutinized. However, one must not lose sight of the fact that although each moment in the circuit involves distinctive changes of form, the power of the model rests in the acceptance that "each moment depends upon the others and is indispensable to the whole" (Johnson, 1986, p. 284). The moments of the circuit are dialectically interrelated to one another. Each alone cannot give an accurate account of the symbolic value of a cultural formation.

In visual image and advertising research, the greatest insights have come from analyses not only of the encoding processes that produce the images we see, but also of analyses of the internal structure of the texts themselves (Barthes, 1977, 1988; Coward, 1982; Kervin, 1990; Myers, 1982; Nichols, 1981; Shields, 1990; Williamson, 1978). This research emphasizes how the text "positions the subject" through its structural dimensions and its articulation with other competing discourses and ideologies in society. In the case of gender advertising, this type of research isolates the executional elements used to establish gender relationships (Warlaumont, 1993).

The schools of thought most readily associated with cultural studies approaches to the visual text are variations of semiology and/or structuralism and psychoanalysis. These approaches will be explored in chapter 2. However, two other schools of thought have played an influential role in contemporary thinking about gender and advertising. The first
is American mass communications research on sex-roles in advertising, characterized by the use of the method of content analysis. The second is what here will be called the "ritual view" of gender and advertising characterized by a theoretical basis in symbolic interactionism.

This study is most interested in the articulations between the moments of the encoded text and the moment of reception, or "viewing," which is intimately related to the "lived culture" or experiential knowledges and situational influences of the subjects in the context of the viewing. Understanding the moment of reception in its entirety would involve:

[grasping] the specific conditions and practices through which the product was 'consumed' or 'read.' These conditions include all the asymmetries of power, cultural resources and knowledge that relate readers to both producers and analysts, as well as the more fundamental social relations of class, gender, race and age (to list only a the primary ones). (Johnson, 1986, pp. 284-285)

Cultural studies in the past has approached the reader/text relationship, or the articulations between readers and texts, as a series of subject positions. Readers may be seen as taking up either oppositional, negotiated or preferred (dominant) subject positions in regard to the text (Hall, 1980; Morley, 1980). Then again, other cultural studies approaches have shown that the audience may use the cultural form in ways never anticipated or preferred by the text, such as for coping with the larger demands of gender relations in a patriarchal society (Radway, 1984).

Another moment of the circuit of interest in this study are the moments when audiences themselves influence the modes of production of cultural commodities. The discourses and meanings of lived culture continually provide the "raw material" for cultural production (Johnson, 1986). For example, feminist scholars such as Coward (1985) discuss how the insecurities created in women by advertisers who relentlessly present an idealized and unattainable the ideal female body to women, creates a demand that is continually reproduced by the women themselves. This demand is reproduced not simply
because the women buy the products, but because they are culturally educated in what to demand in order to achieve the ideal.

**Encoding/decoding.** Stuart Hall (1980) elaborated the intricacies of the communication circuit in his influential model of encoding/decoding. Revolutionary for its time, this model offered an alternative way to study the text/audience relationship than traditional mass communication models. Hall credits the American "uses and gratifications" paradigm for beginning to look at what people do with the media rather than what the media do to them. However, he sees the limitation of this perspective as its "insufficiently sociological or cultural perspective, in so far as everything is reduced to the level of variations of individual psychology" (Morley, 1989, p. 17). The uses and gratifications paradigm, in Hall's opinion, offers the academic and nonacademic worlds very little in the way of answering the question: how do mass culture texts work? Hall explains that the mass communication field had long given up the notion that there is a direct causal effect of a "message" upon the "receiver," however, the uses and gratifications paradigm, it seemed, had accepted the polar opposite: every individual has the capacity to interpret a message differently, insisting that what needs examining is the different variables, generally psychological in nature, which influence the uses persons make of messages. Curiously, the postmodernist position on media effectiveness seems to end up with some of the same propositions.³ Fiske (1989), for example, states that:

> [p]opular culture is made by the people, not produced by the culture industry. All culture industries can do is produce a repertoire of texts or cultural resources for the various formations of the people to use or reject in the ongoing process of producing their popular culture. (p. 24)

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Hall's theory of encoding/decoding directly critiques both of these positions on mass communication research. Constructed primarily to address the way in which television viewing "works," this model has proved to have wide utility for many reception studies of popular media. For Hall, the production of the television program and the reception of that program by audience members are two sides of a complex communication phenomenon. The production of a television program and the text that results cannot be thought of as a dominant ideological bloc - but instead, must be thought of as produced within a structure of dominance by a group of social actors. However, once produced, the television program is a symbolic text in its own right - not divorced from, but once-removed from "the authors." Although some texts are more polysemous than others, that is, more open to a larger variety of meanings or interpretations, the message system in the text is constructed for a "preferred meaning," or at least a preferred image.

Hall's work, like many theorists influenced by the work of Louis Althusser, relies heavily on the concept of "interpellation," or the structuring of the text to address, or "hail" its reader in a particular way. Within the structure of a text are preferred meanings which are not the mere reflection of authorial "intent." Hall maintains that the encoding of a message is only partially conducted at the conscious level. The intentional message produced is itself framed by an entire set of "unconscious ideological practices" (Morley, 1981), constituted through the producers (themselves social actors).

Given this position, then, one must argue that the decoding of messages is not merely a pluralistic notion of individual audience member's uses and pleasures. Hall suggests instead that the audience of a mass communication text is always decoding within a structure of "dominance." We are born into a culture and a system of language that is "always and already" constituted, functioning, and reproducing itself. However, it is not a "closed" structure; it is possible for the audience to map the meanings in different ways than they were preferred, or encoded. Although a viewer can go as far as to give an
oppositional reading of the text, in other words, rejecting the dominant meanings altogether, the encoding will affect, to some extent, the limits and parameters of that oppositional decoding (Hall, 1980), just as the dominant culture at once produces and limits its own forms of counter-culture (Williams, 1977). "Audiences produce meanings, but have to work on material which has been pre-selected and organized in particular ways by producers" (Morley, 1981, p. 5).4

Hall sees the notion of "preferred readings" and "dominant messages" however, as shifting and fluid. Although messages are encoded in and through structures of dominance, and negotiated and oppositional decodings are not unlimited, moments of "articulation" between a viewer and a text always have the potential to change or to shift, to reconfigure, or even to dissolve. Hall (1985) explains:

By the term articulation I mean a connection or a link which is not necessarily given in all cases, as a law or a fact of life, but requires particular conditions of existence to appear at all, which has to be positively sustained by specific processes, which is not "eternal" but has constantly to be renewed, which can, under some circumstances, disappear or be overthrown, leading to old linkages being dissolved and new connections--rearticulations--being forged (p. 113).

Key to this conceptualization of articulation is: the unity forged, no matter how flexible or shifting, is not random in nature. The particular conditions under which the social structures are configured at the moment of articulation, are not serendipitous. Instead, the particular conditions under which the social structures are configured at the moment of articulation are defined by certain relations of dominance and subordination (Pillai, 1992). This premise will be explore more fully in the discussion of methodology below.

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4 This statement is of course a contemporary version of Marx's dictum, "Man [sic] makes his own history, but not in conditions of his own choosing."
From encoding/decoding to methodology

Morley (1980) was one of the first to test empirically Hall's model of encoding/decoding in his study of "The Nationwide Audience." Since that time, Morley has advanced his conceptualizations of the circuit model and encoding/decoding in empirical research (see Morley, 1986), and in extensive self-reflexive critique about the evolution of his own work and the state of the field in critical audience studies. In a state-of-the-art review of changing paradigms in audience studies, Morley (1989) offers two points of critique particularly instructive for this research.

First, Morley suggests that the encoding/decoding conceptualization overemphasizes class and race, de-emphasizing gender and age as major determinants of decodings. He argues that his study and Hall's model, while paying lip-service to the four categories, in practice only focused on class and race. For Morley, the dimensions of sex/gender are particularly important in relation to mass cultural texts and, for example, "its construction of the domestic sphere in relation to women's position in the family" (p. 8).

Feminist perspectives on reception support Morley's first critique. Feminist scholars argue that gender, understood typically in traditional audience research as one demographic factor among many, is in fact much more than a demographic factor. Gender is a central social organizer (Barrett, 1980; Duelli Klein, 1983; Modleski, 1986; Rakow, 1986), possibly more so than class, race, education and or social status. Gender inequalities and differentiations are constituted throughout the dominant institutions and discourses in society, the mass media being one of the most influential institutions for reflecting and reproducing gender relations (Schwichtenberg, 1989; Tuchman, 1978).

In the past twenty years or so, much progress has been made by feminist theorists in examining how female pleasures, female "ways of seeing," and female constructions of mass culture consumption may be qualitatively different from those of men in this society. One example is the case of traditional standards of viewing comprehension and
"attentiveness." Modleski (1982) makes the point that the structure of the soap opera, a decidedly "female genre," with its disruptions, cliff hangers and unending, non-linear story lines, may be an example of a feminine aesthetic. Because traditionally women have worked in the home and attended to children and domestic chores, their productivity has depended on the ability to do many things at once and on tolerating interruption and distraction. Also, women have had to find satisfaction in work that is only ever temporarily finished, such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, ironing, and so on.

By traditional standards of comprehension and attentiveness, the female soap opera viewer would probably be judged inferior to male viewers of, say, the detective drama, where comprehension and attentiveness correspond to the ability to logically comprehend the linear plot line and decode the meaning of the ending. Modleski’s main point is that the categories of comprehension and attentiveness, in this case, are defined by the assumption that male viewing is the norm and the non-linear female aesthetic mentioned earlier is inferior to that norm. Sex, not gender, is seen as a demographic category that may differentiate viewing skills and preferences. In this dissertation gender is seen as central to decoding.

Second, Morley’s insights into the central organizing position of gender, highlight his advances in conceptualizing the nature of social structures in the process of decoding. Morley’s conception opens up possibilities for examining a multiplicity of competing structures at work at any given moment of articulation with a text. In this schema, the structure of the text itself is not necessarily the most dominant structure in that moment of articulation. For example, the structures that prove themselves most dominant in that moment could be the educational structure, the family structure, structures of gender relations or any combinations of these or others. This conceptualization allows for a notion of an active audience member who operates within and through competing social structures.
Morley, himself presents this second critique in more concrete terms. A second flaw in his operation of the encoding/decoding model, he reports, lies with the notion that the concept of decoding may in fact be blurring together many different processes that should be treated separately, such as attentiveness, recognition of relevance, of comprehension and of interpretation and response. By treating these separate processes as a single act of reading, an act of comprehension/incomprehension and an act of agreement/disagreement may be seen as undifferentiated. There is a "necessity to recognize, in the first instance, the question of the viewer's positive or negative response to the text as a particular cultural form - do they enjoy it, feel bored by it, recognize it as at all relevant to their concerns?" (Morley, 1981, p. 10). Morley suggests that these concerns should precede concerns with the audience's ideological accommodation or opposition to the text, mainly because they may be the more appropriate starting points from which to study the decodings of audiences.

These arguments beg the methodological questions: a) can empirical audience research build in this kind of complexity without losing sight of the central concepts presented in the encoding/decoding model: structural constraint and interpretive freedom are not two equally weighted sides of one process. Even our moments of resistance are bounded by certain structural parameters (Williams, 1977), and b) How can one operationalize research that captures a portrait of when and how viewers decode through "structures of dominance" and when and how viewers resist and negotiate with those structures of dominance? and when and how do social structures constrain, restrict, enable or liberate agency, and when and how individual situational and trans-situational (e.g. demographic) uniqueness sometimes plays as big a part as structural dominance in decoding strategies?

Conceiving of research methods that begin to address these questions suggest ways of tracking certain kinds of movement and process. Further, asking questions that
assume a dialectical relationship between structures competing for dominance at any given moment of articulation, *and* the interpretive freedom of audiences assumes certain characteristics about the nature of human beings and more specifically, about the nature of human communicating.

Dervin's (1993a, 1993b) concept of "verbing" communication adds clarity to the ideas presented by Morley, while at the same time extending the possibilities of the act of "decoding." Dervin's conceptualization of the communicating subject refocuses the notion of a subject who is "positioned" by a multiplicity of competing structures (states), to a subject who moves (e.g., cognitively, emotionally, behaviorally, etc.) through, with, and even against, social structures. Sometimes the subject moves through and with social structures with flexibility and at other times with great rigidity. Shifting emphasis from the human as defined by differing *states* of subjectivity, to a human who is seen as ever-moving from one state to another, allows one to see "difference" in a new light. When focused on the subject who is moving from one state to another, difference can be conceptualized as "both across time (e.g., one entity at the same time) as well as across space (two entities being different at the same time)" (1993b, p. 51). In this schema, difference need no longer be seen as residing solely in moments of individual interpretive freedom, but differences are found *in* communicating. Further:

... differences come into existence *in* communication; differences rigidify *in* communication; differences are bridged *in* communication; and differences are destroyed *in* communication. Likewise structures that attempt to homogenize difference as well as those that attempt to display it come into existence *in* communication; maintain, rigidify, and disappear *in* communication. (1993b, p.51)

In this communication-centered view of human subjectivity, a major assumption is that human beings have the ability to be changeable and uniquely interpretive in their responses from moment to moment and/or highly rigid and predictable in their responses from moment to moment, depending on numerous factors, including what structures prove
most dominant at that moment. Others of these factors include, the life experiences that individuals bring to the viewing, competing or confirming discourses that influence their responses and the structuring of mass mediated message systems as particularly closed and repetitive (such as in beer commercials) or open, comparatively (such as in high art photography cologne ads).

This study will focus on a major methodological contest described it its many facets above. This contest poses the questions, how can we operationalize research that captures a portrait of when and how viewers decode through "structures of dominance" and when and how viewers resist and negotiate with those structures of dominance? and when and how social structures constrain, restrict, enable or liberate agency, and when and how individual situational and trans-situational (e.g. demographic) uniqueness sometimes plays as big a part as structural dominance in decoding strategies?

This study proposes that an analysis of gender advertising as a structuring meaning system can suggest how dominant gender images are continually reconstituted throughout the media and, in turn, in culture. At the same time, the study of gendered subjects’ encounters with advertisements can suggest where the particular sites of struggle for control over the meanings of gender are, and also where the sites of compliance with dominant meanings reside.

As a methodological intervention, then, this study will employ the insights of Dervin, in the form of her Sense-Making methodology to operationalize an audience reception study of the decoding of gender advertisements that is framed within the broader conceptions of the encoding/decoding model, but which extends the conceptual capacities

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5 Sense-making as an academic enterprise has been under continual development since 1972. These insights rest on a corpus of work by Dervin and other authors she has collaborated with. For the most general and complete introductions to Sense-making as a methodology see Dervin (1983; 1997a). For more specific findings on situational vs. demographic predictors of decoding see: Dworkin & Dervin (1985), Dworkin (1987), Atwood & Dervin (1982).
of that model into the realm of the sense-making gendered subjects do in communication with these images.

Purpose

The overarching purpose of this research is to provide an audience reception study of advertising decoding that illuminates the interpretive freedom/structural constraint question by focusing on gender as both structural constraint and as a personal resource for enablement and identity. To achieve this, this study will employ the insights of Dervin, in the form of her Sense-Making methodology to operationalize an audience reception study that is framed within the broader conceptions of the encoding/decoding model, but which extends the conceptual capacities of that model into the realm gendered subjects in communication, therefore focusing on gender "differences" across time and across space, in relation to structures of advertising texts and other competing social structures that subjects bring to the viewing of advertising texts.

A more specific purpose of this research is to understand the ways in which images of the ideal female body in advertising are implicated in the on-going constructions and maintenance of gender identities. This will be accomplished by examining women and men's interpretations of these images by allowing respondents to talk in-depth about how they see advertisements, how they see social structures as pertaining to these advertisements, and how they see their lives as relating to and being impacted upon by both these advertisements and social structures. This study, therefore, will offer empirical evidence about how gender influences audience members' interpretations when viewing advertising messages.

A third purpose of this study is to offer an analysis of gender differences and differences within gender by interviewing an equal proportion of male and female respondents. At this point in time, most propositions about gender decoding are based on
"female spectatorship," or a feminist perspective on how women decode images of other women in media (see Gamman & Marshment, 1989; Pribram, 1988). This work is extremely valuable, and much more needs to be undertaken in order to uncover the silenced voices of women. However, research on male decoding strategies remains small with the exception of scholarship offering only general statements about the different levels of experience that males and females bring to viewing (see Craig, 1992; Dyer, 1982; Tolson 1977). This study will offer insights into male decoding strategies as well as female decoding strategies.

Research Questions

Two research questions guide the analysis to follow. These research questions cut across the theoretical terrain of gender advertising research, both textual and reception studies. The two research questions to follow center on the "articulations" between the encoded message in advertising and the process of decoding those messages by subjects, or more specifically, these questions center on the connections between gendered discourses about the female body in advertising, and the interpretations both men and women bring to the viewing of those discourses. This study is interested particularly in what role gender of the subject plays in this relationship. Therefore, the first research question is: How will female and male decodings of advertising differ in articulations with society, self and others?

The second research question is based on the theoretical assumption that male and female decoding are not essentialist categories and that the particular social, cultural, and emotional experiences each individual brings to the viewing in a particular situation will effect their gendered responses. The second research question is: How will female and male decodings of advertising differ within each gender in articulations with society, self and others?
Larger theoretical questions will guide the analysis also. These questions are derived from the debate discussed in the problem statement over where the "meaning" of ads resides -- in the text, in the audience, or in a complex web of signification that links the two. In other words, this study will examine the relationship between structural constraints imposed by the dominant messages about gender in advertising, how those messages articulate with messages about gender in society at large, and when and how individuals have the interpretive freedom to negotiate with the dominant messages in advertising and in society at large. The guiding theoretical questions are: Where are the particular sites of struggle for control over the meanings of gender by men and women in relation to dominant messages in advertising? Where are the sites of compliance by men and women with the dominant messages about gender as prescribed through advertising?

This analysis, therefore, will shed light on the discursive bridges individuals build between the macro structures of power and control of a mass mediated cultural forms such as advertising, and the micro-politics of everyday living as gendered subjects of these macro structures. A discussion of the research findings in relation to these larger theoretical questions will be addressed in the conclusion chapter of this study.

Outline of chapters

Chapter 2 will review interdisciplinary literature loosely defined as cultural or critical approaches to the various theories and analyses of the relationship between gender and advertising in this culture. Consistent with the cultural studies circuit model, literature that addresses the encoded message structures in the advertising text will be reviewed and literature which addresses the audience decoding of advertising as well as other media texts will also be reviewed. Much of this literature attempts to bridge the moments of textual encoding and audience decoding either from the vantage point of textual analysis that suggests "ideal subject positions" in audience decoding, or from the vantage point of
audience reception, which in turn speculates about the "structure" of the advertising texts. Therefore, for purposes of this review, the moments of encoding and the moments of decoding will not be treated as distinct, dichotomous categories. These literatures are organized by the following broad conceptual frames: The content of advertising portrayals of gender, The codes and subjects of gender representations in advertising, and Gendered decoding.

Chapter 3 presents both the rational for methodological choices made, and the methods used in this research to study gender decoding of gender advertisements. Chapter 3 serves to situate this study within the major metatheoretical contest in cultural studies, feminist studies and across the terrain of critical audience research, introduced in Chapter 1. This contest involves capturing the dynamics and process involved in the articulations between mass media texts encoded in "structures of dominance" and individual interpretive freedom (agency) to negotiate with or even resist those structures. For feminist scholars of female spectatorship the contest involves conceiving of methodological operations that allow the forging of a bridge between the macro structures of power and control of the mass media (specifically structures of gender as defined through patriarchy) and the micro-politics of everyday living (in, with and against patriarchy).

Further, chapter 3 explores how methodological premises advanced through the chosen method of "ethnography" have fallen short in their quest to address this metatheoretical contest. This chapter shows how Dervin's Sense-Making methodology can offer a methodological intervention into this terrain. Unlike cultural studies methodologies that tend to address this contest by centering on the multiplicity of structures and human states that an individual is positioned by when viewing, Sense-Making centers on tracking certain kinds of movement and processes. Dervin's conceptualization of the communicating subject refocuses the notion of a subject who is "positioned" by a multiplicity of competing structures (states), to a subject who moves (e.g., cognitively,
emotionally, behaviorally, etc.) through, with, and even against, social structures. The second half of Chapter 3 will describe in full the Sense-Making interviewing method used in this study, the research design, and data analysis techniques.

Chapter 4 begins the analysis of male and female responses to gender advertisements by addressing the first research question of this study: *How do female and male decodings of gender advertising differ in articulations with society, self and others?* Responses in this study showed a clear division between how men and women discuss the content of gender advertising and how they see themselves as the subjects of gender advertising. Therefore, the gender differences found in relation to these two divisions are analyzed across two chapters. Chapter 4 focuses on gender differences in response to advertising content. Gender differences in responses to issues about advertising content comprised four distinct themes in this study. These themes serve to organize Chapter 4. First, gender differences arose in responses to whether or not advertising is "powerful." Secondly, male and female responses differed when defining and describing "sexism" in advertising and in society. Third, gender differences arose in response to four different gender displays in advertising: "body cropping," "action vs. appearance," "the new working woman," and "motherhood." Finally, respondents differed by gender in their definitions of and reactions to, an alternative aesthetic of femininity in advertising.

Chapter 5 concludes the analysis of research question 1 by focusing on gender differences in how respondents see themselves and others as the socially constructed subjects of advertising. Further, chapter 5 focuses on gender differences in how males and females construct and negotiate with their own gender identities in relation to advertising, society and others. Gender differences in responses to issues of constructed and negotiated subjectivities and identities in relation to advertising, society and others comprised six interrelated themes in this study. These themes serve to organize the first portion of chapter 5. These six interrelated themes include: Ways of seeing, ways of looking, split-
consciousness and narcissistic damage, weight and discipline, disciplining the diet, and female negotiations.

Chapter 5 also presents the analysis of research questions 2: *How will female and male decodings of advertising differ within each gender in articulations with society, self and others?* Differences within gender were defined as those clusters of same gender responses that presented a definite "break" with the overall responses to similar themes by the rest of the same gendered respondents. Differences within gender in responses comprised three distinct themes in this study. These themes serve to organize the second portion of chapter 5. These three distinct themes include: Competing structures to the male gaze, symbolic annihilation of lesbians, gay males and African American women, and male empathy.

Chapter 6, the conclusions, offers concluding analyses to research questions 1 and 2, and also to the guiding metatheoretical research questions: *Where are the particular sites of struggle for control over the meanings of gender by men and women in relation to dominant messages in advertising? Where are the sites of compliance by men and women with the dominant messages about gender as prescribed through advertising?*
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

An interdisciplinary interest in gender and advertising has reached ascendency over the past fifteen years. Academic fields such as communication, journalism, sociology, anthropology and women's studies all have offered theories and analyses of the relationship between gender and advertising in this culture. Consistent with the cultural studies circuit model, which provides the theoretical frame for the study to follow, literature that addresses the encoded message structures in the advertising text will be reviewed and literature which addresses the audience decoding of advertising as well as other media texts will also be reviewed. Much of the literature to follow attempts to bridge the moments of textual encoding and audience decoding either from the vantage point of textual analysis that suggests "ideal subject positions" in audience decoding, or from the vantage point of audience reception, which in turn speculates about the "structure" of the advertising text and also the larger societal structures that inform the encoding process. Therefore, for purposes of this review, the moments of encoding and the moments of decoding will not be treated as distinct, dichotomous categories. Rather, literature from both vantage points will be addressed where appropriate.

Within this loosely defined cultural studies frame, a mosaic of research on gender and advertising exists. This review surveys those literatures that most closely inform the empirical study to follow. These literatures have been organized by the following broad
conceptual frames: The content of advertising portrayals of gender, The codes and subjects of gender representations in advertising, and Gendered decoding.

The content of advertising portrayals of gender

The first serious research studies on gender and advertising were conducted in departments of mass communication, journalism and marketing in 1970s, an opus of research now referred to as sex-roles research. Through the use of the method content analysis, these studies investigated questions pertaining to gender difference and inequality within the content of ads. In the midst of this flurry of content analysis research, Erving Goffman (1976) published his own empirical manifesto on the nature of advertising portrayals in *Gender Advertisements*. Goffman, however, asked very different questions of his data than sex-roles researchers and also employed a very different method for analyzing his results. Guided by the tenets of his chosen theoretical framework, symbolic interactionism, Goffman suggested that the most relevant questions we can ask of advertising are: of what aspects of real life do advertisements provide us a fair picture, and what social effects do the advertisements have upon the lives purportedly pictured in them?

The sex-roles approach and Goffman's symbolic interactionist approach to the study of gender in advertising provide the base of pure textual analysis from which all other textual analyses of gender in advertising either build upon or are a reaction against. Understanding the origins and critiques of sex-roles research on advertising portrayals provides a historical frame for understanding the impetus of current research. Further, and highly relevant to this study, the findings of sex-roles research, invested with liberal feminist values, labels and language, have filtered more readily into the popular discourses of our culture than virtually any other gender advertising research to date. Therefore, audience members are likely to employ the discourses made popular through sex-roles
research when interpreting the content and context of gender advertisements for themselves and in society.

Goffman's research was unique at the time for employing a method now being labeled "semiotic content analysis." Goffman's analysis focused on message structures across the entire discourse of print advertisements containing gender components. Goffman revealed patterns in messages about gender that when repeated constantly and consistently provide a picture of reality that seems natural, real. Goffman's work provides the base for textual analyses that will be reviewed later on which are compatible with the tenets of semiotic content analysis and symbolic interactionism, such as post-structuralist and psychoanalytic approaches. Prominent feminist scholars on gender and advertising, like Jean Kilbourne (1987), for example, build their highly persuasive and widely circulated findings on the nature of gender in advertising on Goffman's original categories. Therefore, sex-roles research and Goffman's original study on gender advertisements are presented here as the corner-stones of research on the nature of advertising portrayals of gender.

**Sex-roles research and content analysis.** The research approach now referred to as "sex-roles research" focused on sex-role stereotyping in advertising, both in magazines and on television. Through the use of content analysis, this approach sets out to show the inequality of male and female representation in advertising. Specifically, sex-roles research has revealed that women in advertising are portrayed by restrictive categories, such as housewife or sex-object, and that advertising reflects a false picture of women's real lives (see Courtney & Whipple, 1974).

In the early 1970s the sub-field of mass communication witnessed a surge in attention to sex-role stereotyping in the mass media, peaking between 1971 and 1979. This rush to research the image of gender portrayal across the mass media can be attributed to at
least three major factors. The first was the re-emergence of feminist writing in the academy spurred on by Betty Friedan's (1963) *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan was one of the first to raise pointed questions about the portrayal of women in women's magazines and the advertisements contained therein. She saw these images on "women's pages" not only as documentation to support her arguments, but as powerful shaping forces in the social fabric and a "critical moving force in creating for women a view of her ideal self" (Courtney, 1983, p. 4).

Friedan found that the portrayal of women between the 1930s and the 1950s had changed considerably. In the late 1930s "women were more likely to be portrayed in fiction as autonomous heroines seeking to fulfill their own personal goals, but as the forties progressed, the autonomous heroine gave way to the glorified housewife, praised and rewarded for her efforts to run the household and nurture others" (Courtney, 1983; p. 3). For Friedan, advertising, perhaps even more than the magazines themselves, were reflecting (if not fostering and perpetuating) a limited life-style for US women by portraying household care and the embodiment of roles of ideal mother and wife as the ultimate goal for women. These roles constituted her most creative opportunities.

Friedan's insights highlight a second factor driving the insurgence of sex-role research in the early 1970s. Advertising and print journalism received special attention because women were dominating, more than ever, many of the consumer groups targeted by advertisers and common sense dictated that the ways in which women viewed themselves in ads might greatly impact the effectiveness of commercial marketing campaigns (Lundstrom & Sciglimpaglia, 1977; Morrison & Sherman, 1972; Wise, King & Merenski, 1974; Wortzel & Frisbie, 1974). This research was concerned with advertising "effectiveness," examining whether, and under what conditions, more progressive, less stereotyped portrayals may be preferred to traditional ones. Of foremost concern was the measurement of causal relationships between women's heightened attitudes about
"Women's Liberation," role portrayal, and product desirability. Several studies, for instance, hypothesized that women would view products more positively if the role portrayal were that of women in jobs or careers (Wortzel & Frisbie, 1974).

Like so much "effects" research, taken as a group these studies resulted in inconclusive findings about segments of consumers who were more or less in favor of progressive role portrayals. Traditional roles are not displeasing to everyone, but do tend to irritate many consumer segments. One consistent finding that emerged from this research showed that "the sex of the product representative in the advertisement, the role portrayed, and the setting for the advertisement should match the product image" (Courtney, 1983, p. 98). Realism in advertising was important, therefore, whether the roles were more traditional or progressive in style.

Mainstream scholarship of gender and advertising has offered rich insight into the "messages" of advertising texts beginning in the 1970s through voluminous content analyses of sex roles and gender stereotyping. Three general types of content analysis concentrating on sex-role portrayal prevailed throughout this era. These included: 1) content analyses of the types and frequencies of male vs. female characters on TV dramas (Downing, 1974; Lemon, 1978; McNeil, 1975; Seeger, 1974; Tedesco, 1974; Turow, 1974); 2) content analyses of women's and men's portrayals in magazine advertising (Belkaoui & Belkaoui, 1976; Courtney and Lockeretz, 1971; Dodd et al., 1989; Pingree, Hawkins et al., 1976; Poe, 1976; Skelly & Lundstrom, 1981; Sexton and Haberman, 1974; Wagner and Banos, 1973; Wohleter & Lammers, 1980); and 3) content analyses of gender portrayals in TV commercials (Bardwick & Schuman, 1967; Cantor 1972; Courtney and Whipple, 1974; Culley and Bennet, 1976; Dominick and Rausch, 1972; McArthur and Resko, 1975; Schuetz and Sprafkin, 1975).

Courtney and Lockeretz' (1971) content analysis of the portrayal of men and women in print advertising was one of the first and also one of the most widely cited and
replicated research studies on the subject. These authors concluded that four general stereotypes of women existed across advertisements in eight major general-interest magazines in the years 1958, 1968 and 1978: 1) a woman's place is in the home, 2) women do not make important decisions or do important things, 3) women are dependent and need men's protection, and 4) men regard women primarily as sex objects (Courtney and Whipple, 1983, p. 7). Studies charting progress in these images in the next few years also charted new problems. Wagner and Banos (1973) found that the percentage of women in working roles had increased, but in non-working roles women were being seen less in family settings and more in decorative capacities. Further, women were seldom depicted interacting with one another or making major purchases without a male also in the picture. These authors concluded that stereotypes pre-dating the women's movement remained and advertising was not keeping up with the times in failing to portray realistically the diversity of women's roles (see also Belkaoui & Belkaoui, 1966).

Little attention was paid to male sex-role portrayal in print ads at this time, with exception of one major study replicating Courtney and Lockeretz' sample from a male standpoint (Wohieter & Lammers, 1980) and one minor study (Skelly & Lundstrom, 1981). These studies found that men are more likely to be shown working outside the home and to be involved in the major purchases of expensive goods. All of these studies concluded that roles of men and women in print advertisements had changed little over twenty years.

Further, although the volume of content analyses on television commercials were greater and included more issues, such as child portrayals, many of the conclusions were virtually the same as with print advertising. Sexual stereotyping was found to be pervasive in both print and television and very little had changed in this regard in twenty years. The findings of one study on television content by Dominick and Rauch (1972), however, deserves particular attention here. The authors found the following:
Women were seven times more likely to appear in ads for personal hygiene products than not to appear.

75% of all ads using females were for products found in the kitchen or in the bathroom.

38% of all females in these television ads were shown inside the home, compared to 14% of the males.

Men were significantly more likely to be shown outdoors or in business settings than were women.

Twice as many women were shown with children as were men.

71% of the women in the ads were judged to be between 20 and 35 years of age; for men only 43 percent were in this category.

Men over 50 years of age outnumbered women over 50 by a factor of two.

56% of the women in the ads were judged to be housewives.

43 different occupations were coded for men, 18 for women.

Of 946 ads with voice-overs, only 6% used a female voice; a male voice was heard on 87%.

(Busby, 1975, p. 107).

Critiques of sex-role research. The critics of sex-roles research are many. However, perhaps the most important critiques to have an impact on the direction of research on gender and advertising have come from within feminist academe (Janus, 1977; Lott, 1981; Putnam, 1982; Steeves, 1987). These critics purport that not only do conceptional or operational flaws need analyzing in this research, the very assumptions underpinning these studies are of consequence—assumptions these critics call the "liberal feminist bias."

Liberal feminism rests on assumptions inherent in liberal theory, which assumes that the state should act to assure equal opportunity for all in pursuing rational mental development. Liberal feminists focus their efforts on creating and changing laws that promote women's opportunities for professional success and intellectual growth such as those concerning equal pay and employment (Shefer, 1990; Steeves, 1987). Liberal
feminists believe that inequity is the result of irrational prejudice and can be solved through rational argument. Relying heavily on cognitive learning theories of modeling behaviors (see Tuchman et al., 1978), liberal feminists believe that "rational argument and legal struggle are effective in both increasing opportunities for women and in providing role models for adult women and for girls" (Steeves, 1987, p. 101). Equal opportunity, therefore, is possible within existing socio-economic structures (Brown, 1990).

This bias shows up in the content analyses of sex-roles in media described above. While these studies suffer from an underdeveloped theoretical framework, they do stress the liberal ideal of increasing women's public visibility by criticizing traditional stereotypes (Janus, 1977; Putnam, 1982; Steeves, 1987). One of the major criticisms with this type of study is that content analyses such as these do not differentiate between form and content, therefore failing to integrate the two levels of meaning into a common framework. Content analyses chart changes in form (for example, change from woman in automobile ad from wearing bikini to wearing a business suit) without adequately addressing the little change in content. This kind of analysis offers a static picture in which an image is described in one moment in time (Janus, 1977).

The feminist critique of sex-roles research is a valid one, themes of which will be taken up in later sections. A more central critique for understanding communication processes, however, is offered by Sut Jhally (1987). Content analysis research of gender stereotyping in advertising places its emphasis on the truth or falsity of representation, when in fact "advertisement images are neither false nor true reflections of social reality because they are in fact part of social reality" (p. 135). As such, advertising needs to be studied as a constituent part of our social reality, not as a distorted reflection of it. Therefore, emphasis must shift from questions of trueness or falseness to processes of "signification." This charge marks a theoretical and methodological shift in gender
advertising research from analyses of manifest content to analyses of the "symbolic potential" of content.

**Gender advertising ritualized.** In the second approach to the study of gender and advertising, less concern is placed on the truth or falsity in representation of the larger society by ads, but rather with advertising's place as a part of society and, more specifically, its ability to "signify" or "communicate" to social actors. This second approach, called here the "ritualistic" perspective on gender and advertising, originated with Erving Goffman's *Gender Advertisements* (1976), a symbolic interactionist approach to "gender display." This approach is most interested in how advertisements offer up ritualized "bits" of real gendered behaviors in order to offer a familiar picture of gender to consumers. Taken as a whole, however, or as a system of meaning, advertising, in fact, offers up a very distorted and hyper-ritualized picture of real gender relationships.

Goffman's *Gender Advertisements* was one of the first and is, to this day, one of the most influential textual analyses of the symbolic potential of advertising images. Goffman was intrigued by the signification (although Goffman would call it symbolism) of advertising images in their ability to look familiar, when on close inspection they portray a world which is really quite peculiar. Goffman's discussion of gender and advertising is based on a symbolic interactionist perspective on communication. To better understand Goffman's "ritual view" of gender in advertising, the symbolic interactionist perspective will be explained briefly.

George Herbert Mead's concept of the duality of self is instructive in this regard. Interactionism suggests that the "I" and the "me" are two integrated aspects of the "self." According to Fisher (1978), "The 'I' is the active portion of self capable of performing behaviors. The 'me' embodies within the self the concept of 'other'--social mores, definitions, attitudes, values, and behavioral tendencies" (p. 167). The "me" provides
direction for the "I." The individual acts as both the subject and object when in interaction with others, with the "me" indicating appropriate action for the "I." This process of experience and interpretation is called "self-indication" (p. 167).

Through the process of "taking the role of the other" an individual assumes another's perspective of him/herself. Further, the individual can assume the "standpoints" (interpretive processes) of others in order to define the self. This definition of self, however, is not always resultant of how the individual is "actually" seen by others, but often is defined by how he/she "thinks" others see him/her. Often referred to as "referential appraisal" or Cooley's "looking-glass self" (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Berger et al., 1976). this line of thinking goes further to suggest that individuals come to reflect the appraisals of others who are important to them. In other words, individuals interpret how they appear to others and how others judge that appearance; they therefore respond to the judgments they "think" others make.

At the heart of all interpretation is "meaning." According to symbolic interactionism, when two individuals communicate it is not through the sharing of identical meanings of the objects of the communication; instead, communication is achieved through an adequate level of common understanding. Each person in the interaction assigns meanings to the symbols used in the interaction. What has been shared is an interaction of the ideas through the symbols used and the interpretations of those symbols. According to Blumler, "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them" (1969, p. 86). Meaning constitutes an individual's reasons for action.

This is all to underscore that changes in how individuals see themselves and how they choose to behave evolve out of their interactions with others. These interactions are shaped by roles, the communicator's social self (Fisher, 1978, p. 174), and rules, followable prescriptions that indicate what behavior is obligated, preferred, or prohibited in certain contexts (Shimanoff, 1980). The "generalized other" is representative of typical
members of a culture or society with which the individual identifies him/herself. The role-taking function allows the individual to align his/her behaviors with those of others within a social setting, and as such, a social collectivity is organized that can perform identifiable actions.

Mass media is one way that the prescribed roles and rules of a society get disseminated, and advertising plays a very large part in our experience of the mass media. For Goffman, advertisements offer highly stylized versions of "the other"--of social mores, definitions, attitudes, values and behavioral tendencies whose meanings must be clear enough to be interpreted in an instant: "The task of the advertiser is to favorably dispose viewers to his [sic] product, his means, by and large, to show a sparkling version of that product in the context of glamorous events. The implication is that if you buy the one, you are on the way to realizing the other--and you should want to" (Goffman, 1979, p. 26). For Goffman, the most relevant questions we can ask of advertising are: of what aspects of real life do advertisements provide us a fair picture, and what social effects do the advertisements have upon the lives purportedly pictured in them?

Goffman compares the "job" of the advertiser--to dramatize and make salient the worth of his/her product--to that of a society, in "infusing its social situations with ceremonial and ritual signs facilitating the orientation of participants to one another" (p. 27). Both must use limited resources to tell a story, both must transform the opaque into the easily readable. When studying gender in advertising, according to Goffman, the uncovering of sexual stereotypes is important, but not nearly as important as attending to how those who produce, and for that matter those who pose for, advertisements can "choreograph the materials available in social situations in order to achieve their end" (p. 27).

Central to Goffman's view of how gender operates in advertising is his notion of "gender display": "[I]f gender be defined as the culturally established correlates of sex
(whether in consequence of biology or learning), then gender display refers to conventionalized portrayals of these correlates" (p. 1). The key, then, to understanding how gender is communicated through advertisements is to understand the notion that advertisements present to us familiar ritual-like displays. Displays, however, in real life or in the world of advertising can, and are most likely to be, polysemic. More than one piece of cultural information may be encoded into them. Further, once a display becomes well-established and sequentialized--say, for example, the steps and gestures involved when a man opens a door for a woman--parts of the sequence can be taken out, bracketed. The stylization itself becomes the object of attention, the actor then having the ability to comment upon it. This is the process of "hyper-ritualization" according to Goffman: "Thus the human use of displays is complicated by the human capacity for re-framing behavior" (p. 3).

Partly because of this web of hyper-ritualization, individuals feel that gender is one of the most deeply seated traits of human beings; femininity and masculinity are the prototypes of essential expression. Gender display, therefore, is at once something that can be expressed fleetingly and at the same time has the ability to characterize a person at the most basic level (p. 7).

Advertisements, then, are actually "ritual-like bits of behavior which portray an ideal conception of the two sexes and their structural relationship to each other..." (p. 84). Actual gender expressions are artful poses, too. However, advertisements exist in a constant state of "hyper-ritualization." Standardization, exaggeration and simplification are found to an extended degree in advertising. The gender displays in advertising are familiar because they show to us rituals in which we engage in real life. However, advertisements further serve to conventionalize our conventions. Cut off from context and taken as a group, advertisements supply us with exaggerated distortion of a world with which we are intimately familiar.
Goffman lends empirical support for his arguments by suggesting six general categories of hyper-ritualizations that showed up consistently throughout the over 500 advertisements he analyzed. Under the title, "The feminine touch," Goffman concludes that in advertising, women, more often than men, are pictured using their fingers and their hands, whether to caress an object, cradle it or outline its surface. Self-touching is also a feminine domain, indicating that the body is a precious and delicate object (pp. 29-31).

Further, Goffman concludes that advertisements rank the importance of the individual by the function they perform, much as in real life. In his section called appropriately, "Function ranking," Goffman explains that most often it is the male who is pictured in the executive role, if only one is taken. The hierarchy of functions is pictured both within, and outside of, occupational frames. In these depictions the male is the one executing the action, giving instruction or overseeing the action. When instruction is given in advertising, generally deference for the instructor by the instructed is also shown.

Interestingly, when males are pictured in the traditional domains of female authority, namely the home, three trends emerge: the first, and perhaps the best mirror of real life, is to picture the male engaged in no contributing role at all, "in this way avoiding either subordination or contamination with the 'female' task" (p. 36). The second is to make the male ludicrous or childlike, therefore distancing the image from real life and preserving the male image of competency. Third, and a more subtle technique, is to picture the male undertaking the task under the watchful eye of the female (pp. 36-37).

Perhaps most important to our concerns here is the category of hyper-ritualizations Goffman calls, "The ritualization of subordination." According to Goffman, a classic stereotype of deference is to lower oneself, in one way or another, either to bow one's head, slump in one's posture or to sit or lay below another. Holding the body erect and the head high "is stereotypically a mark of unashamedness, superiority and disdain" (p. 40).

Advertising embraces these conventions as if they were universal in value. Women and
children seem be pictured on floors and on beds more than are men. Men also seem to be located higher than women in much advertising--drawing on our society's convention of elevating, quite literally, those of superior status, as in a courtroom setting, for example. Further, women much more frequently than men, are pictured with one knee slightly bent--a convention of unpreparedness, and also in canting positions which can be read as an acceptance of subordination. Women tend to smile more in ads than do men. Again, the smile can be read as a type of acceptance and as a mollifier of the male's activity or emotions.

Goffman's analysis forces the reader to reconsider the relationship between advertising and reality. "He also uncovers the assumptions underlying the interpretive codes buried in advertisements and the way advertising acts as an accomplice in perpetuating regressive forms of social relations" (Leiss, Kline & Jhally, 1986, p. 169). In all its familiarity, advertising does not merely reflect reality. Although it draws its materials from everyday life, from real gender displays for instance, the bits of everyday life used are selected carefully and much is habitually omitted. By selecting some things to integrate continuously into the message system of advertising (a good example is the ideal female body image), ads create new meanings that are not found elsewhere necessarily.

Expanding Goffman's analysis. Cultural critics of communication have attempted to build upon, as well as push beyond, Goffman's ideas of gender display. Taken in historical context, these new directions in theorizing are beginning to address more adequately how gender relations can be reproduced when viewed across time and symbolic conventions. Since Gender Advertisements, many scholars have expanded upon the concept of gender display in advertising and what these rituals communicate to us when viewed over and over again (Coward, 1982; Hay, 1989; Kilbourne, 1987; Milliam, 1975; Myers, 1982; Williamson, 1986; Winship, 1981, 1985). Two prominent themes have
emerged in this body of work which are of particular relevance to this study. The first of these themes involves the "photographic cropping" (Millium, 1975) of female body parts to substitute for the entire body in advertising representations. The second theme is the active male versus the passive female in advertising representations.

One recurrent ritualization of considerable concern to these authors is the fragmentation of body parts in advertising, a condition termed "photographic cropping." Women in advertising are very often signified in a fragmented way, by their lips, legs, hair, eyes or hands. The "bit" stands for the whole; the sexualized woman (Winship, 1981, p. 25). Men, on the other hand, are less likely to be "dismembered" in this way in advertisements. Kilbourne (1987), in particular, describes the cropping of photographs of women in advertising as one of the major elements that presents the female as dehumanized, as an object, a male fetish. This, she argues, contributes to a general climate of violence against women. Treating the human as an object is the first step toward the legitimization of committing violence toward that person. Individual ads don't cause violence against women, but the dehumanized gender displays across the discourse of advertising contributes to a callousness towards violence against women (see also Kuhn, 1985; Root, 1984).

In her analysis of the relationship between the positioning of hands and sexuality in advertising, Janice Winship (1981) brings together the theme of photographic cropping with a second theme, the public male and the domestic female. Male and female hands are a part of an entire message system of social representation signifying appropriate gender behavior. In her analysis, Winship juxtaposes an ad of a man's hand holding an open pack of Rothman's cigarettes, the "World Leader," and a woman's hand pouring a pitcher of Bird's custard over a dessert, the caption reading, "home-made goodness." A switching of the hands would disrupt the meanings with which each gender imbues the ad:
A woman's hand does not signify 'world leader'; a man's hand does not signify 'home-made.' But as it is, the appropriately gendered hand allows us to key into familiar ideologies of masculinity and femininity. Those ideologies see 'naturally' masculine or feminine, and the represented hand is 'naturally' a man's or a woman's (p. 30).

Kilbourne (1987) and Williamson (1986) make very similar points about the ideology of the active and "public" male and the passive, dependent, "domestic" female. Williamson names these divisions in representation the "male-work-social" and the "female-leisure-natural." Men are often positioned in very culturally specific and purposeful poses and attire, such as in moments of working, conversing on the telephone, or conveying a commanding stare. Man is positioned as the consumer of the object being advertised. Women, on the other hand rarely have command of the stare, but are positioned in such a way that they are the object of the stare, the product to be consumed. "He needs the product with a drive that comes from his own masculinity, his activity at work [for example], while she needs the product to bring alive her universal femininity, which is represented as passive and completely separate from the social world" (p. 105). He is society, culture and she is "nature." Winship (1981) describes this odd mix of female subjectivity as both passive, yet actively sexual:

This ideology of sexuality in the ad context admits both to a passive, virginal and innocent sexuality--waiting for men, typified by the image of a young woman in long white robes and flowing blonde hair--and to an active experience of sexuality. However, the active experience of sexuality only takes place in a fetishistic mode. Women are invited by the ads to respond to themselves through the imagined fetishes of men--the tights/legs, the lipstick/lips which fragments or distortions of them stand for all their womanness (p. 219).

Therefore, the fragmentation of female body parts in ads presents fetishes of sexuality that are seen as active, yet renders the woman herself passive because the whole woman is only suggested, not represented.
The codes and subjects of gender representations in advertising

Many of the most illuminating studies of advertising images have employed some variation of semiotics or semiology\(^1\) (see Barthes, 1977, 1988; Leiss, Kline & Jhally, 1986; Nichols, 1981; Williamson, 1978; 1986). By treating the advertising image as a "text," semiotic analyses concentrate on the relationships between the ads' internal meaning structures as they relate to the larger cultural codes shared by viewers. Semiology's relationship to advertising is explained succinctly by Jhally (1987):

Semiology is the study of signs, or more specifically the system of signs. A sign is something that has significance within a system of meaning and is constituted of two key elements: the signifier (the material vehicle) and the signified (the mental construct, the idea). The two elements are equally necessary and can be separated only analytically... This is the difference between the signifier and the sign. A diamond as signifier is empty of meaning. The diamond as sign is full of meaning... production produces commodities as signifiers while advertising produces them as signs. (p. 130)

For Roland Barthes (1974; 1977) advertising is a mythical structure where any given advertisement has the ability to produce meaning at many different levels of signification. Barthes' essay, "The rhetoric of the image," is considered germinal for understanding the semiology of advertising. Barthes' original contributions to the semiology of advertisements can be seen as a reaction against the notion that photographic images are "iconic;" a notion first presented by American philosopher, C. S. Peirce.\(^2\) For Peirce, photographs (most ads are photographs) are "iconic" signs. That is, signs which

\(^1\) Semiotics and semiology are often referred to as two names for the same science of signs. However, semiotics is actually a part of the philosophy of Charles S. Peirce, later taken up in the work of Umberto Eco. Semiology, on the other hand, is the theory of Ferdinand de Saussure and elaborated upon in the work of Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan. The work of Saussure, Barthes and Lacan is heavily influenced and intertwined with Freudian psychoanalysis, especially theories of the unconscious. Peirce's semiotics does not address the unconscious, but instead elaborates a theory of the referent.

\(^2\) Barthes' semiological treatment of images at times seems a direct challenge to the theory of founding semiotician, C. S. Peirce, although genealogically speaking, the work of Barthes is of direct decent from Saussure and not Peirce. All the same, Barthes' notion of the "image" seems to be more of an inversion of Peirce's conception of the "icon," than an elaboration of the work of Saussure.
possess some of the properties of the thing represented (the referent). The resemblance of the iconic sign is in many ways analogous to the object. A painting or a photograph, therefore, bears direct resemblance to its object. This, however, is not to say that the iconic sign is a direct mapping of the object. This resemblance of the object, or as Peirce would say, this quality of firstness, \(^3\) implies that the signification of the iconic sign is extremely limited. Because the sign is somehow analogous to the object, the meaning of the iconic sign should be relatively transparent.

Bartłes rejects this notion of the transparent iconic sign. Much like Goffman, he rejects the notion that images are or could be iconic. Instead, images are signs whose meanings are polysemous. Barthes explains that an icon or an analogic code, lacking communicative properties, is a site of resistance to meaning. Analogy is perceived as an inferior meaning. Advertising images possess linguistic properties; instead of a site that is resistant to meaning or having only one meaning, the image is polysemous, bearing an almost infinite chain of meanings.

In reality, however, certain visual images are constructed in such a way that the possibilities for multiple readings are closed down. Images such as advertisements and press photographs (see Hall, 1981) have an intentional or "preferred" signification. In these images signifieds are generally transmitted as carefully as possible, closing down the possibilities of readings. The producers or "encoders" of the advertising image attempt to affix signifieds to signifiers. One of the easiest ways to do this is through the use of linguistic text. Words serve to make redundant the preferred reading of the image. When words accompany an image, the possibilities for meaning are significantly reduced.

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\(^3\) For Peirce, signs possess three philosophical qualities; firstness, secondness and thirdness. Firstness is a quality "of being there" without reference to anything else. This quality exists independent of our perception of it. Secondness refers to a thing receiving an effect by something else. While, thirdness brings any relation of relatives together. According to Peirce, we must analyze this quality of thirdness in order to explain human culture. See Buchler (1955).
Barthes posits that the image has meaning at three levels: the linguistic message, the coded iconic image and the literal image. The text helps to 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, a photographic image of Brooke Shields in Calvin Klein jeans may connote leisure, glamour, youth, sex, innocence, American lifestyle. The literal image is not the referent itself, but instead the material evidence of the referent that was originally present (in other words, a photograph did require a model, but we are not experiencing that moment, only the material evidence that it did happen). The literal image give the sense of "having been there."

Barthes' three levels of signification in advertisements are in many ways a reflection of the time in which he was writing. Prior to the 1970s trends in advertising imagery could be traced to particular cultural frames of reference. For example, from around 1890 to 1910 the presentational style of advertisements emphasized utility, or "use-value" of the product. In the period of the 1920s to the 1940s, the presentational style of advertising attempted to associate commodities with abstract qualities and values. In the period of the 1950s and 1960s (when Barthes was writing on advertising) advertising took on a narcissistic cultural frame where satisfaction was judged in interpersonal terms (see Leiss, Kline & Jhally, 1986). However, beginning in the 1970s through the present, a major trend in advertisement imagery is an emphasis on "lifestyle." Today, many product images are totems for lifestyle achievements and subgroup membership are used in combination. This technique in advertising contributes to what scholars such as Hay (1989) and Corner (1983) call the "recombinant culture."

During the present totemic phase the identifying feature of the preceding periods are recalled and synthesized. The product-related images are gradually freed from serving only narrowly utilitarian qualities of the thing itself. .., abstract and authoritative symbols. .., or too restrictive array of interpersonal relations. Here, utility, symbolism, and personalization are mixed and remixed under the sign of the group. Consumption is meant to be a spectacle, a public
enterprise: Product-related images fulfill their totemic potential in becoming emblems for social collectives, principally by means of their associations with lifestyles. (Leiss, Kline & Jhally 1986, p. 295)

Lifestyle advertisements and advertisements which simply capture "a look," are purposefully ambiguous. Meaning in these ads can hardly be considered the domain of the linguistic properties of the text itself. Nichols (1981) argues that the ambiguous advertising image (the emblem) is much further removed from the icon than even the images that Barthes examined.

While Barthes' analysis of the linguistic properties of individual advertisements is considered germinal, both Williamson and Nichols have moved to refine and also expand Barthes' ideas in order to analyze the inter-textuality of advertising as discourse. In other words, these two authors are concerned with how individual advertisements are interdependent on one another as well as the cultural codes brought by viewers, for meaning.

Jhally (1987) explains that "in the semiotic tradition this is referred to as the utilization of paradigmatic structures of interpretation (which make use of resources outside the text) rather than strictly syntagmatic structures (based on a purely internal reading of the text)" (p. 140). This semiotic system of interpretation implies more levels and elements of meaning construction than does Barthes' analyses. The concept that unifies the different elements of the process of meaning construction is that of the code. A code is the store of experience upon which both the advertiser and audience draw in their participation in the construction of 'commodity meaning' (Jhally, 1987, p. 140).

Judith Williamson's (1978) analysis of how advertisements can be "decoded" employs both semiotics and structuralism in order to explore the meaning structures of individual advertising images in relation to the larger structure of advertising "as currency." For Williamson, advertising can be thought of as a "currency of signs." Advertising helps to invest commodities with value. Not merely a utility value, but a value attached to an
"image" or a "look." Williamson points out that the way in which advertisers invest their products with value is by differentiating the image of their product from the images of other products in the same marketing category. The value of the image, therefore, is dependent upon the viewers' abilities to make references to the other products in the category.

Ads have the ability to signify to us when we know the cultural codes that allow us to reference what the signs replace. We, by bringing our own referent systems to the viewing, complete the transfer of meaning, or "significance," to the commodity. Images of gender are highly structured cultural codes in this society. The transfer of codes of sexuality are probably more widely accessible to more people than other cultural codes and are therefore continually recycled in the symbolic world of image production.

These systems of meaning from which we draw the tools to complete the transfer (from meaning to commodity) are referred to by Williamson as referent systems. They constitute the body of knowledge from which both advertisers and audiences draw their materials. Mass media advertising, therefore, plays the role of mediator. "For the audience properly to decode the message (transfer meaning), advertisers have to draw their materials from the social knowledge of the audience, then transform this material into messages (encode), developing appropriate formats and shaping the content in order that the process of communication from audience be completed" (Jhally, 1987, p. 132). It is this point which separates the advertising image from other forms of artistic visual images. Unlike an artistic photograph, the advertising image is not the thing it represents, but instead a part of a referent system, dependent on the viewer's understanding and interpretation of the codes of advertising in general. Understanding this referent system requires an understanding of the larger cultural codes that the spectator brings to the viewing.

This method of decoding advertisements is based on the work of French linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure (1956) tells us that in the English language we know the meaning of a thing by knowing what it is not. We know that C-A-T is not D-O-G. It is
through the *difference* between the sound image\(^4\) of C-A-T and the sound image of D-O-G that each has meaning for us (Hawkes 1977). Based on this concept from Saussure, Williamson concludes that for the viewer, the value of a product depends more on what it is *not* than what it *is*.

For example, types of colognes, jeans, paper towels and so on have very little significance of their own. Advertisements invest products with a value by relating the product to a person, object, emotion or image which already has value for us. Products not invested with such value through advertising are "generic." For instance, Calvin Klein jeans are invested with value when they are differentiated from Levis jeans. An advertisement of Brooke Shields in Calvin Klein jeans is a sign which invests the jeans with the image associated with Brooke Shields. What is possibly signified is that young, beautiful, successful women wear Calvin Klein jeans; Brooke Shields becomes the signifier.

It follows, therefore, that viewers give signs value through the recognition of what they replace. By transferring the significance of Brooke Shields to Calvin Klein jeans we are acknowledging a value we place on the image of Brooke Shields. Of course advertisers hope this is a positive value. However, whether positive or negative, this value differentiates Calvin Klein jeans from Levis and Lee jeans.

In order for this system of currency to have meaning for the viewer, he/she must be able to associate the image of the product with a value which is in turn based on his/her own cultural codes. "Recognition," then, is the viewer's first level of involvement with the meaning of advertisements. The second level of involvement is the advertisement's ability

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\(^4\) For Saussure, the sign is arbitrary. The sound image (meaning literally that we name through sound) is equal to the signifier in contemporary semiology. Saussure referred to the signified (as we now think of it) as the "concept." Saussure's linguistic theory does not address the referent. For Saussure, the meaning of representation is nothing more than another representation. The sign does not "stand for" an object in general, but in very specific ways. See Saussure (1956).
to signify the viewer to her/himself. Advertising insists that we differentiate what kind of person we "are" in relation to a specific product. The product can then be exchanged for the quality of the person(s), as exemplified with "the Pepsi generation." If we drink Pepsi we are signified as something qualitatively different than if we drink Coke; and if we wear Calvin Klein jeans we are signified as being a different kind of person than someone who wears Levis 501 jeans (Shields 1990).

Differentiation cannot be interpreted as a wholly overt and cognitively conscious process, however. Differentiation is often affective and sensual. Many fashion advertisements, for example, operate at a level of social significance that is once-removed from the use-value (utility) of the commodity being advertised. The sensuality of the image does not define the commodity, so much as it differentiates the sensuousness of one commodity from the sensuousness of another.

This process of differentiation removed from use-value is explored fully in the work of Haug (1987). For Haug, differentiation is achieved through the process of "commodity aesthetics." Commodity aesthetics is the quality invested in certain advertisements that attempts to achieve semblance with our longings (desires), and not necessarily our needs. Because longings and desires are far more ambiguous than needs, semblance with the viewer's longings and desires operates at the visceral level of sensuality as well as the cognitively conscious level of decision-making. Perhaps the most pervasive means by which commodities are sensualized is through the use of sexuality stimulating semblance. In advertising this semblance is achieved through sight.\(^5\)

Haug draws upon a combination of semiotics and psychoanalysis to make the point that the general suppression of sexual drive accompanied by the semblance of sexual

\(^5\) Of course many magazine advertisements now are attempting to arouse the level of the sensual by olfactory as well as visual means. Many cologne ads are now heavily scenting their advertisements. Often times the scent becomes a part of every page of the magazine. Therefore, even if the reader chooses to not attend to the cologne advertisement, there is an effect at the visceral level.
images in commodity aesthetics leads to a general sexualization through "sight." Sexuality then, takes on an exchange-value all its own. It is an ambiguous discourse that can be visually attached to virtually any commodity in order to lend the commodity value. Therefore, when bikini-clad women appear in a commercial for Old Milwaukee beer, the relationship between the sexuality of the women and the commodity (beer) does not appear to be arbitrary. The sexuality of the women is a general exchange-value lent in this case to the value of beer, but could just as easily be lent to the value of an automobile or cigarettes.

Critiques of semiology and advertising approaches. As insightful as his analysis is, Haug presents sexuality as a form of general exchange value almost as an arbitrary example to make his point. The choice, however, is not arbitrary at all. The old adage, "sex sells" rings quite true here. The association between sex and commodities is naturalized in Western societies. It is a cultural "way of seeing." Furthermore, this sexualization of commodities is by no means gender-neutral, or equal (Williamson and Nichols seem to miss this point in their analyses also). The sexual semblance of commodities is an appropriation (and in many cases a perpetuation) of dominant discourses and representations of gender in the larger society. Traditionally, it is the female body that has served as the object of sexual stimulation in advertising as well as most other mass-mediated forms. Although the male body is now also represented in this capacity, there is little confusion over which gender has traditionally occupied this dubious position in representation (Shields, 1990).

Annette Kuhn (1985) suggests that this cultural way of seeing the female form as the object of visual sexualization has very material and historical roots. She 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 been conceived, owned, managed and produced by males. Therefore, it is important to remember that the repetitious presentation of gender that we are so familiar with is the historical result of one gender's discretions.

John Berger (1973) expands on these ideas when explaining 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 the 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 high culture, the properties of which have come to define quality in aesthetics. The popularity of the nude was conceived and enjoyed within a particular material context. According to Berger, "in the art-form of the European nude, the painters and spectator-owners were usually men and the persons treated as objects, usually women" (p. 63). However, the codes of high culture aesthetics seem to deny this materiality. The nude is not an iconic sign for female nakedness. The codes of high culture aesthetics deny that the referent is the subject of the gaze; instead "the nude" is objectified, a spectacle in its own right (Shields, 1990). The aesthetic "value" invested in the tradition of the nude in European oil painting has been instrumental, according to Berger, in molding the acceptable way of viewing women today.

**Positioning the gendered subject.** Another prominent approach for studying gender and advertising is derivative of psychoanalytic theories of language and visual images. A psychoanalytic approach to the study of media addresses how "the subject" is positioned by the text, whether the text is an advertisement or a film, and how male and female subjectivity are reproduced through language and image. The psychoanalytic perspective can be credited with giving scholars of gender advertising the theoretical tools to analyze the concept of the "male gaze" and the "voyeuristic gaze" encoded in photography and cinema. Further, feminist scholars of gender advertising have relied heavily on the
construct of the "split-consciousness" of the female subject to theorize how advertising works to further encourage women to view themselves as objects to be improved upon for the male other, rather than to view themselves as subjects of their own femaleness.

The far-reaching influence of continental theories of structuralism and psychoanalysis for the study of representation, both in film studies and in still visual images, is immense. Perhaps the most influential figure in this movement is Jacques Lacan (1968; 1977). Lacan's contribution to psychoanalytic theory is a re-reading of Freud which more adequately incorporates a theory of language, a theory of the symbolic. Closely associated with the semiology of Saussure and the ideological theories of Althusser, Lacan's theory of "the subject" uncovers the relationship between the Unconscious and the Symbolic.

In order to fully understand Lacan's influence on the scholarship to follow, one must begin by examining what is meant by "the subject." Lacan's subject provides the foundation for a materialist theory of subjectivity in social processes. Lacan analyzes the determinacy of language in the construction of the subject as it is imposed on the human subject in history and in ideological formations (Coward and Ellis, 1977).

Lacan's most noted theory in later scholarship on representation, and which provides the base for gender studies of subjectivity, is his thesis in Écrits (1977) on the "mirror stage." The mirror stage refers to the moment in time when the human baby enters into the world of the symbolic, leaving behind forever the world of "the real." According to Lacan, very early in its life the human baby becomes a subject by losing its direct relationship with the body of the mother. Its first binary oppositions experienced, here/gone, are much the same as the baby's first contact with the mirror, baby here/baby gone. Binary oppositions for Lacan, like Saussure, are the basic units of language, a system of difference. The result is the split subject. The split subject emerges into language and an absolute separation is set up between the Imaginary (binary oppositions:
subject/mother; subject/ideal) and the Symbolic (split subject in language and history; actual and variable symbolic structures).

Moving through the mirror stage does not constitute the baby as a unified ego (as in humanist philosophy or ego psychology). Instead, he/she is constituted by the "lack" or "absence" of an unmediated real. The unified ego is itself an ideology or a fantasy. Because the subject lives in language, culture, the symbolic, he/she is separated from the real. "Why should the subject be whole?..." asks Lacan in his seminar of 1954-55, "we haven't the faintest idea. Have you ever encountered whole beings? Perhaps its an ideal. I've never seen any. I'm not whole. Neither are you. If we were whole we would each be in our corners, whole, we wouldn't be here, together trying to get ourselves into shape, as they say" (p. 243).

Central to Lacan's theory of human subjectivity is his distinction between the "unconscious" and the "preconscious." The unconscious, for Lacan, operates by a crude sliding of images, sounds, smells etc. It is an area of high affect--loves, needs, desires etc.--that cannot tell the difference between satisfaction and the hallucination of satisfaction. Language is structured in the unconscious. The preconscious organizes subjectivity as a system of differences. It is a system with low affect attached to loves, needs, desires, etc., and operates by displacing those emotions. The preconscious acts as a kind of censor and discipline for the unconscious.

Psychoanalysis as a theory of the human's emerging sexuality has been fiercely criticized for its degradation of the female, presenting her not for her difference in femaleness, but as her "lack of," and therefore inferiority to, maleness (or, more specifically, the penis). In this schema, female subordination in society is located in the structures through which sexual identity is acquired (the Oedipal complex) and in the immutable structures of the psyche (Burniston, Mort and Weedon, 1978; Irigaray, 1985; Mitchell, 1975; Spivak, 1989). These critiques emerge, of course, in reaction to Freud's
theory of the Oedipal Complex. Lacan's re-reading of Freud's Oedipal Complex, what Lacan calls the Oedipus phase, has however proved more palatable for feminist scholars in that it not so much dooms femininity to an essentialist subordinated position in society, but instead, provides with startling accuracy, descriptions of patriarchy in process (see Benjamin, 1986; Rose, 1986).

Lacan's Oedipus Phase is the process by which the baby becomes a sexed subject. When born, the infant is neither aware of itself as a distinct person nor of gender. However, when the child emerges in the Symbolic from the Imaginary, the harmony of dual relation in the Imaginary is disrupted by a third relation, The Father, or the law (of culture).

In this schema, the figure of the father represents the fact that a wider familial and social network exists, and that the child must seek a position in that context. The child must go beyond the imaginary identifications of the dual realm in which the distinction between 'me/you' is always blurred, to take a position as someone who can designate himself [sic] as an 'I' in a world of adult thirds. The appearance of the father thus prohibits the child's total unity with the mother, and . . . causes desire to be repressed in the unconscious. (Flitterman-Lewis, 1987, p. 178)

Possession of the phallus, thus allows direct identification with The Father, while non-possession does not. For Lacan the phallus is a socially organized symbol of the difference between male/female, in patriarchal societies it is a symbol of male power and privilege.

Female subjectivities. Lacan's conceptions of human subjectivity inform theories of representation as far ranging as film studies, advertising studies and television criticism (see Flitterman-Lewis, 1987). For example, Judith Williamson (1978) suggests that advertisements attempt to represent to us the central object of our desire, the unified (but of course unattainable) self. "Ads set up, in your active relationship towards them, the fictional creation of an impossibly unified self: an 'Ego-Ideal" (p. 65). They suggest that
you can become the person in the image in front of you. Advertising feeds off our desire for coherence and for meaning, by at once alienating our identity and constituting us as one among many objects. We then make the exchange for an image that gives us back our own value.

Nowhere is this process more pronounced as when offering women images of other women, particularly in advertising, but also in film and television. This concept of women being sold the ideal image of themselves is what has been described in cultural studies literature as the "split-consciousness" of the surveyed female. In a patriarchal society most representations of women connote "other-ness," difference from the male norm (Kuhn, 1985). Females are the objects of the gaze as opposed to the subjects of the gaze.

[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. (Berger, 1973, p. 64)

The male gaze connotes significantly more than mere voyeurism, however. It is a controlling gaze. "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 the woman in general (Kuhn, 1985, p. 11). Laura Mulvey (1975) further explains the concept of the gendered gaze:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. the determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. (p.366)

Rosalind Coward (1985) contends that the male gaze encoded in photographic images is an extension of how men view women in the streets. The naturalness of this way
of seeing the female body follows from its pervasiveness in all arenas of female representation as well as experience. Put more simply, "'men act' and 'women appear.' Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at . . . The surveyor of women in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object - and most particularly an object of vision: a 'sight'" (Berger, 1973, p. 47). The "split-consciousness" then, of the surveyed female is her embodiment of the object of the sight and simultaneously her awareness of being the object of the sight. It also allows for a way of seeing that seems natural in appeal to both male and female spectators. If aesthetic appeal of the female body is naturalized for both males and females, it also seems natural that the female body is represented as sexualized more than the male body.

These dominant "ways of seeing" are insidious throughout the discourse of advertising. However, as Kathy Myers (1982) explains, advertising images are constantly evolving and changing. Codes of image production are in a constant state of mutation. Advertisements, unlike most other mass media, absorb societal changes into their discourse quickly; appropriating and incorporating shifting cultural codes into images and text. Often times this incorporation involves recirculating old stereotypes in new "garb;" advertisements for bras that offer "New Freedom" and ads for cigarettes that suggest "we've come a long way, baby," for example. This type of advertisement may at first glance look "progressive" in its message when in fact it is simply recirculating traditional gender messages in new ways.

"The ability of the [advertising] media continually to create new meanings gives a certain instability to the image, which constantly threatens to escape the analytic categories or stereotypes within which we seek to contain it" (Myers, 1982, p. 89). For example, across the wide spectrum of photographic media, from family portraiture to soft and hard-core pornography, conventions of poses, of pouts, of camera angles of lighting and so on, are continuously shifting and overlapping.
Many fashion ads, for instance, borrow conventions from soft core pornography\(^6\) (Coward, 1982, 1985; Kuhn, 1985; Myers, 1982). Coward contends that the codes which categorize 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" (Coward, 1982, p. 16).

One of the major differences that separate fashion advertising from pornography, however, is the way in which the photograph positions its subject. Traditionally, the spectator of fashion advertising is positioned in such a way as to connect the pleasure of looking with the value of particular commodities. Unlike pornography, where the image is placed for \textit{instant} gratification by the spectator, fashion advertising works to \textit{displace} the spectators' instant satisfaction. The fashion image promises satisfaction upon obtaining "the look", and the look can (and must) be purchased.

What most advertisements "of" women give "to" women is the promise to enhance and improve their physical appearance by way of purchasing a product. However this is rarely achieved through straightforward prescriptions, but rather by offering the viewer a "look," a style. Advertisers offer up the power to achieve the look. "But unlike advertisements directed at men, this is not the power over people and things, but power of becoming the perfect "sight" (Root, 1984, p. 66). This type of power is limited. It is most often achieved through sexual display in place of subjectivity. Where male sexuality is traditionally defined as active, seeking and decisive, female sexuality is defined as responsive and in the position to elicit a response from the male (Coward, 1985).

\(^6\) "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, 43).
Gendered Decoding

What, then, does textual and cultural criticism tell us about gender decoding of advertising images? How does it theorize the gendered text/gendered audience relationship? In the literature, predictions of male decodings are sparse at best. A few authors have commented on the nature of male decoding in the confines of their larger arguments (Dyer, 1982; Tolson, 1977; Winship, 1985). Their observations will be discussed in contrast to female decoding in the discussion to follow. One reason for this "lack" of theory on the male spectator as decoder may be the inherent assumption that the male subject will generally decode along the dominant patriarchal construction of the text. The representation is made for him. There is no need, therefore, for negotiation or distance. The gaze encoded is male, and the maleness of the decoder is a "natural" psychoanalytic fit with it. Therefore the 'ideal subject position' in the text will parallel the response of the "real" subject.

This argument is what many feminist scholars would call essentialist (see Barrett, 1987). Male audience members, like female audience members, bring their own experiences, situational constraints, background and sexual orientation to the viewing. Feminist scholars such as Michele Barrett, emphasize the need to resist viewing the differences between men and women as the only and most important divisions. Experiential differences within each gender, such as class, race, education, and sexual orientation, are equally as important to investigate. Although the literature makes a compelling case for the fact that males and females will decode differently, this should not also suggest that male decoding will be monolithic in nature.

There are numerous situations where female and male decoding could show differences within gender. For example, recent gay and lesbian film criticism on looking and spectatorship suggest that not only would lesbian women find different pleasures in looking at women than straight women, there are enormous differences between lesbian
pleasures in looking and gay male pleasures in looking (Dyer, 1982, 1984, 1987; Gross, 1991; Kielwasser & Wolf, 1992; Medhurst, 1985; Neale, 1983; Stacey, 1989). Another scenario that could show differences in decoding is men's exposure to feminist thought and consciousness as opposed to the decoding of men without this consciousness. This proposition has not bee actively pursued in cultural theory, beyond an initial study of "high feminist vs. low feminist" viewing patterns and TV use conducted by Lull, Mulac & Rosen (1983).

In contrast to the lack of theory on male decoding, and decoding within gender categories, scholarship theorizing "the female spectator" is growing rapidly, especially in feminist film and television criticism (Betterton, 1985; Bobo, 1988; Brown, 1989; Budge, 1989; Byars, 1988; Coward, 1982, 1985; Doane, 1982; Gamman, 1989; Gledhill, 1988; Gordon, 1984; Holland, 1983; Kaplan, 1983, 1988; Lewallen, 1989; McRobbie, 1984; Moore, 1989; Mulvey, 1989; Radway, 1984; Roach and Felix, 1989; Tuchman, 1978; Waldman, 1989; Young, 1989). With the exception of studies by Janice Radway and Jacqueline Bobo, the theories offered in this literature on female spectatorship are not derived from audience studies, but from textual analyses of either film or television apparatuses, advertising as cultural discourse, or more abstract psychoanalytic theory.

Scholarship on female spectatorship is interested in exploring beyond the entrapment presented by the concept of the "male gaze," to pose the following kinds of questions: How do women look at women? Are female looks at other women always about identification? Or do dynamics of fascination and difference have other, more progressive resonances? (Gamman and Marshment, 1989). More specifically to this study: If the male gaze is the pervasive address of visual images in Western societies such as this, and if the male gaze is merely an extension of permissive male looking, how and where do women find pleasure in looking at these images? In the case of many advertisements where
the commodity is marketed to women, but the visual construction is for the pleasure of the male, how do these images "work" for women?

**Narcissistic Damage.** Traditionally, female pleasure in looking has been considered a form of narcissism. This theoretical position holds that woman is innately vain, finding pleasure in scrutinizing and assessing her outer image (Betterton, 1985; Coward, 1985). The result of this assessment is the need to masque the appearance in order to improve upon her personal beauty. One of the by-products of the pleasure of self-adoration is the need to gauge one's own beauty by assessing the beauty of others critically. The "others" referred to here are not only other real women, but also the women in the mass media. The flawless beauty of magazine cover girls and Hollywood screen goddesses set the standard for this assessment of feminine beauty. In real life women work toward this standard as a goal of achievement, measuring their success by the reflection in the mirror and more importantly, the attention gained by men as well as other women out in "public."

Feminist scholar Rosiland Coward (1985) contends that this explanation of women's pleasures in looking is extremely inadequate. Female pleasures in looking (at images of other women for instance), have much deeper cultural roots than a psychologically-based theory of female narcissism would suggest. Coward suggests that it is not self-love that leads to a woman's obsession with her own image, it is actually a form of *self-hate*. Coward calls this form of feminine self-hate "narcissistic damage" (p. 80). Yes, women are fascinated with their own images, but not so much out of a sense of desire or pleasure as out of a sense of anxiety and urgency. In a highly visual and image-conscious society such as this, a woman learns at a very early age that physical appearance is probably the most crucial way in which men form opinions about her worth. Therefore, feelings about appearance and self-image easily get mingled with feelings about security
and comfort (p. 78). Absorption into the world of one's own image can be seen as a means of cultural survival, a bid for acceptance.

Given Coward's arguments, it follows that the female gaze can be theorized as doubly constrained; as a lack (or absence) in the text of the visual image and constrained by convention in larger society. Women have been denied the control of the possessive gaze and are also denied the legitimate role of voyeur in public arenas. Males, therefore, possess not only the gaze, but the power that gaze imbues.

The ability to scrutinize is premised on power. Indeed the look confers power; women's inability to return such a critical and aggressive look is a sign of subordination, of being the recipients of another's assessment. Women, in the flesh, often feel embarrassed, irritated or downright angered by men's persistent gaze. But not wanting to risk male attention turning to male aggression, women avert their eyes and hurry on their way. (Coward, 1985, p. 76)

Further, Goldman (1992) explains that the power of the gaze in advertisements is invoked more by what ads conceal than what they make visible:

These ads conceal diverse forms of terror experienced by women who objectify themselves. There is the mundane psychic terror associated with not receiving 'looks' of admiration--i.e., of not having others validate one's appearance. A similar sense of terror involves the fear of 'losing one's looks'--the quite reasonable fear that aging will deplete one's value and social power. A related source of anxiety involves fears about 'losing control' over body weight and appearance. The neurotic obsession with body and food has become the scourge of young women. (p. 123)

This awareness of the relentlessness of the male gaze need not be confined to the looks and stares from men on the streets. Other elements of the public domain can be equally persistent, such as the ubiquitous advertising images that surround the viewer in this society everyday, almost everywhere. In an article for the British journal Spare Rib, a woman describes her feelings about images that surround her everyday:
I am alone in the underground waiting for the 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. All these ads are like his gang - telling him I am a... leg-thing, a breast-thing and that I am waiting for him. . . (quoted in Root, 1984, p. 56)

When women view photographic images, however, especially in magazines, it is a rare opportunity to look freely, not only at other women but at everyone on the pages. It is a kind of looking reserved for males on the street, but open to women in the limited arenas of visual consumption, such as in the viewing of photographs, watching films in the cinema, and viewing soap operas (see Brown, 1989; Rosen, 1986). When a woman looks at a fashion magazine, she not only is allowed to look, she is allowed to **stare**, to assess and pass judgement on others instead of just herself (Coward, 1985, pp. 52-53).

The narcissistic theory of female pleasure in looking holds that the difference between the male and the female viewer of the image is that the male **desires** to possess the image while the female **identifies** with the image. Coward argues that females do not so readily identify with the images they consume, but they too desire them, not as an object of possession, but rather an object of emulation (Shields, 1990). For women, the visual image presents clues for proper conduct which can open doors to happiness and fulfillment.

**Narcissistic damage and discipline.** Fulfilling the potential of ideal femininity in this culture involves a constant focusing on the body as the site of improvement and as the object of judgment-- preparing it, painting it, trimming it, exercising it, feeding it and even starving it. These beauty and "health" rituals are forms of self-imposed discipline. If not narcissism, however, where does the desire to self-discipline come from? In her analysis of the discourse of female weight reduction in American culture, Carole Spitzack (1990) examines the relationship between discourses of "women's health" as associated with thin
bodies and of the discourses of "disease" associated with "weight" or fatness. These complimentary discourses work with other numerous institutions and practices to encourage self-correction and therefore "liberation" for women. That is, the liberation from the disease of fat and "control" over one's health/beauty. Spitzack employs the insights of Michel Foucault to explain how power works through the penetrating cultural gaze, inciting the individual to impose discipline on the self:

In his historical analysis of the relations between power and institutionalization of punishment, Foucault (1979) locates an important shift in disciplinary procedures which took place during seventeenth century practices. Corporeal forms of punishment, direct physical torture as means by which to underscore and make visible the power of government, was gradually replaced by an 'optics' of power. The primary task of power was no longer to evidence its strength through physical brutality, but to establish, at countless points and through innumerable mechanisms, the surveillance of all who existed in its domain. The new mode of power is epitomized, Foucault suggests, in the architectural plans for the panopticon proposed by Jeremy Bentham (p. 200). Designed for use in prisons, the panopticon is a tower resting in the center of multiple stories of cells arranged in a circular fashion. At the back and front of each cell is a small window, allowing light to enter and illuminate each individually housed prisoner. The tower contains windows corresponding to cellular windows; due to the light entering from the back of each cell, guards in the tower cannot be seen by prisoners, but inmates are completely visible to guards. Each prisoner, Foucault writes, 'is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never the subject in communication... this invisibility is the guarantee of order' (p. 200).

... In contemporary culture, Foucault writes, the panoptic scheme can be used when ever 'one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or particular form of behavior must be imposed' (p. 205). Power in the form of surveillance makes a demand on the individual to monitor the actions of the self, subjecting behavior to ever-greater examination, making visible each transgression, and punishing oneself for wrongdoing. Optical power is placed within the body of each person over whom it presides so that the individual 'assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection' (pp. 202-203). In the final analysis, the body of each person is governed not by a visible and openly repressive power source, but by those individuals who have become wholly exposed to the inspecting gaze of power. (Spitzack, 1990, pp. 43-44)

It can be reasonably argued that women in Western cultures are individuals who have become wholly exposed to the inspecting gaze of power. Foucault's insights are especially applicable to a discussion on the self-disciplining of female bodies, therefore.
Most women have experienced being the object of information without being the subject in communication. For example, anytime a woman's worth is assessed solely on her appearance she is the object but not the subject of a controlling gaze. Street harassment of women by men is an overt example of this. Further, the popular iconography of the female body in film, advertising, television and so on is premised on the woman as object, but not subject in a communication arrangement. The prison guards of the controlling gaze in this arrangement are not men, per se, but the conspicuous invisibility of male bodies as the object of aesthetic pleasure and judgement in comparison to the completely exposed female body as aesthetic object. Coward (1985) suggests that the invisibility of men's bodies is needed for the control of women's bodies:

Men's bodies and sexuality are taken for granted, exempted from scrutiny, whereas women's bodies are extensively defined and overexposed. Sexual and social meanings are imposed on women's bodies, not men's. Controlling the look, men have left themselves out of the picture because a body defined is a body controlled. (p. 229)

This explains one type of control, control over the body of the objectified female. However, the internalization of the panoptic logic insists that the woman must identify herself as the "principle of her own subjection, playing the roles of tower guard and prisoner simultaneously. She is spectator and spectacle, one who sees and is seen" (Spitzack, 1990, p. 45). Spitzack suggests that this arrangement is aided by an ideology of women's health that condones policing the body in order to reap the reward of "freedom" or "release" from the unhealthy fat body. In order to maintain the healthy liberated body, one must continuously discipline the body, policing its cravings and excesses, reprimanding self when discipline falters.

Women's weight and body shape is a prominent domain where the optics of power play out through and on women's bodies in contemporary American culture. Women’s weight gain and weight loss invite two different kinds of gazes, both controlling, but one positive and one negative. Spitzack (1990) explains that part of the liberation discourse of
dieting involves the diminishing of negative judgements. "Frequently, women describe body reduction as a means by which to undergo public scrutiny without fear of reprisals or self-condemnation" (p. 46). Weight loss is seen as a means to reduce negative judgements at the same time becoming the object of approval. Weight loss can, however, invite an intensification of the woman as object, but not the subject of communication arrangement. As she moves closer to the societal ideal of perfect body size, she invites more attention, not all positive or even wanted.

Recent literature on the body has focused on two closely related domains where women are particularly self-surveilling, "exercise" and "diet" (Bordo, 1993; Chernin, 1986; Diamond, 1985; Featherstone, 1991; Morse, 1987-1988; Shefer, 1990; Spitzack, 1988, 1990; Turner 1984; Wolf, 1991). Morse (1987-88) argues that under the guise of physical and emotional health, aerobic exercise has become a magic tonic for women, staving off the processes of aging. As women age, we grow further from society's ideal of beauty and femininity. In this cultural way of seeing, a woman's value as a worker and sexual partner diminishes with age also. Morse explains that this devaluation of the woman through aging is matched by a cultural "neuterization" of the female identity. "To be old, tired, or unattractive is to be vulnerable to a kind of cultural extinction before death" (p. 21).

Actress/activist turned fitness guru Jane Fonda is attributed with creating the first credible link between beauty culture and obsessive weight loss by promoting a cardiovascular fitness regimen designed for women. Through this regimen of counting heart beats, calories and music rhythms, the female body can be transformed beyond thinness to an ideal of the "female physique" (Morse, 1987-88, p. 23). Aerobics, like the cosmetics and fashion industries, is now an integral part of commercial "beauty culture." Like other beauty industries the "fitness industry" preys on the difference between the ideal fashion model and the natural tendencies of real women's bodies (to store more fat than a
man's body for example), and like the other beauty industries, aerobics offers a "solution" to this difference through disciplining the body in the name of fitness—the triumph of culture over nature (Diamond, 1985; Morse, 1987-88; Wolf, 1991).

Morse argues that aerobic exercise is situated at the intersection of several competing discourses. It has been deemed the first feminist sanctioned approach to weight loss. This approval, according to Morse, stems from the intrinsic properties of activity and movement in aerobic exercise, which run counter to long-prevailing notions of feminine passivity and stasis. Further, "the entree of exercise can be understood as an aid to weight loss and as part of the fitness movement as well as an expression of anxiety and as a potentially liberating antidote to it" (p. 24). Women can take charge of molding and sculpting their own bodies for societal display. Femininity is cultural.

The definition of the ideal female physique is cultural also, changing many times over the last century. The voluptuous, wasp-waist and rounded hips physique epitomized by Marilyn Monroe in the 1950s, gave way to the ultra-thin waif of the 1960s epitomized by Twiggy. This dubious "never too thin" legacy stretched into the 1970s fashion world. The 1980s ushered in a new female physique complementary to aerobic exercise and activity. This curvaceous, muscular look, which is now most closely associated in its ideal form as supermodel Cindy Crawford, is the combination of cultural antitheses: "thin and muscular, hard and curvaceous, it suggests power and yet a slender boyishness; furthermore those very muscles which empower are also the material of feminine curves" (Morse, 1987-88, p. 25). Achieving this combination of attributes is difficult, involving an investment of large amounts of time, money and effort on "body work." The ultra-thin look of the 1960s and 1970s could be achieved through starvation

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7 Wolf's (1990) research reports that in the twenty years after the start of the second wave of the women's movement, the weight of Miss Americas plummeted, the average weight of Playboy Playmates dropped from 11% below national average in 1970 to 17% below it in eight years. The average model, dancer or actress is thinner than 95% of the female population (p. 185).
diets alone, but today, thinness without muscle tone falls short of the ideal feminine physique. The ideal must be achieved through a regimen of diet plus exercise. Even the naturally thin are no longer safe from weight-loss regimens. Thinness is no longer an immediate sign for fitness or health, these signs are found in the definition of body muscle and the glow of skin tone from a well-exercised body (or achieved artificially at the tanning salon).

This discussion has thus far been confined to the parameters of shifting cultural definitions of women’s "health" as achieved by disciplining the body. However, the anxiety that women feel in this culture over the difference between the body they see promoted in the mass media and the body they live in can often lead to types of self-surveilling and extreme discipline that fall outside societal parameters of "health" or even beauty. Societal pressures for women to conform to ideal body images presented throughout society is considered a prominent contributor to the onset of eating disorders in women such as anorexia nervosa (self-starvation) and bulimia (bingeing and purging)\(^8\) (Bordo, 1993; Bruch, 1988; Chernin, 1986; Diamond, 1985; Hsu, 1990; Morse, 1987-1988; Shefer, 1990; Spitzack, 1990; Turner 1984; Wolf, 1991; Zraly & Swift, 1990). The multiple causes of such illness in individuals are complex, having psychological and familial components as well as other major contributing factors. Although psychologists and therapists have been examining and treating these illnesses under these names for over twenty years, popular and academic discourses have only recently begun to examine anorexia and bulimia in their sociological contexts, as biological reactions to cultural conditions.

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\(^8\) Estimates on the percentage of American women suffering from eating disorders vary mainly because of the secretive nature of the illnesses, especially in the case of bulimia. Wolf (1990) reports that the American Anorexia and Bulimia Association states that these illnesses strike a million American women every year; 30,000, it reports, also becomes emetic abusers. Each year, according to the association, 150,000 American women die of anorexia. Brumberg (1988) estimates the number of anorexics at 5 to 10% of all American girls and women. On some college campuses, she believes, one woman student in five is anorexic.
Spitzack (1990) describes anorexia as "the body's triumph over dieting" (p. 12). For the anorexic the weight loss effort is endless, even past the point of emaciation. Definitive of all anorexic behavior is the extreme need for control over the body. Many times this need to control one's own body comes in response to the body's violation by others, either emotionally or physically. Sometimes the anorexic is a victim of physical sexual abuse. In many of these cases the anorexic feels compelled to exorcise the femininity (sexuality) from the body, reducing any signs of feminine curves, halting menstruation (see Turner 1984) and shielding the shape of the body from others' view with multi-layered clothing (Bruch, 1988; Hsu, 1990, Zraly & Swift, 1990).

In other cases an over emphasis placed on body shape by parents, especially mothers, compels the anorexic to gain the parents approval and at the same time gain control over her own body by starving it until acceptably thin (Bruch, 1988). These women are generally lavished with praise once initial weight loss is achieved. Often this craving for additional praise spurs them on to continue losing weight, no matter how thin they become. A similar response can happen when children are continuously encouraged by the parents to over eat. The anorexic response is to gain control in the only arena where they have complete power to do so (Spitzack, 1990). In this case they say "no" to the thing that the parents are insistent upon, therefore asserting a type of control over the parents.

In still other cases, self-reports by anorexics reveal that their illness is the logical conclusion of narcissistic damage created and reproduced by the fashion, cosmetics and fitness industries. Dr. Michael Strober, director of the eating disorder center at UCLA's Neuropsychiatric Institute, stated in a recent magazine article that "a woman becomes anorexic because her soul has been battered by the unreasonable expectation that you can never be too thin and that fat--any fat--equals failure" (Lague & Lynn, 1993). For some women the self-surveilling gaze becomes overwhelming and, in turn, distorted. The anorexic can no longer gauge the image in the mirror against the ideal with any objectivity.
No matter how thin the anorexic becomes, she still sees a fat, and therefore powerless, body in the mirror. In time, any plumpness of flesh on the body looks like unwanted fat and must be ridded of the body through starvation and exercise—the ultimate discipline.

**Symbolic annihilation.** The preceding arguments deal directly with women's encounters with mass mediated messages prescribing an often oppressive ideal female beauty. What if, however, one rarely sees representations of themselves in mass media to emulate? What if one's identity is deemed unworthy of representation in the dominant ideology of images? In media theory, this serious underrepresentation has been coined "symbolic annihilation" (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Tuchman, 1978). Symbolic annihilation refers to the most profound inequities in "the spectrum of mediated representations of social groups" (see Kielwasser & Wolf, 1992, p. 351). For example, women and men of color must be fine-featured, resembling the European ideal of beauty, in order to be represented in advertising, on the printed page or on television commercials. Further, although gay men and lesbians are major actors (encoders) in the fashion and entertainment industries, representation of homosexual relationships are rarely made explicit in mainstream advertising. Both of these "minorities" suffer from similar types of symbolic invisibility (Dyer, 1984, 1988; hooks, 1992; Kielwasser & Wolf, 1992).

Feminist scholars such as Roach & Felix (1989) suggest that we live in a culture where the dominant gaze is not only male, but white. Up until the last decade or so, representations of blacks are not only excluded, but also stereotyped and ghettoized, presenting a spectrum of negative representation to no representation. Blacks are placed outside "natural" and "beautiful" representation in advertising and positioned as "other." However, unlike the "exotic other" of the Hawaiian or Asian "girls" (see Williamson, 1986), blacks are society's mundane other, (Fredrickson, 1988; Miles, 1989; Omi &
Winant, 1986), "a biot on the cultural landscape" (Roach & Felix, 1989, p. 130). This is changing, but very slowly.

Critics like hooks (1992) explain that blacks have come to understand that in order to enter the mainstream media, one must look and sound as "white" as possible, altering voice, diction, and most importantly, appearance to present a close ideological "fit" with white culture, the white status quo:

Blacks in commercials and on news programs may be perceived as 'Exotic Primitives', blacks with 'white' talents. They are non-threatening to the white community while providing assimilationist role models to the Black community. They have successfully conformed, in the eyes of the white culture. (p. 163)

This conformity helps maintain a black invisibility. Dyer (1988) explains how the invisibility of Blackness is constituted as "normal" in white society through symbolic representation and also through common language:

Power in contemporary society habitually passes itself off as embodied in the normal as opposed to the superior. This is common to all forms of power, but it works in a peculiarly seductive way with whiteness, because of the way it seems rooted, in common-sense thought, in things other than ethnic difference. . . Thus it is said (even in liberal textbooks) that there are inevitable associations of white with light and therefore safety, and black with dark and therefore danger, and this explains racism; again and with more justice, people point to the Judeo-Christian use of white and black to symbolize good and evil, as carried still in such expressions as 'a black mark,' 'white magic,' 'to blacken the character' and so on. (quoted in hooks, 1992, p. 340)

Dyer's observations mesh with the psychoanalytic theories of Wadinasi & Wadinasi (1977) reported nearly a decade before. Wadinasi & Wadinasi (1977) present a series of well-defined stages that blacks purportedly go through in order to reach a sense of self-actualization in the midst of dominant white society, therefore overcoming feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. These stages include: a) Pre-encounter: Blacks are programmed in over-determined social structures to think of the world as non-black, anti-black or the opposite of black. b) Encounter: Blacks begin to feel a sense of self-worth and develop a Black perspective on life. c) Immersion: Everything of value, at this stage,
must be related to Blackness. d) Internalization: A developed self-concept and Black perspective, working for the betterment of all blacks and oppressed groups. The Wadinasi's claim that the mass media represent blacks in a constant state of Pre-encounter. Blacks are seen as in a constant state of confused identity, harboring feelings of latent self-hatred. As Dyer's research shows, even our everyday language helps support this perception that Blacks live in a state of Pre-encounter.

**Resistance in decoding.** Thus far, critical audience studies that show the most promise for accommodating the questions raised when active decoders suffer from froms of symbolic annihilation are those that examine "resistance in decoding." Scholars like Belinda Budge (1989) believe that what is needed is a new vocabulary that can better describe pleasurable and resistant associations women make when looking at images of other women, for example. A limited number of feminist audience studies provide the beginnings for such a move. If not new vocabularies, findings from these studies offer new ways of seeing female resistance to white patriarchal images.

For example, Bobo's (1988) study of the viewers of The Color Purple, revealed that black female viewers found a positive connection to the film, even though it had been seriously criticized in both the popular and academic press for showing a negative and stereotypical view of blacks, especially black males. Utilizing Stuart Hall's concept of articulation, Bobo concluded that the ability of the black women viewers to not only enjoy, but gain positive messages from this film was a result in part of these women's awareness of and connection to another set of discourses, that of "the renaissance of black women writers" (p. 93). This set of discourses has given voice to black female experience, an area habitually absent from dominant writing and representation. The Color Purple, although dubious in many of its representations, had something to say about black women and black female experience. For the women in Bobo's study, the messages of the writings of black women and the messages of the film formed a particular type of cultural
connection, an articulation. It was important to them that the image of black women's experience was present at all, and much less important that the images were not perfect.

In her study of the readers of romance fiction, Janice Radway (1984) found that often times female readers of romance novels are using the "act of reading" as a vehicle of liberation in escaping from traditional roles in the home. For snatches of an hour or two at a time, these women escape into the fantasy pleasure of their novels. For many of these women the "relevance" of the text is primarily its ability to afford them pleasure through time, time set aside only for themselves. This may be very different from the traditionally defined masculine notion of the "relevance of the text." Radway found that although these women were particular about the formulas of their texts, clues to the central importance of reading romances in women's lives was not to be found in the text itself.

Finally, McRobbie (1984) examines the relationship between dance and female pleasure. She explains that young girls' attraction to texts such as the movie Flashdance and the T.V. series Fame may not be as simple as females "buying into" sexist representations of women's bodies. In fact, girls may find a real freedom in dancing; a pleasure that is not necessarily directed toward the male partner or spectator, but is in fact a pleasure of experiencing their own movement, their own sensuality. McRobbie argues that while girls are trained to be aware of being watched, sometimes they can use that "way of seeing" to derive pleasure from seeing themselves move and have fun.

Female spectatorship as negotiation. Recently, many feminist writers on female pleasures in looking, especially in film theory, have expressed a growing discomfort with the limited range of female pleasures in looking that can be explored with the male gaze, woman-as-object frame (see Doane, 1982; Kaplan, 1983; Betterton, 1985; Pribram, 1988; Mulvey, 1989; Waldman, 1990). Many of these scholars contend that although the conventions of the male gaze in visual images are dominant conventions in our society, it
is wrong to theorize that female spectatorship can only be seen as an activity that is dictated by the male gaze. Women have developed their own ways of looking that should not be defined through the masculine lens.

Both Rosemary Betterton (1985) and Diane Waldman (1990) argue that while one must be careful not to minimize or trivialize the power of dominant ways of seeing visual images, one must also be aware of the changing and evolving consciousness of many of the female spectators in question. According to Betterton, a result of this evolving consciousness is the ability of many female spectators to switch points of view between the position of surveyor (active, voyeuristic) and the position of the surveyed (passive, narcissistic). This ability empowers the female spectator with the ability to take up a critical position of looking that is not traditionally masculine or feminine.

In looking at a glamour photo or a nude it is possible to be both fascinated and attracted by the image, and at the same time, be well aware of the difference between the image and our experience: just as in reading a romance or in watching a melodrama one can be swept up by, and yet recognize the seductive pull of fantasy. (Betterton, 1985, p. 10)

It is possible to both read "against the grain" and also enjoy the pleasure of viewing. This ability, or need, is what is meant by "negotiating" with the text and is similar in conceptualization to Hall's notion of articulation:

The term negotiation implies the holding together of opposite sides in an ongoing process of give and take. As a model of meaning production, negotiation conceives cultural exchange as the intersection of processes of production and reception, in which overlapping but non-matching determinations operate. Meaning is neither imposed of passively imbibed, but arises out of a struggle or negotiation between competing frames of reference, motivation and experience. (Gledhill, 1988, p, 68)

In the past, many feminist scholars would have considered female pleasure gained from a dominant oppressive text to be a naive reading and a sign of "pre-consciousness" (see Kuhn, 1985). Without dismissing that this type of reading is still prevalent in this
society, feminist interviewers and ethnographers are beginning to discover the dynamics of ways of looking and reading which are both critical of, and responsive to, the particular representation or cultural form being investigated (see Shields & Dervin, 1993).

Waldman (1990) argues that once we begin to theorize about the possibilities of the critical, and at the same time responsive female spectator, it is helpful to distinguish the positions that are "feminist" from those which are strictly "female." This ability to move between culturally defined male and female viewing positions is not the innate province of the female psyche, but is instead the result of a disruption in traditional ways of seeing which can be directly attributed to multiple feminist discourses in society. No longer can the female spectator be seen in the dualistic terms of the culturally emasculated (determined by the male gaze) or the culturally enlightened (empowered by the teachings of feminist scholarship). Instead, a female spectator's ability to be critical of the images she derives pleasure from may be the product of her everyday cultural experiences.

A limited number of theories of male spectatorship seems to take an opposite stance. Where women are able to negotiate with images from their own experience, presenting its nuances and sensations, men, even in their most perceptive, seem to theorize about themselves, analyzing from the outside (Tolson, 1977). Betterton (1985) concludes that men too look critically, but within forms of culture made for and by men, they are less likely to be forced to negotiate the viewpoint. Further, they are less likely to choose to do so.

Summary

Communication research on sex-role portrayal in advertising in the 1970s was a necessary starting place for assessing gender inequality as represented in this influential mass media form. These studies revealed that gender portrayals were not changing at the same pace as societal perceptions of gained gender equality. Instead, advertising was
consistently recirculating messages about women that depicted their limited and subordinated place in society. Although this research was important for drawing attention to inequalities in representation, later on, scholars of gender and advertising showed that concentrating on advertising images as a true or false reflection of society was not nearly as critical as understanding how advertising operates as part of society, and thus, part of our on-going gender relationships.

For Goffman, the gender displays in advertising are highly stylized conventions of real gender displays, thus giving them an instant familiarity. Advertising gender displays are well-established, with some codes taken from real gender displays continuously repeated and others continually omitted. Advertising's gender portrayals are an idealized conception of the two sexes and their structural relationship to each other. On close inspection across the message system of advertising, however, it is clear that the ritualizations point to the subordination of women to men. One pervasive ritualization is the portrayal of women as having the status more closely associated with children than adults. Another is the ritualization of "cropping" the female body so that emphasis on body parts supersedes the need for representations of the female as a whole human being. In so doing, gender advertising does not merely reflect reality, it is a part of our social reality. Through the use of selective codes in clever recombinations, advertising has the ability to create new meanings and also to perpetuate regressive forms of gender relations.

Two interrelated themes that originated with Goffman's notion of gender display have been further expanded by feminist cultural theorists. The first of these themes suggests that the use of photographic cropping of the female body to represent the whole dehumanizes women in the view of men on the one hand, and serves to encourage women to see themselves through the lens of male fetishes, on the other hand. Further, repeated representations of the active and purposive male in society juxtaposed with the representations of the passive, sexually available female in nature suggests that males are
generally positioned as the consumer of the object in the ad where they appear, while women are not the consumers of the object, but are positioned for visual consumption themselves to lend sex to the object.

The semiotic approach to gender advertising explores the structure of ads as a system of signs that have a particular currency in modern capitalist societies. Advertising is a mythical structure where any given advertisement has the ability to produce meaning at many different levels of signification. Images are polysemous, structured by linguistic properties. It is the advertisers' task, therefore, to close down the number of meanings produced by a single image as much as possible. This is achieved by carefully attaching signifieds (images, meanings, connotations) to signifiers (commodities, in this case).

This process of pinning down signifieds to commodities is the process of giving commodities cultural value they inherently lack. This is achieved by tapping the cultural referent systems of both the advertisers and the viewers. Ads have value for us when we know the cultural codes that allow us to reference what the signs replace. We, by bringing our own referent systems to the viewing, complete the transfer of meaning, or "significance," to the commodity. Advertising creates differences between commodities in the same marketing categories by giving each commodity value. A commodity has value to us more for what it is not than what it is.

The sexualization of commodities is a pervasive code used to lend value to, and therefore differentiate, one product from another in this culture. The association between sex and commodities is naturalized in Western societies. It is a cultural "way of seeing." Furthermore, this sexualization of commodities is by no means gender-neutral, or equal. Traditionally, it is the female body that has served as the object of sexual stimulation in advertising as well as most other mass-mediated forms. The image of the sexualized female has general exchange-value in this society and can be, and has been, lent to nearly any commodity advertised. Feminist cultural scholars in particular contend that this
historical legacy of gender representation is still playing a major part in molding the acceptable way of viewing women today.

Psychoanalytic approaches to gender advertising reveal how "the subject" is positioned by the text, and how male and female subjectivity is reproduced through language and image. The psychoanalytic perspective can be credited with giving scholars of gender advertising the theoretical tools to analyze the concept of the "male gaze" and the "voyeuristic gaze" encoded in most mass media in this society. Further, feminist scholars of gender advertising have relied heavily on the construct of the "split-consciousness" of the female subject to theorize how advertising works to encourage women to continuously view themselves as objects to be improved upon for the male other, rather than to view themselves as subjects of their own femaleness.

Critical audience studies of gendered decoding of advertising are sparse. More so for theorizing the male spectator than the female spectator. However, a growing literature of textual analyses in feminist film, television, and advertising studies has begun theorizing the female spectator not only as someone forced to endure representation through the lens of the male gaze, but as one who actively negotiates and even resists dominant patriarchal images. Further this literature suggests that differences between men and women in decoding may not be the only or even most important divisions. Experiential differences within each gender, such as class, race, education, and sexual orientation, are equally as important to investigate.

The literature offers several positions on female spectatorship. The first suggests that the popular notion that woman's obsession with her own image is narcissistic, a form of self-love, is overly simplistic and highly inadequate. Female pleasures in looking (at images of other women for instance), have much deeper cultural roots than a psychologically-based theory of female narcissism would suggest. It is not self-love that leads to a woman's obsession with her own image, it is actually a form of self-hate,
"narcissistic damage." In a highly visual and image-conscious society such as this, a woman learns at a very early age that physical appearance is probably the most crucial way in which men form opinions about her worth. Therefore, feelings about appearance and self-image easily get mingled with feelings about security and comfort. Absorption into the world of one's own image can be seen as a means of cultural survival, a bid for acceptance.

Fulfilling the potential of ideal femininity in this culture involves a constant focusing on the body as the site of improvement and as the object of judgment. Beauty and "health" rituals are forms of self-imposed discipline and often extreme forms of self-surveillance. Women internalize a self-surveillance logic that places women in position of imposer of the discipline and the recipient of the discipline at the same time. This arrangement is aided by an ideology of women's health that condones policing the body in order to reap the reward of "freedom" or "release" from the unhealthy fat body. Recent literature on the body has focused on two closely related domains where women are particularly self-surveilling, "exercise" and "diet." Under the guise of physical and emotional health, aerobic exercise has become a magic tonic for women, staving off the processes of aging. Through a regimen of counting heart beats, calories and music rhythms, the female body can be transformed beyond thinness to an ideal of the "female physique." Like other beauty industries the "fitness industry" preys on the difference between the ideal fashion mode! and the natural tendencies of real women's bodies (to store more fat than a man's body for example), and like the other beauty industries, aerobics offers a "solution" to this difference through disciplining the body in the name of fitness.

The anxiety that women feel in this culture over the difference between the body they see promoted in the mass media and the body they live in can often lead to types of self-surveilling and extreme discipline that fall outside societal parameters of "health" or even beauty. Societal pressures for women to conform to ideal body images presented throughout society is considered a prominent contributor to the onset of eating disorders in
women such as anorexia nervosa (self-starvation) and bulimia (bingeing and purging). For some women the self-surveilling gaze becomes overwhelming and, in turn, distorted. The anorexic can no longer gauge the image in the mirror against the ideal with any objectivity. No matter how thin the anorexic becomes, she still sees a fat, and therefore powerless, body in the mirror. In time, any plumpness of flesh on the body looks like unwanted fat and must be ridded of the body through starvation and exercise—the ultimate discipline.

Another position on female spectatorship argues that the discussion above describe white middle-class experience, but are not necessarily the experiences of those who do not fit in these categories. What if one rarely sees representations of themselves in mass media? What if one's identity is deemed unworthy of representation in the dominant ideology of images? In media theory, this serious underrepresentation has been coined "symbolic annihilation." For example, we live in a culture where the dominant gaze is not only male, but white. Up until the last decade or so, representations of blacks are not only excluded, but also stereotyped and ghettoized, presenting a spectrum of negative representation to no representation. This is changing, but very slowly. Cultural critics argue that blacks have come to understand that in order to enter the mainstream media, one must look and sound as "white" as possible, altering voice, diction, and most importantly, appearance to present a close ideological "fit" with white culture, the white status quo:

Critical audience studies that show the most promise for accommodating the questions raised when active decoders suffer from forms of symbolic annihilation are those that examine "resistance in decoding." For example, a study of the black female viewers of *The Color Purple*, revealed that these viewers found a positive connection to the film, even though it had been seriously criticized in both the popular and academic press for showing a negative and stereotypical view of blacks, especially black males. *The Color Purple*, although dubious in many of its representations, had something to say about black women and black female experience. For the women in the study, the messages of the
writings of black women and the messages of the film formed a particular type of cultural connection, an articulation. It was important to them that the image of black women's experience was present at all, and much less important that the images were not perfect.

The most recent, and perhaps the most promising position on female spectatorship contends that female looking is a complex process of negotiation. Although dominant images constructed for the male gaze do proliferate throughout the culture, women have the ability to be both critical of the image and at the same time find pleasure in the viewing. Further, feminist discourses now circulating through culture are giving women of varied backgrounds and experiences new tools to negotiate with images of women. These women's negotiations with dominant meanings of gender cannot be defined by either a state of "pre-consciousness" or a result of "feminist enlightenment." This active negotiation is most fully explored in feminist audience studies of female spectators and readers. These studies have found that women use popular images in ways that articulate with their own experiences. These articulations cannot be uncovered by a close reading to the text alone. The negotiation process often times is not with the image itself as much as how the women incorporate the image into other experiences.

Limited theorizing on male spectatorship seems to take an opposite stance. Where women are able to negotiate with images from their own experience, presenting its nuances and sensations, men, even in their most perceptive, seem to theorize about themselves, analyzing from the outside. Although men too look critically, within forms of culture made for and by men they are less likely to be forced to negotiate the viewpoint. Further, they are less likely to choose to do so.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Metatheoretical contests

This study is situated within a major metatheoretical contest in cultural studies, feminist studies and across the terrain of critical audience research. This contest involves capturing the dynamics and process involved in the articulations between mass media texts encoded in "structures of dominance" and individual interpretive freedom (agency) to negotiate with or even resist those structures. For feminist scholars of female spectatorship the contest involves conceiving of methodological operations that allow the forging of a bridge between the macro structures of power and control of the mass media (specifically structures of gender as defined through patriarchy) and the micro-politics of everyday living (in, with and against patriarchy).

Morley (1989, 1993), speaking for a cultural studies perspective, makes the metatheoretical contest more specific. For Morley, the methodological challenge rests in conceiving of research that can account for a multiplicity of structural constraints in any one moment of articulation with mass media texts. In understanding the particular conditions under which certain structures, both inside and outside of the text itself, are more dominant than others, we can begin to understand the relationship between structural dominance and interpretive freedom.
**Ethnography and cultural studies.** Cultural Studies audience research seems to be united on the value of "ethnography" as the best way to address this major metatheoretical issue in its empirical work. Ethnography is held up as a method best suited for studying the complexities of the "elusive audience" (see Ang, 1989, 1990; Ang & Hermes, 1991; Bird, 1992; Erni, 1989; Fiske, 1988). "Ethnography is the work of describing a culture" (Spradley, 1979, p. 3). The aim of ethnography is to grasp a way of life from "the Natives' point-of-view," (Geertz, 1983) and to understand a way of living that is usually different from, but sometimes a part of the researcher's own experience. It is a method more concerned with learning from people than with studying them.

American cultural studies scholars, in particular, have theorized and problematized ethnography's place in cultural studies at length. Fiske (1988), for example, suggests that what is needed is a "semiotic ethnography that will help us toward understanding concrete, contextualized moments of semiosis as specific instances of more general cultural processes. In these moments, there are no texts, no audiences. There is only an instance of the process of making and circulating meanings and pleasures" (p. 250). Further, Allor (1988) and Erni (1989) suggest that what is needed is a "structural ethnography," because the studying of people and how they appropriate the cultural forms they consume is an impossible task. A structural ethnography "studies the specific material spaces and relations of viewing and reading within which people can make all sorts of decisions and yield all sorts of effects, but in conditions not of their own making" (Erni, 1989, p. 37).

These arguments, as Bird (1992) so aptly points out, exemplify American cultural studies' project of dissolving ethnography into its theorizing, while rarely ever applying ethnographic methods to study real audiences. The exceptions, those who have tried to do empirical audience studies employing ethnographic techniques, are cited over and over again as exemplars (Ang, 1985; Morley, 1980, 1986; Radway, 1984, 1989). However, cultural studies scholars write that cultural studies have not examined empirical audiences
(Jensen & Rosengren, 1990), and that few scholars trained in cultural studies are actually doing audience studies (Probyn, 1988). Ethnographic approaches in cultural studies, then, have done little to illuminate the major metatheoretical contest of capturing the dynamics and process involved in the articulations between mass media texts encoded in "structures of dominance" and individual interpretive freedom (agency) to negotiate with or even resist those structures.

When these scholars have made suggestions on procedure and method, the panacea is generally to build in more complexity and to involve large numbers of interviewers on a project. For example, Radway (1988) advocates major collaboration among a team of ethnographers who fan out across an entire city and study people’s leisure practices as they articulated in their everyday lives. She admits that this ambitious project could be "potentially unwieldy and unending" (p. 369). To this, Bird (1992) poses the probing and insightful question, "But where does this ideal leave the researcher working essentially alone, as most of us do? Do we, in effect, give up, because our attempts can never be broad enough?" (pp. 251-252).

It can be argued that this obsession of cultural studies scholars with the building in of more and more complexity in order to begin to address issues of articulations between mass media texts encoded in "structures of dominance" and individual interpretive freedom (agency) to negotiate with or even resist those structures, rests with cultural studies view of human actors as "positioned" by a multitude of structures at once, suggesting that at any given moment the human actor can be "positioned" by different configurations of structures, each vying for dominance. To further complicate matters, the human agent takes up a variety of "subject positions" in and against those structures. How, in all of this complexity and chaos, can any coherent pattern be gleaned?

A way out of this quandary, and a path toward more productive research on moments of articulations between mass media texts encoded in "structures of dominance"
and individual interpretive freedom (agency) to negotiate with or even resist those structures, can be found in the methodological approach of Sense-Making. The methodological approach for this study builds on the insights of Dervin,¹ who suggests that conceiving of research methods that begin to address the contest presented above must center not on the multiplicity of human states, but on tracking certain kinds of movement and process. Dervin's (1993a, 1993b) concept of "verbing" communication adds clarity to the ideas presented by Morley and Radway, while at the same time extending the possibilities of the act of "decoding," into the realms of "constructing" and "deconstructing" (see Dervin, 1993a). Dervin's conceptualization of the communicating subject refocuses the notion of a subject who is "positioned" by a multiplicity of competing structures (states), to a subject who moves (e.g., cognitively, emotionally, behaviorally, etc.) through, with, and even against, social structures.

In this schema, sometimes the subject moves through and with social structures with flexibility and at other times with great rigidity. Shifting emphasis from the human as defined by differing states of subjectivity, to a human who is seen as ever-moving from one state to another, allows one to see “difference” in a new light. When focused on the subject who is moving from one state to another, difference can be conceptualized as "both across time (e.g., one entity at the same time) as well as across space (two entities being different at the same time)" (1993b, p. 51). Therefore, difference need no longer be seen as residing solely in moments of individual interpretive freedom, but differences are found

¹ Sense-making as an academic enterprise has been under continual development since 1972. The description presented here rests on the following corpus of work: For the most recent conceptualization of communication as "verbing," see, Dervin (1990, 1993a, 1993b). For the most general and complete introductions to sense-making as a methodology see Dervin (1983; 1991a). For one of the most advanced accounts of the theoretical power of sense-making see Dervin (1990; 1991a). For a general introduction to the sense-making metaphor see Dervin & Clark (1987). An application of sense-making in the area of media studies is Dworkin & Dervin (1985) and Dworkin (1987). For an application in feminist scholarship see Shields & Dervin (1991). For a discussion of the role individual freedoms in relation to structural constraints see Dervin & Clark (1989).
in communicating. Given the larger purpose of this study, this approach is particularly well-suited to strive toward providing an audience reception study of advertising decoding that illuminates the interpretive freedom/structural constraint question by focusing on gender as both structural constraint and as a personal resource for enablement and identity. Implied in this general purpose is the notion of exploring "gender differences."

**Sense-Making methodology.** Sense-Making is a coherent set of theoretic premises, concepts, and methods developed to study how human agents use observations to construct pictures of reality which in turn serve to guide behavior. Sense-Making treats different kinds of ideas and thoughts—such as ideas and thoughts about physical reality, ideas about internal reality (cognitive, emotional, physical, spiritual), as equal, in the sense of giving them equality in the methodology. When used to study mass media audiences, Sense-Making focuses on the steps of communicating connections subjects make between their perceptions of media forms and their own experiences, external or internal.

The Sense-Making approach defines "sense-making" as "behavior, both internal (i.e. cognitive) and external (i.e. procedural), formal and informal, habitual and spontaneous, learned and invented, which allows the individual to construct and design his/her movement through time-space" (Dervin, 1983, p. 3). The approach has been applied since 1972 in a wide variety of contexts, cutting across most of the traditional polarities in the field of communication. Studies have been conducted focusing on all communicative levels (e.g. intra, inter, organizational, mass) with both administrative and critical intent, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Sense-Making draws on a germinal loan from Carter (1989, 1980, 1972), the discontinuity assumption, or the "gap idea." The discontinuity assumption posits that gaps exist fundamentally between times, spaces, objects and persons. In the context of the discontinuity assumption, there are no a priori conditions which can be assumed to
eliminate gaps automatically. Rather, humans construct bridges that allow them to move cognitively from place to place. Sense-Making assumes that it is always constructings that bridge gaps and that constructings are mandated in every context. Therefore, the acts of making sense involve not just "de-constructing," as in or "de-coding," but foremost, "constructing."

Sometimes these constructings are repetitions of past constructings, sometimes they are new inventions. Sometimes these constructings seem responsive to changing conditions, sometimes they seem like rigid repetitions. Sometimes they seem highly constrained by hegemonic forces, sometimes they seem spontaneous and inventive. Whether flexible or rigid, whether new or old, Sense-Making assumes constructings are what humans use to bridge the pervasive gaps of existence—the disconnectedness of self to others, to situations, to events across time and space.

The entire Sense-Making enterprise is built on the implementation of the gap idea, which is axiomatic. No assumption is made that humans act linearly or cyclically or episodically. Nor is any assumption made that humans are purposive. Rather, it is assumed that humans bridge gaps cognitively as well as physically because reality and life are gap-filled. Accepting the idea of a fundamental gap condition has far-reaching implications. It mandates theoretic and methodological attention to difference as primary focus even when difference is not expected.

In this communication-centered view of human subjectivity, a major assumption is that human beings have the ability to be changeable and uniquely interpretive in their responses from moment to moment and/or highly rigid and predictable in their responses from moment to moment, depending on numerous factors, including what structures prove most dominant at that moment. Others of these factors include, the life experiences that individuals bring to the viewing, competing or confirming discourses that influence their responses and the structuring of mass mediated message systems as particularly closed
and repetitive (such as in beer commercials) or open, comparatively (such as in high art photography cologne ads). It is assumed in Sense-Making that by focusing on process one can illuminate both process as well as state conditions, both flexibilities as well as rigidities, both hegemonic constraints as well as unbounded freedoms.

Further, Sense-Making assumes that communicating behaviors, both internal and external, are the behaviors by which humans bridge ever-present gaps. Thus, Sense-Making offers the gap idea as essential to the study of communication phenomena. Sense-Making focuses on how people define situations (which Sense-Making calls situation-defining strategies) as well as how they conceptualize the cognitive gaps they face and how they make ideas which allow them to bridge these gaps.

**Method.** The gap idea is pervasively implemented in Sense-Making. It is, for example, implemented in data collection procedures—i.e. in interviews and in the choice of research questions which focus not on trying to develop understandings of communicative phenomena based on state conditions (e.g. what are people or situations like in a specific context or across contexts), but rather on process conditions (e.g. how do people construct and move, how do situations become, change, maintain and/or rigidify).

Sense-Making assumptions have been used to generate a series of interviewing approaches useful in a wide variety of research settings, for in-depth as well as brief contacts, in formal research as well as informal episodes where one person wants to understand another, in two-person as well as group settings. Fundamental to all Sense-Making data collection approaches is the assumption that no matter how much like another human being one person may be, there is always difference present and there is always
potential for these differences to change over time.² This is the implementation of the basic discontinuity assumption—that there are gaps between times, spaces, and people.

What Sense-Making has attempted to do, therefore, is develop a generalizable interviewing approach that, as much as possible, gets the interviewer out of the interview while at the same time utilizes a qualitatively powerful and qualitatively sensitive, systematic, and comparable set of queries to the respondent. The reason for getting the interviewer "out" (as much as is ever possible) of the interview is to provide the interviewee with the freedom and the power of self-description and explanation.³ In essence, Sense-Making believes that by guiding the respondent through an open-ended, yet highly structured interview protocol, developed by use of the discontinuity assumption, and getting the interviewee's own input out of the interview, allows the respondent to be her/his own social theorist.

Sense-Making accomplishes this by focusing not only on what the respondent saw self as experiencing, but also on his/her understanding of how he/she came to a place, and how he/she moved from one place to another cognitively and procedurally. Sense-Making assumes that addressing this kind of systematic "subjectivity" speaks both to universals in human experience (i.e., the mandate to bridge gaps across time-space in a world where no prior experience necessarily provides complete instruction) while at the same time allowing the rich uniqueness and detail of given experiences to emerge.

All Sense-Making interviews draw on a core metaphor—a picture of a person moving through time-space, constructing sense of situations, seeing gaps ahead and

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² It is this logic that leads sense-making to assume that the sharing of demographic conditions does not necessarily bridge gaps. Thus, sense-making does not assume that the condition of being female or poor, by definition allows one to understand another who shares the same conditions.

³ Sense-making takes the position that there is a viable role for what Carl Rogers calls "neutral positive regard." This implies a dialogical approach where the interviewer is a facilitator of the interviewee's self-expression.
constructing notions of the kinds of ideas needed to bridge these gaps, the actual building of these ideas—regarding physical, cognitive or emotional states—with which to build these cognitive bridges, and putting these bridges to work in constructing the next moment in the future.

In the interview, the interviewer always starts by having the respondent identify a real situation which the respondent experienced. The interviewer then asks questions which deliberately and systematically implement the Sense-Making metaphor: What happened in this situation -- what happened first, second, and so on? What was important to you about the situation? What was difficult about it? What lead you to see it in this way? What questions did you have? What kind of answer(s) were you looking for? What understandings did you get? Did the understandings help? Did they hinder? How? What ideas did you create? Did these ideas help? Did they hinder? How? Did they have an impact on your later behavior? thinking? feeling? How?

These questions all fit within the class generally called "open-ended" queries. But in Sense-Making, these questions are more than open-ended. They are deliberately structured and systematically derived from the core assumption of the pervasiveness of gaps. It is assumed that we can better hear what others have to say about their worlds by systematically addressing their views of how they bridge gaps, of how they invent their worlds even in the most externally constrained of situations. Sense-Making questions are all, thus, derived from the Sense-Making metaphor. The metaphor provides in essence a theory for the conduct of the interview. It is an assumption of that theory that querying others in terms of how they invent their lives opens the door to fully hearing them on their own terms.

Sense-Making interviewing techniques are particularly well-suited for this study for the following reasons:
1. Sense-Making is an actor-centered methodology that assumes that the experienced reality of the subject studied is valid and valuable. In this regard Sense-Making can be considered congruent with the aims of ethnographic scholarship, placing at the center of the analysis the informants' own experiences of situations they find themselves in. Sense-Making does not impose reality on its respondents, male or female. Instead, it provides a systematic way for subjects to re-construct their own reality of situations they have faced and gaps they have bridged (or avoided, or decided not to bridge, etc.) for the researcher.

The interviewer is mandated by the approach to ask the respondent not only what he/she experienced but how he/she came to experience it in a given way and how he/she made sense of the gaps he/she saw in that experience. It is the systematic attention to gap-defining and gap-bridging which Sense-Making assumes gives the respondent the opportunity to connect his/her public expressions during the interview to the private sphere of his/her life. One result of this is that respondents are systematically asked to make the kind of connectings which usually are left to the final research stage when the researcher attempts to find patterns in data. With Sense-Making the respondent is systematically asked to describe the patterns he/she has constructed in his/her living.

2. As a set of interviewing methods, Sense-Making yields procedures that can be utilized in any context where one wants another to talk about their experiences, in whatever way they find useful and meaningful to that context. One powerful context for talk is anonymity and intimate contexts. Since it is never possible to conduct a given interview from all contexts, Sense-Making assumes that a self-reflexive assessment of contexts and impacts of contexts is an inherent necessity. This includes an assessment of power relations between interviewer and interviewee as well.

3. Sense-Making accepts the axiom that gender is a social and cultural construction. For Sense-Making, all meaning-making is constrained not only by the
limitations of past and present time-space but by the social and cultural arrangements in which we live. Sense-Making assumes fundamentally that researchers must focus on the gap as an important entry point for understanding how micro-level phenomena (e.g. individual behavior) links with macro level phenomena (e.g. structural constraints) and vice versa. Sense-Making assumes that structures are built, maintained, changed, and destroyed by behaviors. Thus, the Sense-Making approach is defined as offering a methodology, by which one can systematically bring to bear multiple perspectives on a phenomena (e.g. how individuals define their freedom within situations and how they define structural constraints and hegemonic processes).

4. Sense-Making is concerned with coherence and understanding between two individuals. An important aspect of the procedures is that interviewers read back their understandings of what respondents have said giving respondents the opportunity to confirm, change, or add to what was written. Because the Sense-Making interview has a deliberate structure, it is possible for many interviewers to work on a project at once. Unlike naturalistic research where the researcher is the sole "human instrument" (see Lincoln and Guba, 1985), in Sense-Making all the interviews do not have to be conducted by the primary researcher, yet the metaphor that guides the interview structure offers comparability across interviewers and respondents which in turn becomes a powerful part of the interpretation phase.

Research design

Sample. The sample for this study was a randomly drawn group of 30 respondents: 14 women and 16 men from the Ohio State University graduate and undergraduate student body--7 respondents in each of two sub-groups of females and 8 respondents in each of the two sub-groups of males. The original goal for the study was 40 respondents with 10 in each of the 4 sub-groups. However, because of resource and
time constraints coupled with high number of respondents who did not honor initial and follow-up appointments, the population was reduced to 30. An incentive of $20 was offered to each respondent to encourage his/her participation.

Although cultural studies approaches to media audiences have proved in the past to be particularly antagonistic to samples drawn from college student populations (see Seiter, Borchers, Kreutzner & Warth, 1989), this sample was selected not only for its accessibility but because it represents a primary market for the advertising used in this study—a university student population considered representative of in many ways of middle America. Further, this sample is particularly well-suited for this study for the following reasons:

1. Unlike many other popular media forms such as soap opera or romance novels, where particular groups of viewers actively seek out the viewing experience, the study of advertising texts does not suggest such easily identifiable groups. Instead, the viewing of advertising is generally secondary to the primary medium actively sought, such as the magazine or the television program. Further, advertising is ubiquitous in the modern landscape, experienced daily across and throughout differing media. It has been persuasively argued that the influence of advertising is experienced both consciously and subconsciously, as an activity sometimes solicited, but more often than not, unsolicited. Therefore, most all textual analyses of advertising, suggesting the subject positions taken up by viewers, refer to the mainstream, white, middle-class audience, not a particular subculture or specialized group.

2. Since Columbus, Ohio is among the 5 most popular test market cities in the U.S., and considered representative of middle America for survey, and research purposes (see Evans & Berman, 1990, pp. 304-305), a random sample of Ohio State University students is particularly appropriate for a study where the purpose is to tap into the sense-making of mass marketed texts by a mass audience.
3. Like most qualitative research studies, the total population in this study is relatively small. By sampling the university community, more control can be placed on characteristics such as age, education level and income than could be achieved by a same-sized random sample of adults in all of Columbus, Ohio, for example.

**Data collection.** Respondents were contacted by telephone either by the principle researcher or by one of two other members of the research team (see Appendix A for "introduction to respondents"). Strong emphasis was placed on the time commitment each respondent would need to make. The average interview lasted between one and two hours. Respondents were then given a phone number for purposes of rescheduling or additional questions. A reminder call was made the night before interviews were to take place.

Respondents were interviewed individually. Interviews were conducted by a research team of 7 individuals comprised of 4 men and 3 women, hired and trained extensively in Sense-Making interviewing techniques (a minimum of 20 hours). Most of the interviews were conducted on the Ohio State University campus, while several were conducted at respondent's residences. Female respondents were interviewed by female interviewers and male respondents were interviewed by male interviewers. All interviews were tape recorded because, a) tape recording interviews allowed interviewers to concentrate on sense-making interviewing techniques instead of concentrating on writing down responses word-for word, and b) from tape recorded interviews, full transcriptions were typed and therefore, none of the respondents' expressions were lost in translation.

**Protocol design** (refer to Appendix B for protocol). The interviewing protocol for this study was carefully designed to try and capture a portrait of interrelated theoretical relationships introduced in chapters 1 and 2 of this study and to provide a methodological alternative to the traditional unstructured, open-ended interview techniques. The Sense-Making interviewing technique used at this stage was a highly abbreviated version of the
"micro-moment time-line interview\textsuperscript{4}," a Sense-Making method. The abbreviated micro-moment time-line interview technique was a particularly appropriate choice for this study because it allowed each respondent to anchor his/her responses to advertising in real time-space first, and then allowed the respondent (not the interviewer) to indicate how he/she constructed the connections between the media content being viewed and his/her own life experiences. Thus, this interviewing method allowed respondents to talk about the relationships they saw between messages, social structures, and their own lives and experiences.

This interviewing protocol presented the viewing of ads to respondents in three different ways. First, respondents were allowed to discuss ads they chose for themselves. Secondly, respondents discussed a series of ads that were chosen in advance and third, respondents were asked to envision the advertising that had been influential throughout their lives. The reasoning behind these choices will be discussed below.

Part I of the interview protocol was designed to encourage respondents to choose for themselves the advertisements that they would like to talk about. The intention here was for respondents to discuss advertising in a way that simulates a natural viewing situation. Respondents were allowed to browse through their choice of the 5 magazines provided, and choose 3 ads that affect them in some way (i.e., because the ad is: attractive, eye-catching, pleasing, disgusting, intriguing, repulsive, persuasive, etc.). The 5 magazines were \textit{Time}, \textit{Cosmopolitan}, \textit{Rolling Stone}, \textit{Sports Illustrated}, and \textit{People}. These magazines were listed as the 5 most popular magazines of an Ohio State University

\textsuperscript{4} The micro-moment time-line interview is the most elaborate of the sense-making interviewing techniques and the one termed as being closest to sense-making's theoretic roots. The informant is asked to "time-line" his/her experience--essentially to answer the interviewer queries in detailed steps, reconstructing how he/she saw self as moving in whatever time order they see appropriate through a focal situation.
Department of Communication undergraduate course consisting of approximately 130 students, surveyed in Autumn of 1991\(^5\).

Parts II and III of the interview protocol were designed to tap into the relationship between how respondents see society's view of the ideal female body in advertising and how they personally see, or experience, the ideal female body in advertising. Respondents were asked to relate their assessments of the ads to their own life situations, past and present, and how they see the ads as impacting upon their lives, thoughts and emotions.

The goal of this particular construction of the protocol was to tap into those moments where respondents see constructions of gender as rigid and unyielding and also those moments of interpretive freedom about, and through, gender in response to those rigid constructions. By rank ordering their impressions of the 8 ads, respondents were encouraged to begin making fine distinctions for themselves about what constituted these rankings.

The Sense-Making questioning in Parts II and III, then, focused on those distinctions, or more specifically, what led respondents to make those distinctions. Through a series of questioning, respondents were asked to compare and explain the choices they made in ranking both individual ads and piles of ads. Through Sense-Making triangulations, or offering respondents sense-making cues that allow them to circle their own realities and experiences, respondents were allowed to relate those choices and distinctions to their own lives, society and others.

The final series of sense-making questions in both Parts I and II asks, "when you look at the female(s) in this ad(these ads), what characteristics would she/they have to have

\(^5\) The course is communication 260, "Introduction to communication in culture and society," taught three times a year at Ohio State University. This course is the introductory core requirement for the area of the department entitled critical/cultural studies, and is required of all undergraduate majors. The students were asked to respond to the following question: "If you were offered free subscriptions to 5 magazines of your choice, what 5 magazines would you choose. Respondents were asked to indicate on their survey if they were male or female.
to make them unattractive by society's standards?" This question and the Sense-Making triangulations that follow were designed to encourage respondents to take a critical stance toward the ideal body image, that answering questions about what is "attractive" might not evoke. For most respondents, framing responses to what society finds ideal and what they personally find appealing was somewhat intuitive and common-sensical, while being asked to express what specifically is "unattractive," ran counter-intuitive for them, demanding higher reasoning and more abstract responses. Further, by encouraging respondents to make these abstractions, generally resulting in lists of characteristics, the goal of this question was to tap into those points of greatest agreement about the rigidity of gender definitions of ideal femininity.

Part IV of the interview protocol asked respondents to describe their life histories and, in addition, to trace back to life situations in the past where they saw advertising as impacting upon their definitions of gender, both socially and personally. The goal of this section was to further encourage respondents to theorize if, how, and in what ways advertising played a part in their social and personal develop as gendered subjects.

**Selection of ads** (Appendix D, figs. 1-8). The ads selected for Parts II and III of the interviewing procedure were chosen from past or present issues of the same 5 magazines used in part one, for the sake of consistency. Seven of the 8 advertisements used were chosen as representative of sex-role stereotypes and gender ritualizations widely identified by scholars of gender and advertising and widely recognized as repetitive themes in representation of the female body in mainstream print media (see chapter 2). The eighth ad, the runner for Nike shoes, is representative of an alternative aesthetic to the conventions of the other 7 ads:

1. **Sex-object/passive.** Advertisement "L", fig. 1, for Budweiser beer, is representative of a highly sexual stereotyped ad. The women in the photograph are ornamental, the female body is objectified, positioned clearly
for was visual gratification of a male gaze, and the pose is one of complete passivity, both because the women are laying down and because their swim suits are a part of the beach towel, suggesting restricted movement.

2. **Sex-object/active.** Advertisement "K", fig. 2, for Johnnie Walker, offers a slight contrast to the Budweiser beer ad. The female bodies are again the object of the voyeuristic male gaze, however the women in this ad are engaged in a moment of activity. They are unrestricted in movement.

3. **Pleasure/danger.** Advertisement "G", fig. 3, is representative of the male gaze incorporated in the photograph as well as suggested from the positioning of the female body in the photograph. The voyeur of this scene is offered an ambiguous scenario: the woman featured is either in a moment of pleasure (enjoying the attention of three males) or danger (attempting to flee the attentions of three males).

4. **Body cropped.** Advertisement "J", fig. 4, for Montana fashions, is representative of the convention of photographic cropping of the female body in ads. Headless and feetless, the whole woman is represented by the torso and one arm.

5. **Mother role.** Advertisement "H", fig. 5, for Pier One Imports, is representative of ads that present motherhood as a woman's primary role. This image, however, is updated for the 1990s and places the young mother in an ambiguous setting of nature, as opposed to the more traditional setting of the home.

6. **Business woman role.** Advertisement "I", fig. 6, for Virginia Slims cigarettes, is representative of the genre of "new woman" ads. The business woman is supposedly a symbol of progress and sexual equality. Like many ads in this genre, the Virginia Slims ad here incorporates "progressive signs (man's suit, briefcase) within very conventional codes of ideal femininity (make-up, slimness, long hair, pink coat).

7. **Face shot.** Advertisement "M", fig. 7, of Isabella Rossellini for Lancome cosmetics, is representative of ads which focus on the face in lieu of objectifying the body. This particular ad was chosen for the recognizability of the model, lending to the significance of the ad the possibility of inter-textual references.

8. **Alternative aesthetic.** Advertisement "N", fig. 8, for Nike shoes, was chosen for its alternative aesthetic value in comparison to the other 7 ads for several reasons: a) the model is pictured in a moment of self-absorbed activity in a traditional masculine domain, sport. b) She is not addressing the camera directly, lending a sense that this is a candid photograph. c) She is not made-up and her hair is not coiffed. She, in fact, appears to be perspiring. d) The body is not cropped, she is "embodied." e) the photograph is shot with a soft-focus lens.
Data analysis

Each interviewer was responsible for making complete transcriptions of the interviews he/she completed. The data was coded and interpreted by the principle researcher.

Coding. Miles & Huberman (1984) define codes as "efficient data-labeling and data-retrieving devices." However, in the process of separating data out one runs the risk of losing the processual patterns of human constructing and movement that are paramount to understanding human sense-making. This research shares a basic assumption with scholars such as Turner & Brunder (1986) and Dervin (1993a, 199b), that expression should never be seen as an isolated and static text, and that it always involves processual activity--a type of verbing rooted in social situation, culture and historical era--it is believed that this temporal dimension becomes self-referential in the telling of experiences. Therefore, many categories were conceived in such a way as to attempt to capture this temporal dimension. In order not to lose a sense of process in individual responses during coding, the codes were arrived at not only by taking into account the patterns and themes of pure content in the interview transcriptions, but also by interpreting the explicit temporal dimensions of responses for individual respondents. For example, some passages indicated that they should be coded "female negotiations." However, passages coded "female negotiations" had two different dimensions, "female negotiations-in real time" and "female negotiations-historical."

An initial set of 35 discrete codes were derived from several passes through the entire data set. Creating codes prior to the in-depth coding process was helpful; "it forces the analyst to tie research questions or conceptual interests directly to the data" (Miles & Huberman, 1984). However, the qualitative analyst must be flexible and responsive to the data, bending the codes when they turn out to be inapplicable, overly abstract, overly
descriptive or ill-fitting (Glazer & Strauss, 1967; McCracken, 1988; Strauss, 1987; Strauss and Corbin 1990). Through the coding process codes were added, deleted and changed to best fit the data. By the end of the coding process, 42 discrete categories emerged that maintained their usefulness throughout the rest of the study (see Appendix C for code list).

**Memoing.** During coding, extensive memos were recorded both in the margins of interviews and in a separate log. These memos logged major patterns in the data, and made note of where responses supported or disputed major theoretical premises about gender decoding found in the literature. Memos on unique characteristics of individual interviews were also recorded along with specific page numbers and other vital information for retrieval. Characteristics of individual respondents were noted and were later made into a short-hand profile list of all respondents. This list was useful to retain a record of respondents as whole individuals and not just patterns of responses.

In setting up a filing and retrieval system for the data, the major concern was how to track the responses both across the sample and within individual responses without losing the ability to reconstruct vital movements, negotiations and patterns. To address this concern of how to store and retrieve blocks of text, coded transcripts were Xeroxed in triplicate. These copies were then cut into sections, each section containing a train of thought, or a chaining out of related ideas. The respondent number, subcategory and pseudonym were written on each section cut. Each section was then filed in its corresponding box folder by code. A section could be filed under up to three different codes. When more than three codes existed for a section the three most prominent were chosen.

**Conceptual analysis.** Through this extensive process of coding and memoing, distinct patterns began to emerge in the data. These major patterns and the clusters of
responses that supported these major patterns were recorded electronically for later retrieval. The next stage in data analysis was to examine the relationships between the major patterns discovered in the data and the conceptual and theoretical premises examined in chapters 1 and 2 of this study. In some cases, the data suggested that the literature in chapter 2 should be expanded in order to accommodate major findings central to the purposes of this study. For example, the data yielded overwhelming evidence that the competing discourses surrounding how women discipline their bodies in order to reduce body weight, was an important and integral theme to examine. The appropriate literature was then examined at that point to accommodate such a discussion in later chapters.

Not all of the major patterns of responses discovered in this data fell within the parameters of this study, and therefore, not all of the findings will be reported in this dissertation. For example, extensive evidence was found for gender differences and similarities in the making of inter-textual references. However, inter-textual referencing is not integral to the purposes of this study. The analysis to follow in chapters 4 and 5, therefore, employs those major patterns and clusters of responses that directly informed, extended, or contradicted the major arguments put forth by the literature presented in chapters 1 and 2.
CHAPTER IV
GENDER DIFFERENCES IN ARTICULATIONS WITH ADVERTISING CONTENT, SOCIETY, SELF AND OTHERS

The purpose of this chapter is to address the first research question of this dissertation: *How do female and male decodings of gender advertising differ in articulations with society, self and others?* The full analysis in response to this question will be presented across two chapters. This chapter focuses on gender differences in response to advertising content. Chapter five focuses on gender differences in how respondents see themselves and others as the socially constructed subjects of advertising. Further, chapter 5 focuses on gender differences in how males and females construct and negotiate with their own gender identities in relation to advertising, society and others.

Gender differences in responses to issues about advertising content comprised four distinct themes in this study. These themes served to organize this chapter. First, gender differences arose in responses to whether or not advertising is "powerful." Secondly, male and female responses differed when defining and describing "sexism" in advertising and in society. Third, gender differences arose in response to four different gender displays in advertising: "body cropping," "action vs. appearance," "the new working woman," and "motherhood." Finally, respondents differed by gender in their definitions of and reactions to, an alternative aesthetic of femininity in advertising.

In the analysis to follow, gender differences were defined not only as responses that departed from, or directly contradicted one another by gender, but also as thematic
clusters of responses by one gender for which there existed no counterpart by the opposite gender. For example, in this study women offered many more categories of experiential knowledge of gender and advertisements than did males. Many of these responses had no true counterpart in male responses. In this study, these responses were considered gender differences.

This chapter, therefore, was not organized solely around stark differences between male and female responses. Instead, the analysis to follow was based on patterns discovered by analyzing clusters of responses from the 30 respondents interviewed. Not all of the clusters of responses discovered fell within the parameters of this study, and therefore, not all of the findings will be reported in this dissertation. The analysis to follow employs those clusters of gender differences in responses that directly informed, extended, or contradicted the major arguments put forth by the gender and advertising literature presented in chapter two.

Extended quotes from the original interviews have been used throughout this chapter and chapter five to illustrate major patterns in responses. These patterns, informed by the gender advertising literature in chapter two, serve as abstractions above the specificity of the individual responses. The selection of quotes used in a given section, therefore, is illustrative and is not intended to be representative of all of the quotes available. The organizing premise of this study is to focus on major patterns in responses and not quantitative presence of data. Therefore, the number of quotes used to illustrate a particular point was not meant to be indicative of the quantity of direct evidence for that point. Instead, the number of quotes used to illustrate a particular point was indicative of a certain variety, but not necessarily a certain quantity of responses illustrating that point.
The power of advertising

Male and female respondents in this study recognized that advertising images increasingly pervade our everyday lives, bombarding us with snapshots of what we "lack" and what we need to fill the void. In this study, both men and women recognized that each new day brings with it a barrage of images attempting to market goods and services directly at them as consumers, and each day these men and women employed strategies in attempts to filter out desired from undesired messages, and/or to resist or to ignore those messages. Men, in particular, reported feelings of being barraged by advertising images:

You’re just bombarded with different images every day. Anyone that watches television 20-25 hours a week, reads the books and magazines and journals. You’re just bombarded with images and so you just kind of . . . I guess I use my values, and my personal life experiences, and things that I feel are right and wrong . . . I use them as filters . . . (Mario, male graduate student).

I mentioned a beer commercial earlier where you have the beautiful women and the good-looking guys who are with the women and having a lot of fun and whatever else is going on. And I think they take advantage of that. I think it kind of makes it seem like, with them flooding the media or whatever, when you see these kinds of commercials, they make you think that’s the normal, that it’s normal to have these kinds of feelings. And it’s normal to expect to have a beer commercial with beautiful women in it. Basically, that’s normal—kind of like a mass consent thing (Art, male graduate student).

While both men and women recognized the pervasiveness of advertising images in their daily viewing experiences, sharp gender differences arose in response to whether or not advertising is seen as a "powerful" organizing social structure of values and behaviors in this society. Most men in this study saw themselves, their values, emotions, behaviors and so on, as relatively unaffected by the dominant messages in advertising. Most women in this study, in sharp contrast, considered the dominant messages in advertising, especially pertaining to gender identity and gender relations, to have immense influence on how they view themselves, how they perceive others as viewing them, how they behave and how others behave.
Therefore, men and women in this study saw the influence of advertising differently. At a fundamental level, the difference can be explained in terms of two competing theories of media effects. Males in this study tended to speak of the power of advertising in terms of one ad’s ability to directly influence one’s behavior or values. These conclusions, drawn by many of the males in the study, correspond to the findings of most limited effects research. This research has found that the direct causal effects of messages on individual behavior is extremely limited. The males in this study were confident that the content of advertising messages did not directly effect their purchasing behaviors, much less their actions regarding others.

Illustrative of this confidence were overt statements by male respondents that advertising is not "powerful." Male respondents often described advertising as a nuisance, but rather innocuous and benign. Although both men and women described strategies for resisting advertising, only the males saw resistance as easily achievable. When male respondents in this study stated that advertisements are not powerful, or have no effect upon them personally, almost all references were made in the context of the one-to-one correspondence between seeing an ad and buying a product or buying into an idea.

A basic assumption here is that media effects occur at the conscious, rational level and that the viewer (consumer) must employ rational decision-making capabilities in order to thwart potential influences. Feeling confident that they possessed such skills, many of the males in this study felt they also possessed the ability to easily distance themselves from the messages and images in ads. A word used repeatedly to describe this ability to distance oneself from the influence of advertising was "immune." Males in this study possessed a sense that the over-exposure to all these images had inoculated them against the ads' effects:

*I've been impressed by advertising but I don't think it's ever changed my life or made me go out and say, 'I just got to have that to be fulfilled,' in a gender sense. I don't think it's ever really been part of my past experience.*
I look at a lot of ads and I think sometimes, wouldn't that be nice to have, but I don't see an ad or buying a product as something that's going to change me... I'm just not really affected by ads, to tell you the truth (Kevin, male graduate student).

...I think I'm pretty much immune to this kind of advertising by now. I'm not overly disturbed or shocked or impeded" (Bill, male undergraduate).

It [advertising] doesn't do anything for me. I'll turn the page before the advertisement bothers me (Shawn, male undergraduate).

I don't think I'll be suckered into anything that I don't need or want. So, for me, I see it as a positive. Advertising for me is a kind of nuisance. Nothing (Greg, male undergraduate).

...The commercials, there's nothing really wrong with them, I just don't believe that if I splash on some Old Spice that all of the sudden a great-looking woman is going to walk up to me ask me what I'm doing tonight... (Craig, male graduate student).

I think I know what the ad is for as soon as I look at it and I am not deceived when I look at it in greater depth (Jake, male undergraduate).

As stated above, males in this study were adamant that the content of an ad has absolutely nothing to do with what they purchase. Some male respondents made some minor concessions to the fact that advertising may help them choose between name brands, but beyond that, advertising has no influence on purchasing decisions:

The only thing that an advertisement does to me is that it shows me it is a name brand. ...When I go to the store I look at two things, can I afford it? and, do I want it? If I want and can afford it, I'll buy it. Not because Jane Blow is in the ad (Shawn, male undergraduate).

This perceived distance from the seductiveness of the content of ads plays a very important part in defining a male "way of looking," which will be explored in-depth in chapter 5. Male distancing suggests a certain comfort in looking at ads, and the females in ads, without the anxiety of being seduced by the image. Male respondents stated that it is possible to enjoy ads, especially of attractive women, with the enjoyment having little or no
effect upon whether or not they buy that particular product. In this schema, therefore, the male, not the image, is always in control of the seduction:

_I look at ads and think whether they have sexual content or not. Usually that's about it--more of a curiosity thing. If they do [have sexual content], it pleases me in that regard but for the product itself, if I use it, I use it, if I don't, I don't, and the ad doesn't really do a lot to change it_ (Art, male graduate student).

_Advertisements don't make me run out and buy something, no matter what's in the ad. If they put a sexy woman, half-naked in an ad for a six-pack, I don't run out and buy it... No matter what they put in the ad, I'm not going to go out and buy the stuff. When I shop for something I'm very careful... Putting a half-naked woman in a car is not going to make me go out and buy a Toyota over a Honda_ (Jim, male graduate student).

Women were far less likely than men in this study to describe the power of advertising in terms of one-to-one causal relationships between viewing a particular image and buying a product or adopting a particular behavior. Instead, women in this study described the influence of advertising in terms of pervasive images and repetitive messages that reverberate throughout culture, not just in certain media, such as advertising. Further, women described their experiences with advertising in terms of conscious as well as subconscious viewing, suggesting the possibility that resisting the messages of advertising on a conscious, rational level may not be enough to protect themselves from the influence of advertising messages:

_... There are so many things. They expect people to make this connection and then there's no reason to make the connection... All you have to do is think something through, you know, two steps and you realize that the claims are totally bogus. Can't you come up with anything better? [Advertisers] have been deceptive or whatever... I hope [advertising] doesn't get any cleverer. It's already too powerful. It has too much control over people's opinions and values. I hope it doesn't get any more powerful_ (Laura, female graduate student).

Indeed, the inner conflicts women in this study often described when viewing advertising images, especially of other women, were generally couched in terms of a conflict between a) what their "logical mind" was telling them they should ignore and b) what "another part"
of them could not ignore. For these reasons, among others, no woman in this study stated that advertising was not powerful. All the women in this study stated in one form or another that advertising images of women have influenced their lives either now or in the past:

*I feel basically advertising has tried to shape my way of thinking. And has made me, I think everyone, view life from the advertisers' eyes or stereotypes (Jamie, female undergraduate)*

*Usually when I see commercials like that [for Nike], I want to go out and do some aerobics or something or buy some shoes. Either way I think they're getting their point across. It's good to once and awhile see these and go do something. Half the time that's why I go out and do something, it's because I saw it on TV or in a magazine and I'm thinking, 'Yeah, I bought these shoes for that reason.' (Collette, female undergraduate)*

*I think it [advertising] helps to contribute to people... and how they think about women. I think it is harmful, what we are seeing is the one dimensional things and we are not--men are not trained to deal with us like regular human beings. Not a lot of them... Everybody including women and including myself, who thinks I'm sort of aware of this, still is influenced by what you see in advertisements, so we are all going to be influenced to see women as one-dimensional things (Laura, female graduate student)*

Given that the women in this study did not view the effects of advertising only in terms of direct causal relationships with buying products or ideas, as could be expected, these women made far fewer references to their purchasing decisions than did men. In further contrast with male responses, when speaking of purchasing decisions, women were more likely to elude to times when advertising did affect their buying habits and than when it did not:

*. . . I have some pretty strong feelings about what products I endorse, or what advertisements I endorse. When I see an ad I don't care for I tend to remember not to buy that product...[I]f I like a product and especially if I like the ad that goes along with it, I try to buy that so I try to balance it out--its not all negative... It [advertising] helps me remember because if you go to Drug Emporium or Far-More or one of those places and there is a million things lined up, a lot of them there isn't much difference who makes them or the price or that type of thing. An ad might make a difference to me whether I might choose to buy a product or not (Christi, female graduate student)*
[There's a] difference in day and night ads. The difference is who it is that they were trying to sell to. Who was watching TV at that time... [I]t's just that the ones at night you ignore. When you are watching football games you get up and leave when the commercials come on because you know that what you are going to see is the Swedish bikini Team and that kind of stuff. Really how many times do you want to see it? You get up or you don't watch. What you learn is to not pay attention (Heather, female graduate student).

**Sexism in advertising**

Perhaps the most enduring and profound legacy of second-wave feminism has been its ability to imbue our language with the capacity to name those images, remarks and actions that are "sexist." Of course, the legal definitions of what constitute sexist remarks and actions (in the form of harassment) are being currently hammered out in this country's court system and contested in public and private forums. However, the naming of sexist images, remarks, and actions has circulated in the common parlance and in the popular culture of this society for the last 20 years. Although men and women still are probably worlds apart on agreeing to the boundaries of sexist remarks and sexually harassing behavior, sexist images are a more agreed upon and more easily identifiable phenomena. Words such as "sex-object," and "sexually-exploited," are common descriptors that both men and women in this study employed to discuss certain images, especially the images of women in particular advertising genres such as beer commercials and music videos:

* I think they [the ads] definitely exploit women. The sexual content of them is focused on it. Beauty and very little brain is demonstrated and it's just the male attraction to them (Jane, female undergraduate).

* I guess the most evident thing is the sexism issue. The fact that they just show pictures of pretty women, or parts of pretty women as opposed to women with a cause, enjoying themselves, doing something social whether it be social or motivational, that would be the biggest difference [between sexist and non-sexist ads] (Richard, male graduate student).

* Not knowing what he ad is for, I couldn't imagine a product where it would be appropriate [for a woman to be licking the floor]. That probably helped me to decide it was rather sexist because as there is no product that requires
one to lick the floor, I assume the only reason she would be doing it would be to be blatantly sexual and pleasing to men, I suppose (Bill, male graduate student).

It disgusts me. Again, just the association with the traditional notion of beer companies using really degrading ads of women to sell beer. To promote their products to men. I guess using women as tools to sell products. . . This [Bud ad of three women as part of a towel] was a very popular poster when I was a freshman in the dorms. . . Obviously a lot of men had this poster on their door and in their rooms and things like that so it conjures up images for me of that macho, masculine attitude that I hate. (Camron, male undergraduate)

'Cause you go to the beer store and you buy beer nine times out of ten they hand you a poster and the girls would be wearing bikinis. It is nice to look at but you know. I think it is more of an everyday occurrence to see people wearing work clothes. I don't think you see people wearing bikinis. . . I don't know. I am just comparing it [the Bud ad] to other ads I have seen. Every Coors ad I have seen tends to exploit women and sometimes men but not as often as women. This ad just seems to do it in a trendy, yuppy fashion. Not like high school. . . (Shawn, male undergraduate)

The woman [in this ad] appeared to be in a somewhat submissive position and I feel particularly sensitive to these things, as men go (Bill, male graduate student).

I just don't like the idea of women being portrayed as these kind of objects that when they're wearing really skimpy clothes and have guys hanging all over them, they just have that kind of arrogance about them that I don't care for (Craig, male graduate student).

Do I look at it as being potentially degrading to women or something? There's a certain part of this ad that says that this is the way that we portray women, and that's not appropriate. At least in my opinion, it's not appropriate" (Mario, male graduate student).

Sex-roles research, in particular, has played an important part in diffusing the concept of the "sexual stereotype" throughout the language of this culture. Courtney & Whipple's four categories of sexual stereotyping in advertising, are instructive here. These authors concluded that four general stereotypes of women existed across advertisements in eight major general-interest magazines in the years 1958, 1968, and 1978: 1) a woman's place is in the home 2) women do not make important decisions or do important things, 3) women are dependent and need men's protection, and 4) men regard women primarily as
sex objects. Although the variety of roles of women represented in ads has increased, current feminist literature on gender and advertising argues that these content categories have changed very little.

Male and female respondents in this study stated that sexual stereotypes serve as guidelines for lived behaviors. As Goffman suggested, there is a familiarity in gender-displays in advertising because these displays are conventionalized portrayals of the correlates between biologically-defined sex and culturally defined gender. Advertising offers up, in ritual-like bits, idealized notions of gender relations. However, cut off from context, and taken as a group, advertisements supply us with an exaggerated distortion of a world with which we are ultimately familiar. In agreement with this assessment, the men and women in this study suggested that through sex-role stereotyping, advertisers do more than reflect gender inequality, they help to create it:

_To a certain extent I think advertising has an effect on how we lead our lives because it shows the type of symbolism we should appreciate as males or females. It shows how one should act. . . (George, male graduate student)._ 

_We see on TV and the media that life is like this for a particular family or group of people, and advertisers just play along with the image, if it's right or wrong or true or false. Advertisers tend to do more of creating a situation then, trying to represent society. (Jamie, female undergraduate)._ 

_Stereotyping, whether consciously or unconsciously, always has some effect on how I view others. It also creates an environment, also affects the views of other people. It also provides a pressure for me to have society views, because it either directly influences my views, or it influences other views of the people who are close to me, and they can directly influence my views. It kind of influences me to have the group consciousness of stereotypes. . . 
First of all, it tells me stay young, it tells me to stay thin, it tells me to be very social. The majority of advertisements I see are geared toward cliquish types of atmosphere where a lot of people are always involved in a lot of things. All these are, ironically, I have found most of these to be untrue. I've been very solitary. I can do something about my weight, but I'm going to get old (Richard, male graduate student)._ 

_They're all the same. . . The rustic Madonna with the child was once maybe a more real or less glamorized person, but now they sell that wholesome thing too. . . I guess if you thought you looked like all the others [ads in study], you'd feel guilty about not looking like the mother in cowboy boots._
...It doesn't please me that people waste their time on advertisers' dreams (Mike, male undergraduate).

A surface reading of male and female responses in this study on what constitutes a "sexist" image or a "sexual stereotype" presents the illusion that men and women are now of like mind on issues of equality in gender representation. On a definitional level, this may very well be true. However, much the same as with the reporting of whether or not advertising is powerful, gender differences about sexism and sexual stereotyping appear in this study not at the level of identification and naming, but at the level of "experiential knowledge." The remainder of this section discusses how female responses on the subject of sexism in this study extend beyond the male and female responses of naming, to female "experiencing."

How women read sexism. Women in this study were far less likely than men to brush aside the cliched sexism of beer commercials and other such advertising genres. Women suggested that the danger in such images is in the fact that they are not isolated, but merely the extreme of the ubiquitous and repetitious portrait of femininity circulated and recirculated throughout this culture. Sexist representations in beer commercials are only the most profound symptom of sexist representation, they are not the disease. Female respondents felt that the effects of these images on cultural "ways of seeing" women in this society are cumulative in nature. Ignoring the most "obvious" sexist representations, therefore, would defeat the purpose of naming the real problem:

I would say now maybe because I'm so tired of seeing ads like this, like there's a lot in the music industry, of seeing a woman sprawled out on a car to sell blank tapes. The whole scenario of women being made into objects leads you to question, 'what's the point'?...I'm angry because women are not objects and they're continually shown that way. It makes me angry. And the more it continues the harder it is to drive it home to people that women are equal as human beings and not objects. (Rachel, female undergraduate).
I mean, every time you watch a car commercial, which is what every other commercial on TV, or a beer commercial or all of those... it has women like that [the Bud girls]. This one commercial for the Eclipse [car] came on, two heavenly bodies coming together, there’s the car and there’s the women with long legs and a skimpy dress walks by. So many of them are like that... It makes me mad that they always use women to sell things just like they were products themselves or something. (Laura, female graduate student).

It just makes me angry that they use women’s body parts to try and sell something. It is not done so much on men as it is done on women. Women have traditionally been in that position where they have been exploited and they let it happen... I want to be taken seriously as a woman and these kinds of ads, men can look at them the wrong way, it could hurt you... The fact that women always seem to be exploited in ads has lead me to become more of a feminist than I would have been otherwise. It takes so much more to be respected as a woman and not be an object. That is like the main thing. I don’t like it when men look at ads and then just think about sex. It makes me really angry. Like the women in the ads make me angry too because they are hurting other women (Claire, female undergraduate).

She has a good body and nice hair. She has the whole look but she has this helpless look on her face like, ‘I have a good body and that is it.’ That is why I think she is selling out. The way they portray her is not the typical woman... It hurts me just being a woman. Her representation hurts women all around the world. This kind of hurts me because once again the way they are portrayed in these bathing suits, lying there, degrades women (Nicole, female undergraduate).

How women read sexual stereotyping. Women in this study often described sexual stereotyping in gender displays as the prescriptions for gender identities. Stereotypes provide prescriptions for how women should look and be looked at, how they should feel and be made to feel and how they are expected to act. Female respondents felt that males see them in terms of stereotypes, therefore over-simplifying who they are and what they have to offer as human beings. Most female respondents carried around in their heads a list of sexual stereotypes continuously perpetuated by advertising, and can easily tick off the list when the subject is broached:

I see these women as the perfect mother, thin, younger, beautiful, with a child on her back, having a good time. I think that men have thought we should be this. Despite that, we’re supposed to be happy with our children and ourselves. Men are behind these ads...
I would say now maybe because I'm so tired of seeing ads like this. Like there's a lot in the music industry of seeing a woman sprawled out on a car to sell blank tapes. The whole scenario of women being made into objects leads you to question 'what's the point'? . . . I grew up with these [images] -MTV. I used to watch it when I came home from school. I am not these people but I always want to be because you think if you are these people then you're going to be happy--if you're a Bud girl or tight and small in a bikini (Rachel, female undergraduate).

It disturbs me greatly. I'm sick of people wanting me or women to be all sensual and sexy. I'm me. People buy into that type of behavior when they read articles, or look at magazines. We have models who get paid for selling their looks. That's disgusting. Advertising and women are just a business, but the business is negatively affecting society in a way that it stereotypes women. . . . I don't want to see women's personal body parts. . . . For me it's a turn-off. I watch music videos all the time and see women exposing their bodies and I don't care to see it so I turn it off, or turn the channel. Why must women show their bodies all the time to prove their true potential? I don't know why they bother. It's temporary satisfaction (Jamie, female undergraduate).

They [women in beer ads] are always stupid, in addition to being dressed this way. So that's why I think they are bimbos because they are in a beer ad. And her [Jordache ad], she looks so stupid. Somebody wants to be with three men dressed like that. They are missing a screw somewhere. . . . Same old stuff. I wish women weren't like that, and they would think a little about being their own person. And yet at the same time, I think about real human beings making decisions for all kinds of reasons. I hate that I am judgmental about it. . . . I don't see why I should care about how anybody dresses, or what kind of choices they make. I wish women weren't sometimes the way they are, that they didn't act that way. I don't know, I wish they didn't want to, or they knew a little more about, or they think about it and make a decision to dress that way (Laura, female graduate student).

Women in this study described stereotypes as helping to circulate the message that women are the societal "other." Women's sexuality itself has been held up historically as the dark "other" of culture. For example, the male-dominated medical profession has traditionally employed the euphemisms of "women's problems" and "nerves" to cover a wide range of feminine physical problems ranging from menstrual cramping to postpartum depression to menopause. Further, the supposed female susceptibility to "hysteria" has historically been used by male medical professionals to separate women from men as the psychological "other":
I still think there is somewhat of a feeling that 'we have uteruses and therefore we are hysterical,' you know (laughs). God, every 28 days we are just going to blow some place up. It's ridiculous. (Christi, female graduate student).

Placing women in the position of "other" in society is consistent with what feminist scholars of gender and advertising have identified as the ideological gender divisions of "male-work-social" and "female-leisure-natural" found consistently throughout advertising. The exotic female "other" is outside of culture in nature, and outside of the conventions of the social. The ideological construction of placing female sexuality in nature (the private sphere) and male sexuality in culture (the public sphere), allows the naturalized coexistence of very different ways of seeing gender in this culture:

I was just looking at these three ads [Budweiser, Jordache, Montana] versus this ad [Isabella] and the thing that sums this one up as an ideal was "Puritanism." This woman is the put-on-the-pedestal woman. She is supposed to be admired. She has a quiet strength about her. Puritan, putting a woman up on a pedestal. Don't let her get dirty... The women when they are shown in ads such as this are rarely shown in business suits. They are often shown either naked or in typical quote "home-maker outfits," taking care of kids while the man is walking around with the briefcase. Which I don't think there is anything wrong with the role if that is the role the woman has chosen, but women are always shown in that role rather than roles that are typically portrayed by men (Bobbi, female graduate student).

Well, she's with her kids, kind of representing the mother image. I guess. Women are always associated with babies and children and housework, things like that. That is supposed to be our role in life. I don't think so! I want children and all, yet that's not my goal in life. This ad makes it seem as she's happy with it, and you should be happy too, instead of pursuing a personal goal that you might have. . I wish people would stop associating all women with children. Everyone always assume that all women want to have children. I mean, I do, but I know some people who don't. Classify me as a human being before a mother, or sex symbol or business woman, please (Jamie, female undergraduate).

The naturalness, or "common sense" of these differentiations of woman-in-nature (private sphere) and man-in-culture (public sphere) begin to disintegrate with the reality of women entering the work force, and therefore the public sphere. The legacy of this ideological division, however, remains. A woman's sexuality still plays an integral part in
how she is seen and treated as a "worker." For example, a woman's ability to bear children has been, both formally and informally, held up as grounds for inequality in pay and advancement in industry. Female respondents cited the concrete examples of inadequate in-house daycare facilities and inadequate maternity leave policies as the types of prejudices against the needs of female workers:

*Or there is still this feeling that you will just get married or pregnant and you will leave us. Or you will need 6 weeks off to have your baby and we just can't have that and that's part of it. Also, this is a bit far a field, but women in our culture have been the primary care-takers since the industrial revolution and males have formed society. Women are still idealized as the mother and the house-wife and for example how many companies have daycare, or novel services for taking care of an elderly parent? Because traditionally that burden falls on females. If health-care companies were run by females you could bet that you would get more than six weeks off for maternity. So that adds into it for me (Christi, female graduate student).*

**How women read sexism in gender relations.** Women in this study expressed their experiential knowledge of sexism in gender relations in two forms. The first is in the realm of sexual harassment and the second is in the realm of "double standards."

The Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings to the Supreme Court in which Law Professor, Anita Hill, was subpoenaed to testify against Thomas on charges of sexual harassment in the work place, was seen by many women in this study as the turning point in this society for heightened awareness of sexual harassment as a serious lived experience, instead of an abstract concept. The hearings themselves are often held up as a mockery of equality in gender relations. Over a two-day period, an all-white, male Senate panel relentlessly questioned Professor Hill about her professional and personal involvement with Clarence Thomas. Professor Hill's character seemed to be on trial rather than Judge Thomas' actions.

In spite of these negative assessments, however, female respondents in this study suggested that many positive things came out of the hearings in the form of raising the male consciousness to what constitutes sexually harassing behavior. Female respondents felt
that the lag between the naming of sexual harassment and the legislation of such issues is a result of the fact that men still hold the most powerful positions in society. The hearings are said to have shaken up the legal system in pursuing legislation that more clearly defines sexual harassment and victims' rights:

. . . [T]he Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill hearings were hopefully a great realization to the people who run this country how badly women are treated and how upset women are about that. . . It was very interesting to hear--to even just listen. There was 'Judge Thomas' and here's professor Hill and those who supported her were calling her Dr. Hill and professor Hill and those not of allegiance it was 'Miss Hill' this and that. So, it was a one-up, one-down position. Here is Judge Thomas and here is Miss Hill. Let's forget she has a Ph.D.. Let's forget she is an attorney. Let's forget she is a professor. It really showed a lot of people, males and females, the inequity of the whole system because not only was it a question of whether she had been harassed by him, the whole hearing became a harassment of her. And that really shows why we have not come very far. . .

. . .And I think the other thing is if we look at the Fortune 500, or you look at top managers, or you look at organizations such like APA [American Psychological Association], that I am in, I would say that APA is 54% or more female in body, but in upper levels it is almost all male. That is true in rehabilitation, it is true in law, it is true in universities. It smacks you in the face all of the time. Even if you choose a profession that is dominantly female, it is very interesting that the people in power are males (Christi, female graduate student).

A second realm where women discussed sexism in gender relations was a double standard they perceived between a male fantasy of ideal femininity as projected in advertising images and the ideal female who is "fit" to marry in real life. Female respondents suggested that although the women in beer commercials and music videos are seen as the perfect sexual playmates, males define a a life-mate as someone beyond reproach, and certainly not sexually promiscuous. In feminist literature this double standard is referred to as the "Madonna/whore" phenomenon. Feminist historians trace this double standard back to Victorian era morals, where women occupied two different stations in society for the needs of men. The wife was supposed to be frail and pure, ashamed of her sexuality, guarding it at all costs. For the wife, sex was endured for the purpose of
procreation only, and a good woman did not enjoy the experience. The whore fulfilled men's other needs for sex and warmth. However valued the whore's company, however, she was never fit to be a wife. Some female respondents suggested that this double standard is alive and well in this culture today:

*I mean I'm sure that a lot of people don't look down on [women in beer ads] because they are, they must sell something, so somebody has got to think that they are hot, right? But in terms of that sort of women, I wouldn't think of that sort of woman as society's ideal. Maybe the men buying beer...even for them, that wouldn't be their ideal woman, I mean to marry or something to live with. You know what I'm saying? That same old thing, not he kind they would marry... (Laura, female graduate student).*

*But as far as women go and females go, if you would really ask the males if this is really the way they want their wife to be it really wouldn't be. So I think in some views they would say yes, this is society's ideal and everyone should look like this and act like this. But in reality, I don't really think they do. It's nice to have it out there, but at home you don't really want this kind of thing (Jane, female graduate student).*

**Gender Displays**

The preceding sections have shown how men and women in this study see sexism and sexual stereotyping in the content of advertising in similar ways on the level of identification and naming, but very differently at the level "experiencing" sexism and stereotyping. The remainder of this chapter expands on many of these themes by exploring how men and women in this study responded to particular "gender displays" presented within the context of this study.

For Goffman, advertisements offer highly stylized versions of social mores, definitions, attitudes, values and behavioral tendencies whose meanings must be clear enough to be interpreted in an instant. The task of the advertiser is to favorably dispose viewers to the product, to show a sparkling version of that product in the context of glamorous events. Advertisers must use limited resources to tell a story, to transform the
opaque into the easily readable. Advertisers do this by choreographing the materials available in social situations in order to achieve their ends.

Central to Goffman's view of how gender is communicated through advertisements is the notion that advertisements present to us familiar ritual-like displays. However, standardization, exaggeration and simplification are found to an extended degree in advertising. The gender displays in advertising are familiar because they show to us rituals in which we engage in real life. In semiotic language, gender displays are cultural codes, the store of experience upon which both the advertiser and audience draw in their participation in the construction of "commodity meaning."

Images of gender are highly structured cultural codes in this society. The transfer of codes of sexuality to commodities are probably more widely accessible to more people than other cultural codes and are therefore continually recycled in the symbolic world of image production. However, Goffman's additional insights are highly instructive here. Advertisements further serve to conventionalize our conventions, to codify our codes. Cut off from context and taken as a group, advertisements supply us with exaggerated distortions of a world with which we are intimately familiar. This is the process of encoding in advertising.

Decoding of gender in advertising, therefore, is not only a process of recognizing ritual bits of the very familiar in gender relations, but at the same time processing highly structured and "hyper-ritualized" images of gender. When respondents brought their own lives and experiences to the viewing, they were not simply reacting to the gender displays they encounter, but they are also responding to the over-codifying of gender relations in advertising. Decoding gender displays in advertising, therefore, involved an intricate process of viewing, always through the lens of gender, the encoded displays that are intimately familiar, yet stereotypical, exaggerated bits of lived experience.
Respondents in this study discussed many codes, or gender displays in advertising, at times their responses intersected with categories of gender display discovered by Goffman, such as "function ranking." Further, some responses expounded upon categories of gender display discovered by Kilbourne and other feminist cultural critics such as the process of "body cropping," and the gender divisions of "action vs. appearance." Two other gender displays were discussed at length by respondents, the displays of "the new working woman" and "motherhood." These gender displays will be discussed below in the context of gender differences.

**Body cropping.** Using female body parts to represent the entire woman in advertising is a often used, and hyper-ritualized convention, familiar to anyone who has consumed print advertising, in particular. The practice of photographic cropping only became politicized, however, in the 1970s when scholars such as Jean Kilbourne proposed that the repetition of this practice across time, helps reproduce a cultural climate where it seems "natural" to view women in terms of their parts. In this climate a woman, seen as a assemblage of parts, is more an object than a human.

Kilbourne carries this argument one step further to suggest that the act of objectifying a human is the first step toward committing violence against that person. When stripped of humanness, the woman is undifferentiated from other objects that one might not think twice about committing violence against. Individual ads don't cause violence against women, but the dehumanized gender displays across the discourse of advertising contributes to a callousness towards violence against women in this culture.

Kilbourne's arguments resonate in this response by a woman in this study:

*Some people might say that images in society are not really dangerous. They don't really teach us that much. We are thinking beings. We can digest this and throw the trash aside. But I think a lot of people are not taught to question the images they see. You see an image like this up on a fraternity wall, and you think of gang-rape. You hear about all these things-*
-the degradation of women. There is a book out about fraternity gang-rape and the brotherhood and how the degradation of women is a big part of that. That is part of the culture.

This is all part of the culture, so you get desensitized to these images we no longer think there is anything wrong with them. Just like the images of war that we see on television and movies like Rambo. We become so desensitized to the killing, that when we actually become engaged in war with Iraq, for instance, the people seen as deviant were the people who protested the war instead of the people who kill. I think it is because of images like this, or other images in general desensitize us to violence, to degradation, to humiliation. So I think it is all related...

In this one [Jordache ad] she looks in control of her situation, yet, there are three men, she doesn't just--so she is out-numbered. As far as my personal feelings, if I had three men surrounding me with these leers on their faces, I would feel intimidated and frightened because there is the possibility of rape here. With three men--although these look like they are not strangers to her--so if I were walking with three men I knew, then again, there is always date rape and acquaintance rape, so there is an implicit danger there. And I think that all women may sense that if you have men surrounding you it can frighten you. One man can... I don't find anything hindering about this [Nike ad] except there is a shadow in the background. There is a threat of being mugged or raped, so this figure in the background reminds me of, 'she shouldn't be running alone.' Which reminds me that women are told you shouldn't run alone instead of men shouldn't rape. It is always the woman's responsibility. It is her fault if she is raped because she shouldn't be running alone. These are terrible messages that women are getting. So this figure in the background reminds me of men--the possibility of being raped. And you do hear stories all the time, like the Central Park jogger where she was raped and beaten and all that sort of stuff...

That element of violence disturbs me, yes. That's part of what makes me angry and it frightens me as well because of the incidents of rape we heard in news in Bosnia and amnesty international typifying rape as a classification of systematic warfare. People say, well you are stretching this to try and make these connections, but I think there is a very close connection between the constant portrayal of women in positions like this, where violence is subtle or implied. I think there is a connection because we become desensitized to these images such that when you hear about rape or see the violence on television, and people go see movies like Rambo, where women are treated like this or they're glorified and put on a pedestal, there is a relationship there (Bobbi, female graduate student).

Both men and women in this study expressed strong reactions against body cropping in this study. However, it must be cautioned that these responses were all directed toward an ad used for this study, where the head and feet are cropped (Appendix D, fig. 4). Another ad using subtler cropping techniques may or may not have generated different responses. In reaction to the ad used, however, two prominent themes define
these responses. First, for male and female respondents, body cropping was seen as a form of depersonalization of the woman, and a form of detachment. Respondents explained that the ultimate objectification of the female is to picture her headless and feetless—unable to think and unable to move. This brings up the second theme. A headless woman suggests no brain, no mind. Therefore, objectification is much easier. There is no need to decode what is happening behind the eyes, because there are no eyes, no soul:

This one, no head. I know no one like this in my personal life. This is so detached. There is nothing that makes me feel connected to this person. With the Lancome woman there is more of a chance of some kind of connection. I can see her eyes. This woman here, there is nothing at all. . . This is the ultimate detachment. I think this is very harmful as far as the feelings. It makes me angry. Purple is my favorite color. So, I'm drawn to that. It is also ironic that purple is considered a powerful color for women, a feminist color . . . I'm looking at this image and thinking, how ironic. "The Color Purple" showed the degradation of women and how awful men can be to women, although the ultimate triumph. In this particular image, there is nothing triumphant about this woman. She is beheaded, she has no mobility, she is simply ass and tits. So I find that very degrading. I can see nothing positive in this image whatsoever (Bobbi, female graduate student).

This one its fairly obvious that she isn't a person, she is just a body. Maybe that's part of what bothers me about this one. She is just a body there isn't a mind or a head attached to these women, even though this woman physically has one, I question whether she does have one. . . she has no head, she has no voice, she isn't really a person. I don't like that . . . Well, I don't like it when I'm headless. That's not comfortable, that's offensive. . . (Patricia, female graduate student).

What strikes me here is her whole body is cut up. You don't even see a head! There's from the shoulders to mid-thigh. I mean, that's chopping up, and what is that saying? I mean, it's saying that she's to be put back for, as a sex object, for her body. That's her main purpose, and its products. . . Yeah, it's just kind of body parts. I mean it's showing a blatant disregard for the person, the person. It's almost as if they're dehumanizing this person. You know, they have statues and things along that line with the heads cut off. Here, they don't even have the dignity to keep--to put the woman's face--up in the advertisement. So, nothing is shown about her, her as a human. It's just her as a sex object. That's all (Greg, male undergraduate).

I just realized that all that is in this picture is the woman's chest and her behind. It disturbs me. No head, no brain, nothing. That's part of the annoyance (Lynn, female graduate student).
She's a form to me because I don't see a face. Your eyes have to do with your soul, hence your face has a lot to do with who you are. Her head. Where's her head? It's really strange. You don't have dolls with no heads on them. Well, normal kids don't. This ain't the Addams Family here. . . . Even if I wasn't in this interview situation I would be wondering why they didn't show her head. Not that I'm better than anyone else, but I know a lot of people who it wouldn't even cross their mind why there is no head there (Collette, female undergraduate).

This is like the ultimate de-personalization. This woman has no head. She has breasts and a hip and an arm. Maybe that is the perfect female (laughs). 'Can't talk back and can't run away!' That kind of really grabbed me, although these [Budweiser ad] are objectifications of females as sex-objects, this one--you have no head, you have no feet (Christi, female graduate student).

Male and female respondents in this study speculated that, sadly, the headless, footless woman might very well represent society's ideal female. These respondents suggested that in very stark symbolism, this image accurately represents women's place in society. In this schema, women are seen as body parts that can be objectively assessed without the complications of a thinking human being inside the parts. Further, the woman in this particular ad cannot move, having no feet. Therefore she is completely immobile and available, in both a visual and physical sense:

Starting with the Claude Montana ad, I guess I look at that and I look at the silhouette or what you get to see of the woman, in the ad, and . . . at least from the male society's perspective, of the way they view the ideal woman, I mean, you see the light--just the lighting in the ad--what it highlights. It highlights the woman's breasts, highlights her behind. It's obvious she is very well constructed (laughs), might be a somewhat non-sexist, but probably still a sexist way of putting it. . . . I find it somewhat disturbing, but I guess it's how I view society's view of woman, and what I guess they think of women. 'Is you don't get to see her head, and so, you get the impression it's kind of like her head doesn't count. All we're concerned about is how she looks and she does look very beautiful. . . . Someone would look at this and say, 'this is the ideal woman,' and I mean, because she's got the looks, she just looks really, really great, and that's all that really matters (Mario, male graduate student).

I saw this as society's ideal because of the appealing curves, her breast is stuck out. No [real] women would stand like this. . . . So, we are drawn toward her breasts and she has no head. I think that was very telling that we are not even introduced to this person as a person. She is merely a
body. A torso and some legs. I think in many ways that is society's ideal of woman—to be enjoyed, to be looked at, not to be admired for intellect. Children are to be seen and not heard and women are to be enjoyed but not appreciated for other attributes. I see nothing wrong with a nice body, but that is the only way women are portrayed in these pictures, as a body. We are not getting any other idea about what these women are about other than their bodies (Bobbi, female graduate student).

The startling difference in this study between female and male responses to photographic cropping in advertisements involves the next step beyond recognition and reacting to the use of body parts in images, to the internalization by women that attractiveness in this society is ultimately defined in terms of body parts. Female respondents carried in their heads a ready check-list of body attributes that they feel are society's ideal of beauty. Many female respondents couched their discussions of body cropping in terms of "men's definitions" of what is attractive, suggesting that advertisers supply the public with a male vision of beauty, centered on the perfection of individual body parts and virtually nothing else. These female respondents saw the fragmentation of body parts in ads as a reflection of men's fetishes about female body parts:

... [S]o many of them are images, society's ideals that have been conjured up by men and what they want to see. They are unattainable, these thin bodies, perfect hair, fine clothes, faces... I just remember commercials telling me I had to be 6' tall, incredibly thin, long hair, and blue eyes. That was my physical image. I also had to be extremely sexy and provocative to men, feeding who I was for men, not for myself (Rachel, female undergraduate).

Well, this is the kind of figure you want--most women want. We'd all like to have long legs and flat stomachs and just over-all perfection--no spotty skin... I would just like to be that way. Probably eating anything you want as well (Jeannette, female undergraduate).

The main thing I looked at was their bodies and their facial attractiveness... She is blonde, she's got big boobs, skinny arms, skinny stomach. I mean she is built perfectly as far as what men like in women. Everyone knows who she [model Paulina] is. She is very beautiful. She is society's ideal. She sells top products so she must be society's ideal (Claire, female undergraduate).

She's symmetrical. She's got big eyes and big lips. [It's] classic beauty... I mean it's all cultural, this look here is very cultural. She's got curves,
right? Long and curvy. I guess that's why it is classical. She's not stampy, all bones, or something. I guess she's [Nike runner] classically beautiful too, I think because she's not all sweaty but her face looks a lot like Isabella's and she's long and sleek too and curvy (Laura, female graduate student).

If these women were more realistic looking [they would be unattractive to society]. Say, they have 36" busts, but also 26" waists and 36" hips. Because most of us are not 5'10" and 130 lbs. or even 110 lbs. (Christi, female graduate student).

**Action versus appearance.** Respondents in this study recognized a prominent dichotomy that is often established in representations of gender in advertising as well as other popular iconography: females appear and males act. Goffman called this convention "function ranking." The hierarchy of social functions for males and females is pictured both within, and outside of, occupational frames. In these depictions the male is generally the one executing the action, giving instruction, or overseeing the action. The female, on the other hand, is the passive recipient of the action or the submissive recipient of an active male "look," from either within or outside of the frame. The defining feature of female representation, therefore, is appearance (a quality Laura Mulvey referred to as to-be-looked-at-ness) most often in a passive or submissive pose, and deferent to the male. The defining feature of male representation is activity. Photographic cropping, for example, is an extreme form of representing the female as passive. The cropped female body is merely an appearance, suggesting no sense of purpose, action or motivation—the cropped female body is the object, but never the subject of the controlling stare.

While in agreement that the dichotomy of action vs. appearance is a definitive gender display in advertising, males and females in this study invoked this dichotomy to describe very different phenomena. Male respondents, for example, used the action vs. appearance dichotomy to discuss their personal preferences of images of females. When explaining the differences between an active vs. inactive female in ads, males confined their discussions to the spectrum of ads presented in the study. Mainly, the males in this study
stated that the use of female bodies for mere objectification is unappealing. An attractive woman caught in a moment of purposive action was seen as far more desirable than the passive woman. In other words, the defining factor between whether an ad was personally appealing, for example, was whether the ad simply showed an attractive woman "appearing," or whether the ad gave the male respondent hints of what the substance of the woman was, what her motivations are or what her personality might be like:

*Maybe society feels aesthetics are a little more important while I feel maybe, the 'substance' in these ads are a little more important. That is one way, one good way of comparing these two [pile 10 to pile 1, personally appealing] aesthetics vs. substance. . . Well, put it this way, it pleases me that these ads do appear to have some aspect of substance. I guess the fact that I consider being athletic something of substance. I consider spending time with your family and relaxing and being active having substance. But I guess it's also been my personal experience with life and dealing with people and my thoughts about society that society doesn't value some of these substantive things as much as they value how good something looks. . . . I look at both these images [Montana, Johnnie Walker] and I see that they are both aesthetically pleasing. They are nice to look at. But then my brain kicks in and tells me there are other things to life than looks. . . Let's put it this way, if the person in the Montana ad had not only this aesthetically pleasing-to-look-at body, but had a wonderful intellect, and a great personality and all that kind of stuff, you would put it over in most personally appealing, but by just looking at this ad there is not way you can determine that (Mario, male graduate student).*

Well, both pictures [Isabella, Montana] don't show any action in women at all. They're more or less inactive. The fact that there's nothing actually being done. It might be a consideration, the fact that women are just being and not being something. Also, there's more of a flavor of sexism involved in these advertisements. The women are more or less exploited for what they are or what they look like instead of what they intend to do or what they really stand for . . . In all these ads, the women seem to be very attractive again, but I don't see them doing anything else other than being attractive. I think society expects a little more out of women than just to stand around and look good, which is what they all seem to be doing. . . The image I would get would be of a person who doesn't think or do anything but worry about being attractive and that would not be attractive to me (Bill, male graduate student).

*The image of presenting a female as a human is what I see these as doing more, is more of an image that is pleasing to me personally. Whereas these other [ads] are almost non-human. They're there to be gawked at, to be looked at, and that's the only purpose they serve. And so, I guess, the actions help to make them more human (Greg, male undergraduate).*
Instead of confining their responses to particular ads, female respondents in this study saw the action vs. appearance dichotomy as a microcosm of the way women are assessed in larger society. Female respondents stated that for women, a judgment based on appearance always proceeds judgments based on other attributes, such as motivations, intelligence, ability and personality. Female respondents at times seemed resigned to this ordering, expressing that no matter what the accomplishments are of a woman in society, she will always be judged foremost on appearance, with all other attributes ranked after:

...I mean the standard by which they judge women isn't, you know, it's how they look, not really what they accomplish, right? Like this business women, or doing something. What I'm saying is all these achievement things, that's not what we [women] are judged by. It's how we look and everything...they [Virginia Slims, Nike ads] are sort of out of that realm...I wish it wasn't the criteria that we were judged on. It seems like that's the only one, the physical beauty and in that sense, it bothers me (Laura, female graduate student).

All the women are showing off their bodies and shapes. I think society wants us [women] to show off our bodies, otherwise they are not showing off their true potential. They are less than they could be. Basically, we are judged on our looks the outsides and not the inside (Jamie, female undergraduate).

When I was looking at it as what I thought society's ideal woman should be, there are some very pleasing ideals. There is nothing wrong with being a woman who fits that, that makes choices around being married and having children and all those things. I think that too many times in advertising you only get the sexual appeal and not the combination. When I'm looking at women I'm looking for the combination of these things (Megan, female undergraduate).

Advertising just in general teaches all women to be beautiful only in the physical sense. To be thin, beautiful, passive, sexually available, non-threatening, not intellectual, not to be powerful in any way that would threaten men. It is OK to be powerful in a pose like this [Jordache ad], but that is only in the sexuality domain. Once in bed, for instance, she is not supposed to dominate the man. The man is supposed to control the mood, the pace, the orgasm, etc. Advertising in general sends women all kinds of negative images. (Bobbi, female graduate student).

When I first saw it [a Jordache ad in Cosmopolitan] the first thing that came to mind was that the woman looked inferior to the man. He looks like he is scolding her the way he is pointing at her, the way he is looking down at her. Also, the way she is holding on to him. She needs to hold on to him like he is a father. Also, what caught my attention was the wording,
Jordache jeans, and neither of them are wearing jeans. It is not selling the product it is just selling the woman. There is a sexy look on her face while the man is yelling at her. It is really degrading (Nicole, female undergraduate).

The new working woman. In the past 15-20 years, a highly recognizable gender display was added to the advertising repertoire, the image of the "new working woman." A snapshot of gender equality in the workplace, without any of the stresses of real life, this image is now a sign for every kind of product from "New Freedom" bras, to "Legg's" pantyhose, to "Virginia Slims" cigarettes. In most cases, the encoding of images of the new working woman in advertising involve what feminist cultural critics call, the process of "incorporation." Incorporation means that what appear on the surface to be progressive images, are not progressive or alternative at all. An incorporated image still adheres to traditional patriarchal conventions of advertising. For example, although a woman in an advertisement may be dressed in business clothes and have a business-like hairstyle, she conforms to traditional conventions of femininity in advertising in almost every other way, such as model thinness, flawless skin, hair and make-up, a nurturing concern for domestic and personal matters, and youth.

Among the 8 ads used in this study, one ad, for "Virginia Slims" cigarettes (Appendix D, fig. 6), featured an image of a youngish woman, dressed in a tailored male business suit and a bright pink coat. She is carrying a briefcase and, according to the accompanying text, is supposedly employed in middle management. Responses to this advertisement uncovered stark gender differences in how men and women see women's place in the work force and how they decode the gender display of the "new working woman."

The males in this study gave what Stuart Hall has coined in his model of encoding/decoding, the "dominant reading" of this advertisement. Male respondents mapped the codes of the Virginia Slims ad in similar ways as were preferred by the text.
For males in this study, the Virginia Slims ad represents an image of equality for women in the work force and a sign that women have truly "come a long way" from previous subordinated positions in society. This ad speaks to males as an image of accomplishment, and perhaps it truly is the accomplishment of liberal feminist ideals. For these men, the Virginia Slims image mirrors women's progress in achieving equal status in the public sphere of work, signaling that women have arrived, and much of the struggle to achieve those ends is in the past.

Further support for the assessment that males in this study gave a "dominant" reading of the Virginia Slims ad is found in the evidence that male respondents not only approved of this image because of its message of equality, but because this message is presented within the traditional conventions of gender advertising. Male respondents suggested that this is an image of the "complete woman." For male respondents it was the combination of a "progressive image" with conventional codes of femininity, such as youth, thinness, and flawlessness, that defined this "complete woman." Male respondents saw the Virginia Slims woman as someone to be envied in the 1990s. Not only is she successful at work, but she is intelligent, independent, happy and perhaps most importantly, has managed to remain feminine and attractive:

*I think motivation comes under society's ideal due to the women's liberation movement. I think society has relinquished some of it's hold of women in the past. I feel society is more accepting of women pursuing office-type careers, management careers, professional careers... It pleases me to think that society has changed enough to be more open about the roles of women and allowing them to pursue what they think they might want to do, but in the past were shunned from... It's motivational the image of the briefcase, I feel that society might associate that with success, the office-type image, the manager image... It pleases me to see that [women] have the chance to be office-oriented if they want to (Richard, male graduate student).*

*She seems to have it all. Work, family, this that and the other... [It's] what I think nowadays, is what is perceived to be 'the complete woman.' You know, she obviously looks like she's got a job... Successful with that, and she's attractive, and you know, happy... content with what is happening with her life up to this point... She's got, I guess, the best of all worlds, in this picture... Who wouldn't want to be in that situation...*
don't know too many people who wouldn't want to have a successful job
(Greg, male undergraduate).

She looks very intelligent. She looks like a woman of the '90's. She can
do as well as me financially. Plus she is very pretty 'to-boot' (Shawn,
male undergraduate).

In this case we have this apparent business woman on her way to the top,
but she's also appearing attractive and feminine and all that good stuff. So
she's managing to combine a professional life with also being the
stereotypical attractive women (Bill, male graduate student).

The Virginia Slims ad is like society's ideal because she is in corporate
drag, she is in what looks like a man's suit and tie so she looks like a very
successful, professional business woman. She has a real fluffy pink coat
on and what looks like a pink suitcase and pink socks... She is proving
that she can make it in a man's world without being threatening to them and
then the little phrase that says, 'you've come a long way, baby' (Camron,
male undergraduate).

Male respondents in this study did depart from their dominant readings of the
Virginia Slims ad in one respect. In this study, males, much more than females,
commented on the conflict they perceived between the very "positive" image of equality and
contentedness they saw in the Virginia Slims ads and the fact that the image was promoting
a harmful product. More specifically, male respondents saw a distinct conflict between
the image of female professionalism and the habit of smoking. Male respondents saw no
integrative features between these two components. Instead, imposing a negative behavior-
-smoking--on a positive image was seen as an act of deceit in the process of encoding. It
can be assumed, therefore, that males in this study would have decoded the image of the
young business woman in the Virginia Slims ad as unequivocally positive if it had not been
attached to the product of cigarettes:

I like the idea of a woman being professional and having career-type jobs
and that kind of stuff. On the one hand, ... but the fact that she's holding
a cigarette in her hand... to me, just puts it automatically way down on
the end of the spectrum and I know that this is probably a little bit my own
feelings rather than what I feel society's feelings are... Most of the people
I know don't look at smoking very highly, especially smoking for people
that are supposed to be business professionals, or health professionals.
Smoking is one of those things that you 'just don't do.' If you do, you don't tell anyone about it [laughs] (Mario, male graduate student).

I don't understand why cigarettes or alcohol contribute to these kinds of images of people. . . Again, you've got a lady running along. She is a business-type lady. And at first I thought that would be quite novel, but then I realized it was for cigarettes and I just completely don't understand the ad altogether. It possibly says that if you are a business-type person then you need cigarettes to relax you or to make you look at the world in a different way (Jake, male undergraduate).

For one, this one shows I'd say a woman in middle management by how the ad is and she smokes, giving the impression that all woman in middle management smoke, which is not true--maybe it is, I don't know. Saying that if you want to be successful, you should smoke. I'm against smoking. I've seen what it's done to people (Paul, male undergraduate).

In stark contrast to the male dominant readings of the Virginia Slims ad, female respondents in this study rarely identified this image as a positive one. Like the males, those women who did find the image positive deemed the ad an image of female achievement and advancement. However, unlike the male respondents, the women who approved of this image did so on a personal level, seeing it as a role-model, but never deeming this an image of "equality." Instead, several female respondents stated that they could identify personally with this woman. They either saw her as someone they would like to be or as a strong figure in her own right:

She's got on a pants suit and a tie and she's got a briefcase. She just looks like a business woman. I am a business woman. I can relate to her because that is what I'll be doing. . . I was a business woman with my intern[ship] and I will be one in the future when I graduate. . . It pleases me because that is what I am going to be (Claire, female undergraduate).

. . . [T]his one is emotionally strong. She's made up her mind that she can smoke if she wants to. She doesn't care what the Surgeon General has said. She's tough enough to take it plus she has a man's suit on and she is saying I can do anything a man can do plus she is carrying a silver briefcase and a purse. . . Sure, this is me. I'm tough and do I care what society thinks? Not really (Patricia, female graduate student).

Continuing with Hall's categories of decoding, the majority of women in this study decoded this image in highly negotiated or even oppositional ways, reading against the grain of the text through the lens of their own gendered experience with the dynamics of the
work force. Female negotiations with this image originated were defined by the incongruities they saw between the image of the young business woman in the ad and the "reality" of work life, as they perceived it.

The first incongruity is rooted in the belief that liberal feminist ideals of increased visibility in representation are not only highly inadequate, but when held up as an end-point of achievement for women, these images actually can be counter productive. More than one female respondent in this study re-wrote the famous Virginia Slims jingle to read: We have not "come a long way, baby." These female respondents were highly critical of the on-going theme of the Virginia Slims ad campaign that suggests women have "arrived." This theme suggests that the struggles of their grandmothers and mothers were certainly worthwhile, but are now a thing of the past. In the on-going Virginia Slims message, women have achieved equality with men in the board room and in the bedroom. Female respondents in this study, however, suggested that this image is actually a thinly-veiled facade that masks the on-going inequalities between men and women in this society:

_Because I think that although we try to pretend that women have come a long way. . . baby, we have not. And the Clarence Thomas/Anita Hill hearings were hopefully a great realization to the people who run this country how badly women are treated and how upset women are about that. The connotation here is that this is a female executive running off to a business meeting and woman are not really accepted in executive-type positions. I think that is true emotionally and also statistically. What are they calling it now? The glass-ceiling? It is the same stuff over and over and over again. Although there are slightly more women in the US than men, society is still run by males. And they more than dictate what ideals are seen, and this is not an ideal (Christi, female graduate student)._}

. . . Anytime I see Virginia Slims I think of this phrase [you've come a long way, baby] and I don't like it. . . I was mostly offended at this ad because you are always drawn back to an earlier time in Virginia Slims ads and you are always supposed to appreciate the progress that has been made. I see nothing wrong with appreciating the progress that has been made, but these images are always supposed to lead us to believe that we have progressed, period. We've gone all the further we need to go. We've come a long way. Be satisfied. Be happy. Don't complain. I think that this is still a long way to go yet (Bobbi, female graduate student).
A second incongruity female respondents in this study identified between the Virginia Slims ad and their own experiences, involved the one-dimensionality of the image. Female respondents discussed the fact that the woman in the Virginia Slims ad looks as if she could not possibly juggle the many roles that real women in the work force do, such as worker, cleaner, cook, mother, chauffeur, accountant and so on. Because she seems so perfect in her role as a business woman, she must have made conscious choices not to be married or to have a family. Female respondents were often hostile to this image, describing the woman in the picture as most likely single, self-centered and aggressive:

*I'd say that it is great that women can have a career and be well-educated, but the reality is that it is not OK. in extremes. Like, it is really easy for women if they make a choice not to have a family, not to be married. Then they're sacrificing and being grouped into an extreme and not caring or some way being less of a woman. . . . This woman seems like she wouldn't be the perfect family woman. I was thinking this woman looks like she, not because she doesn't look educated or like a good mother or any of those kinds of things, she seems more career-oriented, therefore maybe more independent [than one] who opts to have a family and marriage (Megan, female undergraduate).*

* . . . The modern woman. . . she's dressed in this business suit so she's really not just a woman who has a job and a family, right? The woman who can juggle everything. She's one who apparently is also headed to try and take over some territory (Laura, female graduate student).*

* . . . [W]e are supposed to look at her and say, 'look what progress we have made.' Definitely progress has been made, but there is still--she's got to have all the pink, and she's got to be beautiful. Putting her in a man's suit. You know I don't think too many women would be able to go to a Wall Street office would be allowed to dress in a man-type suit like this. Women are still expected to be in skirts and jackets or dresses. So there is a teasing thing going on here. To me there hasn't been that much progress made. The woman has to act like a man in order to get power in society. In order to make it on Wall Street. So this to me is still a negative image (Bobbi, female graduate student).*

**Motherhood.** In general, the gender display of young motherhood was deemed positive by both men and women in this study. Most discussions about motherhood were made in reference to a particular ad included in this study for Pier One Imports (Appendix D, fig. 5). This ad pictures a youngish woman with long flowing hair, dressed in jeans, a
sweater, and cowboy boots. The setting for the ad is somewhere in the country. The young woman has a child, a young girl, riding on her back, "piggy-back" style.

In contrast to the gender display of the new working woman, both men and women in this study gave dominant readings of the image of young motherhood. There seemed to be a close ideological fit for respondents in this study between femaleness and domestic happiness. As was explored earlier in this chapter, feminist critics of advertising have uncovered a dominant theme in gender display that is an extension of Goffman's "function ranking." This dominant theme presents a dichotomy between the "female as nature" private sphere, and the "male in society" public sphere. Images of women caring for young children epitomize the female private sphere. One can argue that this ideological fit is so seamless partly because traditionally males have placed the persona of Madonna and child on a pedestal: 1) because it is a relationship they are unable to reproduce, both biologically and culturally and 2) it is a sphere where they are supposed to have no interest or ability. Further, the elevation of domesticity to a privileged position ensures a clear division of labor. In this schema, males labor in society for economic gain, and females reproduce their man's labor in the home through non-economic means and in the marketplace as consumers.

The ad of a young mother in this study can be read as a literal representation of female-in-nature. This ad for Pier One Imports places the image of the young woman carrying the child on her back in an ambiguous country setting, removed from society. The image is pure, free of stress or problems, a frozen moment of pleasure in simplicity and regenerative youth:

*She's playing with kids, kind of a motherly figure. She seems happy. She's having fun and smiling like she's enjoying herself. It seems to me that she's glad to be with them (Jamie, female undergraduate).*

*Just going out and having fun with your kids, and out in the field or something like that you know, it reminds me kind of where I came from. I'm from Wisconsin and we've got lots of corn fields and dairy cows and*
all that kind of stuff, and that's a lot of the time what we did. Put on a pair of 'clod-hoppers' and a pair of jeans on and went out in a field, and played around. . . I'm attracted to the family aspect of it. I'm attracted to, 'let's go outside and play and have a good time' (Mark, male graduate student).

It's just ideal when a mother and a child. . . It's just society's ideal vs. not having this kind of relationship. It just looks like they're having fun. It looks like they are enjoying each other (Gene, male undergraduate).

Most respondents in this study found this image of the young woman with the child riding on her back enjoyable and "wholesome." For many, seeing this image encouraged them to launch directly into stories about their own families and what family bonds mean to them. For others this image gave them a hopeful feeling about adult-child relationships in a troubled world where children are not always loved and cared for:

For me, families are top priority. Look out for family members. Respect family members. Do whatever you can for family members. . . And so this image with the family is an appealing one. It's kind of the 'all-American' image, a lady with a young daughter, or out for a day with them. The two seem to be enjoying the company of what they're doing. . . So I guess I have a lot of respect for females that are raising a family. Well, even a lot more respect for those that are. . . you know, there are a lot of single females now trying to hold the family together, nowadays. And you know how much work has to be put in to it (Greg, male undergraduate).

This one [Pier 1 ad] reminded me of my sister and her daughter. Really, two sisters and their daughters. Just together as a family, being very important. Trying to be together as much as possible, taking advantage of it. Don't take it for granted. . . I'm a volunteer firemen, EMT. I get an emergency call to an address that sounds really familial: Person in labor. My sister's in labor. I delivered her baby. . . Two years ago I had a call, my Dad was in cardiac arrest. I had to drive, they would not let me in the back. I almost got into an accident. Something about the family, something clicks. My family comes first, my friends come next, then my work. . . Just being so close that you're almost there--you're a part of keeping a relative alive draws that bond closer. Delivering two nieces, one nephew doesn't hurt either (Paul, male undergraduate).

I think that in our society, even though it is starting to change, the mother image has been around for some time and with her holding the child and playing with the kid. . . I've always been from a real close family and that has always been a real strong family value. So I guess that's why I still hold that as a family value although I can see that shifting in society's values (Jane, female graduate student).

Society's ideal is the bonding between adults and children. I guess with all the problems in the world today with respect to abuse and child neglect it's
ideal to see a mother and her daughter or a child and an adult being happy and loving toward each other (Gene, male undergraduate).

Motherly, comfortable, relaxing, fun, energy/career. . . I am a mother, I think mother, that's me. I do things with children, I used to live in the country, playing doing things with kids. . . Yes, a pleasing concept to have a good relationship with children (Lynn, female graduate student).

Gender differences appeared in responses to the display of young motherhood when this image was discussed in terms of being a societal "ideal." Both men and women in this study commented that this image of the young mother in the Pier One ad may be closest to society's ideal of the woman who has it all, or society's "everything woman." This assessment was most often made by weighing the stereotypical gender roles that women have been assigned to in this society against the personal appeal of the particular lifestyle depicted in the ad. Men in this study saw this ideological construction as a fantasy based in reality. In other words, the type of woman in this ad does exist. However, in the troubled and tarnished world we live in, she is hard to find. This woman, unlike the playmates depicted in beer ads, is the type one marries and has a family with:

Well, I picked this woman as most appealing because I think she has it all. She is independent, and strong willed. She is attractive and also believes in family. Well, the fact of the picture with the kid there. It is also the way she is dressed. She isn't dressed to be a sex symbol person. She is dressed to work, basically. I think she gives off a certain image of the intelligent type. Hard worker, strong, independent woman. . . It is hard to find a woman like this (George, male undergraduate).

As ideal as the image appeared to female respondents in this study, they expressed a deep-seated anxiety and even anger at the impossibility of achieving this type of lifestyle today. Female respondents were not content to read pleasure straight off the surface of this image. Instead, they pondered the economic conditions of such a life. If this woman does not work and is free of stress, who supports her? How does she maintain her lifestyle, looks and happiness? Are all these things dependent on a man who is not pictured, but who
is financially holding this picture in place? For female respondents this image presents a lifestyle that is enviable, but, as woman, they find it all but impossible to be this woman:

This one harkens to the maternal ideal that women have children and men take care of them and you can be well-dressed and fashionable at the same time. . . Because this is a print as in an American magazine. This isn't 'Outback 'R Us.' This isn't what most women can be. You can't be relaxed all the time and running around with your kids. The reality is that most women have to work and most mothers have to work. And many mothers are the heads of single-parent families, so I don't think they would be running around the woods. I think they would be working two jobs somewhere. . . I guess the only way I see this as relating is that for years women have been this natural resource that has not been tapped of the work force and there for about 10-15 years there was choice, you work or you stay home with the kids. But now there isn't much of a choice. I feel badly for women who want to stay home with their children, who want to stay home with a parent. Who do not have a mother or father with them as has been in the past (Christi, female graduate student).

There was also something about the women that looked kind of natural and I think that's another expectation of society, she is in her blue jeans and a sweater and her hair is blowing around and she is laughing. Women are suppose to laugh, they are suppose to smile or they are suppose to really look sexy like this one with the guys in the Jordache ad. . . They are images for me. Women with children, women with men, women looking attentive and women without heads. It's almost, there are so many roles for women and I think society puts women into these roles and I think these are the roles that society finds acceptable to men, highly acceptable to men. Companion, men's companions or as listeners or headless people or non-people (Patricia, female graduate student).

I guess, well for the first picture it was more the mother aspect of society for females, the wholesomeness. The woman is supposed to be the catch-all and the nurturing type. . . I think women can serve as role models, a good mother and have a career also (Jane, female graduate student).

The Pier One Imports [ad]--I think this is another one of society's ideals because she is a really attractive woman, down-to-earth, mom, good wife, fun loving, adventurous, always up for something, ready to do anything. I think that is what society definitely wants. Someone that is attractive, a loving wife, someone who can cook, clean, and do everything (Nicole, female undergraduate).

Consistent with their very material concerns for the structural impossibilities of this image in the Pier One ad, female respondents in this study pointed out another very material possibility of this image that they deemed positive. Only female respondents pointed to the
fact that the woman pictured could be a single parent and therefore a positive image for alternative families. Offering a much broader frame of ideological construction of "family" than their male counterparts, these female respondents saw this image as a positive and contemporary representation of an "alternative" family unit to the nuclear family:

\[ \ldots \text{It's a single woman and a child. More modern than a family-type thing. The woman is smiling. They just aren't very serious.} \ldots \text{You always tend to get this image of the family--the mother, the father and the child all together. This is just the mother and the child, which is quite a common thing now. \ldots It pleases me that they are not unhappy images (Jeannette, female undergraduate).} \]

I guess it is pretty much because here is a Mom and her daughter and another kid, I assume it is her son. There is no father and no other kids. The assumption I make is that it is a mother and a child. What the ad seems to be telling me is that you can be a Mom and still look OK \ldots \text{It's kind of a neat set-up. It looks like they are in an out-back jungle situation--wilderness as opposed to the hectic, nine-to-five, New York City kind of ad. So it is very relaxing to look at (Christi, female graduate student).} \]

I plan on having a child. My partner and I both do and one of us would have to be artificially inseminated and so to see a woman interacting with a child on her own I think is a positive image, because the traditional nuclear family is not any longer a man and a woman and 2 kids, or 2.8 kids, whatever it is. There are alternative families now. So this allows for a little bit of flexibility. Although many might assume that her husband is waiting for her at home or at work. But there was something in this that I thought was good, showing a woman alone interacting with children. I wouldn't be alone raising my child as a single mother, but this allows for some alternative notion of what family is (Bobbi, female graduate student).

This looks like a very stable Mom. Strength is very appealing to me, it's positive. \ldots \text{I see this ad of a single Mom. My Mom is a single Mom and she's very strong. \ldots The thought of being a strong, independent woman is very pleasing to me. I think it is to any female. It helps me realize it's OK to be happy and independent as who I am (Rachel, female undergraduate).} \]

**An alternative gender display**

The gender display of the "new working woman" in the Virginia Slims ad, and gender display of young "motherhood" in the Pier One Imports ad fall into the category of ads examined by Goffman. These advertisements offer highly stylized versions of social mores, definitions, attitudes, values and behavioral tendencies whose meanings must be
clear enough to be interpreted in an instant. However, if gender displays in advertising consist of over-codified and exaggerated ritual-like displays of the very familiar, what would an alternative image look like? If most "progressive" images of gender representation are mere incorporations of old conventions in new garb, what characterizes a truly alternative gender display? Further, within the conventions of advertising, is it possible to offer alternative images of gender from the familiar and still promote a product in a positive light?

For female respondents in this study, the answer to these questions, in the abstract, involved an expansion of the dimensionality of representations of women in advertising. By presenting images of females that are three-dimensional as opposed to the traditional one-dimensional images, female respondents envisioned an alternative aesthetic in advertising that was not antithetical to more traditional conventions. These three-dimensional women, as described by respondents, would be attractive and feminine, but also active, responsible, strong-minded, independent, confident and intelligent (to name only a few of the attributes mentioned). Further, the three-dimensional woman would be appreciated for her humanness above her attractiveness:

*We need to see more women who are just being themselves in every facet of their lives, not just women who always are at home, or partying with several types of men. There's more to a woman than that. We need to get away from those ads that just focus on exposing the woman's body and those ads that always have a woman depending on a man. We need more positively, like this ad [Nike ad]... We need to show women doing more realistic things than just sitting around a swimming pool drinking beer with 20 men. More than just playing with the kids. More than just packing school lunches. Women are much more than that (Jamie, female undergraduate).*

*A combination of different things as far as pieces from different ads kind of complete a multidimensional woman for me. There is one of each in each ad. One is very nice and sensible. The other one, the Nike ad, there is a woman being very physical and athletic and the one ad, the woman has a lot of attitude and seems very sure of herself and the last one the image is pure sexuality. I put all the ads together because I think they make a complete woman, all of those things are part of what I think is appealing about women (Megan, female undergraduate).*
I think anytime that ads encourage people or females to live their own lives it's encouraging. . . It's the kind of person I like being, and the kind of person I want my children to be like. . . Some ads do lead you to do it your way. . . I like doing things my way, so whenever I am encouraged it's appealing (Lynn, female graduate student).

In more concrete responses to particular advertising images, the ad for Nike shoes used in this study (Appendix D, fig. 8) was continually described by men and women in this study as an alternative image, or an alternative aesthetic. Men and women respondents both saw this ad as positive in the form of its message, the promotion of health and fitness. Male and female respondents also agreed that the woman in the Nike ad showed commitment and determination, two attributes not often seen in traditional conventions of female representation. Although deemed positive, these attributes seemed somewhat unfamiliar:

I put the jogger in as society's ideal because of the importance and stress on fitness these days and keeping up good health and kind of being like the all-American woman (Jane, female graduate student).

I like the ads that show an independent and hard-working person. It shows her running. She looks like the person that would get up everyday and do exercises. She looks like a very hard working, diligent person. I mean that's appealing to a certain extent. But, she also looks kind of fanatical about it. She is almost a jock type, but I don't see her as a jock, per se, but getting there. She is appealing. She is independent, good looking, and hard working (George, male undergraduate).

Similarities in gender decoding stopped, however, with this agreement that the message of the ad is a positive one. Male respondents in this study found the woman in the Nike ad to be unattractive, specifically because she did not meet the conventions of attractiveness of femininity in advertising that they were familiar with. Ironically, the woman in the Nike ad does adhere to several of the dominant conventions of female beauty in advertising. She is tall, thin and young. In a complete opposite stance from that taken with the image of the new working woman, male respondents saw the image of the woman
in the Nike ad as falling outside the boundaries of attractiveness both by society's standards and by personal standards. Only male respondents cast judgments about the individual attractiveness of the woman in the Nike ad based solely on appearance. For these male respondents she was an "incomplete" woman:

*She's drab, ugly, nasty, and does not look like she is having a good time... I am not very attracted to her. She is running. I really don't want to be with her (Shawn, male undergraduate)*

*The runner's a little blurry, not quite as attractive perhaps... I'd be afraid she'd make me go out and run with her (Jim, male graduate student)*

*Compared to how I categorized the other pictures, these just weren't as appealing to me. The black and white of [Nike] caught my eye, but just the fact of what the picture is just didn't appeal to me that much. I thought of it as a woman out running. Women are out jogging past our house all the time. I just don't give it a second thought (Art, male graduate student).*

*I guess my theme here so far is that one thing society wants is for women to be attractive. I didn't think this one was particularly attractive. I think society does not yet accept athletic women and this woman looks very, very athletic. She looks a little muscular and I don't think society is ready to accept that (Bill, male graduate student).*

Female respondents in this study saw the Nike ad as a positive alternative aesthetic, both in composition and in content. Some of the reasons women respondents saw this ad as an alternative aesthetic include the following: the woman in the Nike ad was not posed for the direct consumption of the male spectator, the soft focus lens added a sense of amateur photography, more like a candid photograph than a professionally posed and shot image. Further, the real viewer was forced to look up at her. She was, therefore, in the more powerful position, above the viewer and in motion, in a moment of flight. The photograph caught her in a moment where she was driven by internal motivations and was unconcerned, even oblivious, to how she might look to others. She is not made-up or coiffed and although tightly fitted, her apparel is not sexy, but practical:

*This one [Nike] has a very sweaty, athletic woman and it's not what you normally see. Also, there is this distorted photography and this strange*
camera angle. It's quite unlike what you normally see. . . She is so different, so muscular and active and sweaty. Her face is strange, too. She is not beautiful, but she is attractive, but it is forceful. . . I find it interesting because it is different (Heather, female graduate student).

She is in a powerful position because of the way this is taken, we are in some ways looking up at her. In some ways a direct gaze, but with this angle and the bridge being such, it looks like perhaps we are looking up at her, which is the very opposite of the way most women are photographed looking directly at her or down on her like the Budweiser ads. So, she definitely looks like she is in power. The way this is photographed the trees are in the background. Her height even exceeds the trees' height. She has just come over a bridge that looks uphill and now she is on the decline. She has conquered the hill. . . She looks strong. She looks fit, although she looks exceedingly thin to me. . . She's got her arms pumped in a position, so she's not. . . she is not trying to look appealing, feminine, no head tilted back. She doesn't have what is generally considered a seductive pose. She's running. Her eyes are pointed away from the camera. She's looking ahead where she is running. She has a sweat shirt on. . . She's in motion. She is still moving (Bobbi, female graduate student).

Female respondents in this study went on to identify the entire Nike "Just do it" ad campaign as alternative advertising primarily because of a shift of emphasis from pictures of "posed athleticism" to pictures of "real athleticism." In other words, these respondents saw traditional representations of women in fitness and wellness campaigns as posed scenarios, the goal of which is to picture the product, or end result, of working out: a toned body to be objectified as a spectacle. The Nike ads, in these respondents' opinions, show the process of working out--how real people look while in the process of toning the body. Therefore, authenticity in representation was cited as an alternative to "staging":

. . . [S]he is very active. She's got tennis shoes, and it's a Nike ad so of course she has tennis shoes on, but I like the imaging that Nike does, 'just do it.' I like that phrase. 'Just' implies, don't worry about, you know, 'Oh God, am I going to be good enough at this?', or 'Am I going to look good while I'm doing it? What are my friends going to say?', and, 'I'm not very good at this sport, I shouldn't try it.' They are saying just go out and do it. 'Do,' an active verb--do it. Do whatever you want. Just be active. Do something. I like that phrase (Bobbi, female graduate student).

I think that they're [Nike] good ads. They're pretty real. They don't have girls dolled up because girls don't always have make-up. Likewise, when they have guys, it's just pure and raw. It's real. These are some real ads. Even the TV ads are real. It's basic in it's message, 'just do it.' Don't wait
for anyone, just do it. It would be kind of neat if it was the same slogan and she wasn’t doing something athletic, but something else that’s important I think it’s a really neat ad. Once again, the ‘just do it’ part, I really like that. The fitness aspect, how she’s doing something for herself. I like Nike stuff a lot. Maybe that has something to do with it. I like it. It’s real. I like that a lot. ‘Just do it.’ That’s what she is doing. She’s not waiting for anyone else... and that is just a nice little motto for anybody. And you can relate that over to yourself, that doesn’t have to stay on the page (Collette, female undergraduate).

Female respondents anticipated that the image of the woman in the Nike ad would be seen as unattractive by men because of all the positive attributes mentioned above. By identifying male tastes in attractiveness as synonymous with society’s definitions of female attractiveness, female respondents saw this image as out-of-cinch with male fantasies of submissive femininity. Females in this study went as far as to speculate that if they were to present themselves this way in public the effects could be detrimental, personally. In the opinion of these women, society is not ready for women to present themselves this naturally and confidently:

All of these women [in #1 pile] are kind of, they look kind of self-sufficient and they are involved in things [that] are not necessarily female, but they are not the stereotype or the ideal woman like the beautiful woman whose dressed always that way... This one is active in sports, right. Okay I don’t know if society wants to know about that. She has a good figure of course, but who cares if she’s out doing sports. ‘Something not feminine about that’ (Laura, female graduate student).

She is jogging in one picture. She doesn’t care how she looks. Her hair is all pulled back. She is not in this ad to be attractive... I think I’m somewhat of a tomboy. I don’t like to wear tons of make-up or fix my hair. Sometimes that can hurt. If you are around woman who look more feminine than you are, they are not going to look at you as well as other people (Claire, female undergraduate).

I was very content putting it [Nike ad] under [pile] five because athletes are such individual figures. This ad would be very ideal for some, and not at all for others. A strong woman athlete is still very questioned—whether it is ideal for women or not (Rachel, female undergraduate).
Summary

Although in agreement about the sheer quantities of advertisements consumed or actively avoided each day and strategies for coping with this barrage of messages/images, men and women in this study see the power of advertising very differently. Male respondents tended to judge advertising's power by the ability of an ad to directly influence purchasing decisions, behaviors and values. These males, therefore, felt that the direct influence of advertising on their lives was extremely limited. Women respondents, on the other hand, saw advertising in terms of pervasive images and repetitive messages that reverberate throughout culture, operating not only at conscious but also at subconscious levels. Women respondents, therefore, felt that advertising is powerful, affecting their everyday lives in very profound ways, through their own actions and emotions and through the actions of others.

Second-wave feminism has imbued our language with the ability to name those images, remarks and actions that are "sexist." Both men and women readily employ such descriptors as "sexual stereotypes," "sex-object," and "sexually-exploited," to discuss certain images, especially the images of women in advertising genres such as beer commercials and music videos. A surface reading of male and female responses about what constitutes a "sexist" image or a "sexual stereotype" presents the illusion that men and women are now of like mind on issues of equality in gender representation. However, female responses to sexism reached beyond naming, to female experiencing. Women in this study suggested that the danger in sexist images is in the fact that they are merely the extreme of the ubiquitous and repetitious portrait of femininity circulated and recirculated throughout this culture, and therefore their effects must be viewed cumulatively and not as isolated images.
There are distinct gender differences in how men and women in this study responded to familiar, over-codified gender displays in advertising. The preceding discussion has addressed 4 gender displays discussed in-depth by respondents: "body cropping," "action vs. appearance," "the new woman" and "motherhood." The definitive gender difference in relation to the display of body cropping involved the internalization by women respondents that beauty in this society is ultimately defined in terms of body parts—a male vision and a reflection of male fetishes. Female respondents discussed how they often find themselves judging their own worth in terms of their individual parts.

The gender display of action versus appearance represents a prominent dichotomy that is often established in representations of gender in advertising: females appear and males act. Photographic cropping is an extreme form of representing the female as passive. The cropped female body is merely an appearance, suggesting no sense of purpose, action or motivation—the object, but never the subject of the controlling stare. Male respondents invoked the action vs. appearance dichotomy most often to illustrate why or why not the females in particular ads were personally appealing, confining their discussions to the spectrum of ads presented in the study. Female respondents, however, saw the action vs. appearance dichotomy in ads as a microcosm of the way women are assessed in larger society. Female respondents discussed how the judgment of appearance always proceeds judgments based on other attributes, such as motivations, intelligence, ability and personality.

The highly "incorporated" gender display of the new working woman is now a highly recognizable image in the repertoire of advertising. Responses to this image uncovered stark gender differences in how men and women in this study saw women's place in the work force. Males in this study gave "dominant readings" of this image, naming it an image of equality and accomplishment for women. By conforming to dominant conventions in gender advertising, males suggested that the new working
woman is the "complete woman." Female respondents rarely identified this image as a positive one. Women who approved of this image did so on a personal level, as a role model, but never deeming this an image of "equality." The majority of women in this study responded to this image in highly negotiated ways, citing major incongruities between the image of the young business woman in the ad and "reality" of work life as they perceive it.

The gender display of young motherhood was highly accepted as an image of wholesomeness and happiness for both men and women in this study. One explanation for this positive reaction is the close ideological fit between femaleness, nature and domesticity in this culture. Gender differences appeared in responses to the display of young motherhood when this image was discussed in terms of being a societal "ideal." For men, the woman in the ad does exist in the real world and she is the type to marry and have children with. She is, however, difficult to find. For female respondents this image presented a lifestyle that was enviable. However, for very material reasons, being this woman was seen as virtually impossible. However, female respondents found another material reason why this image is positive. Only female respondents pointed to the fact that the woman pictured could be a single parent and therefore a positive image for alternative families, therefore broadening traditional definitions of family beyond the nuclear family.

Men and women in this study disagreed on what constitutes a positive alternative gender display in advertising. In the abstract, female respondents suggested that positive alternative images of femininity could be achieved by presenting images of females that are three-dimensional instead of one-dimensional, such as women who are combinations of attributes such as: active, responsible, strong-minded, independent, confident and intelligent. When responding to a particular image described by both female and male respondents as "alternative," male and female respondents agreed on the positivity of the
over-all message in the ad, but disagreed on what constitutes a positive alternative aesthetic in gender advertising.

Men reported that the individual that does not conform to dominant conventions of femininity in advertising is unattractive. Female respondents anticipated that the men in this study would find this alternative image unattractive. By identifying male tastes in attractiveness as synonymous with society's definitions of female attractiveness, female respondents saw this image as out-of-cinch with male fantasies of submissive femininity. These women, however, found the image to be a positive alternative aesthetic because it defies dominant, male-defined conventions of femininity in advertising. Further, female respondents defined this image as "alternative" because it pictures a woman in the process of achieving health and fitness, not as the posed product, or commodity, of fitness.
CHAPTER V

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AND WITHIN GENDER IN SUBJECTIVITY, IDENTITY AND NEGOTIATIONS WITH ADVERTISING, SOCIETY, SELF AND OTHERS

The purpose of this chapter is to continue in addressing the first research question of this dissertation: *How do female and male decodings of gender advertising differ in articulations with society, self and others?* It is also the purpose of this chapter to address the second research question of this dissertation: *How do female and male decodings of gender advertising differ within each gender in articulations with society, self and others?* This second research question will be addressed at the end of this chapter.

The first portion of this chapter, which is a continuation of the analysis addressing research question one, focuses on gender differences in how respondents see themselves and others as the socially constructed subjects of advertising. Further, the first portion of this chapter focuses on gender differences in how males and females construct and negotiate with their own gender identities in relation to advertising, society and others. Gender differences in responses to issues of constructed and negotiated subjectivities and identities in relation to advertising, society and others comprised six interrelated themes in this study. These themes served to organize the first portion of this chapter. These six interrelated themes include: Ways of seeing, ways of looking, split-consciousness and narcissistic damage, weight and discipline, disciplining the diet, and female negotiations.
As with chapter 4, in the analysis to follow, gender differences were defined not only as responses that departed from, or directly contradicted one another by gender, but also as thematic clusters of responses by one gender for which there existed no counterpart by the opposite gender. For example, in this study women offered many more categories of experiential knowledge of gender and advertisements than did males. Many of these responses had no true counterpart in male responses. In this study, these responses were considered gender differences. This chapter, therefore, was not organized solely around stark differences between male and female responses.

The second portion of this chapter focuses on the major themes of differences within gender found in this study. Differences within gender were defined as those clusters of same gender responses that presented a definite "break" with the overall responses to similar themes by the rest of the same gendered respondents. Some of the "breaks" within gender responses were specific to particular topic areas. For example, most women in this study reported feeling estranged from the dominant images of femininity in this culture because of the way women were portrayed. Lesbian women in this study, however, felt estranged from dominant representation of females because of the conspicuous absence of representation of their chosen lifestyle.

Other differences within gender cut across major themes in chapters 4 and 5. For example, although the majority of males in this study reported a certain distance from seeing advertising as powerful, and most, therefore, saw advertising as fairly innocuous, some males in this study, however, showed genuine empathy and understanding of the power of advertising to contribute to injurious social consequences, especially for women.

As in chapter 4, the analysis to follow was based on patterns discovered by analyzing clusters of responses from the 30 respondents interviewed. Not all of the clusters of responses discovered fell within the parameters of this study, and therefore, not all of the findings were reported in this dissertation. The analysis to follow employed those
clusters of gender differences in responses that directly informed, extended, or contradicted the major arguments put forth by the gender and advertising literature presented in chapter two. The clusters of responses that constitute differences within gender related directly to the gender differences analyzed in this study as well as to major arguments put forth by the gender and advertising literature presented in chapter two.

Extended quotes from the original interviews have been used throughout this chapter to illustrate major patterns in responses. These patterns, informed by the gender advertising literature in chapter two, serve as abstractions above the specificity of the individual responses. The selection of quotes used in a given section, therefore, is illustrative and is not intended to be representative of all of the quotes available. The organizing premise of this study is to focus on major patterns in responses and not quantitative presence of data. Therefore, the number of quotes used to illustrate a particular point was not meant to be indicative of the quantity of direct evidence for that point. Instead, the number of quotes used to illustrate a particular point was indicative of a certain variety, but not necessarily a certain quantity of responses illustrating that point.

Ways of seeing

Semiotic analyses of gender and advertising argue that ads have the ability to signify to us when we know the cultural codes that allow us to reference what the signs replace. We, by bringing our own referent systems to the viewing, complete the transfer of meaning, or "significance," to the commodity. Images of gender are highly structured cultural codes in this society. The transfer of codes of sexuality to commodities in this culture is widely accessible to both males and females because the transfer has become "naturalized" in our popular iconography. More specifically, the transfer of codes of ideal female beauty or attractiveness to commodities has become common sensical, even though
the relationship between, say, a woman in a swim suit and a can of beer is in itself arbitrary:

*I mentioned a beer commercial earlier where you have the beautiful women and the good-looking guys who are with the women and having a lot of fun and whatever else is going on. And I think they take advantage of that. I think it kind of makes it seem like, with them flooding the media or whatever, when you see these kinds of commercials, they make you think that's the normal, that it's normal to have these kinds of feelings. And it's normal to expect to have a beer commercial with beautiful women in it. Basically, what's normal--kind of like a mass consent thing (Art, male graduate student).

The sign of the ideal female body, in this culturally naturalized state, then, takes on an exchange-value all its own. It is an ambiguous discourse that can be visually attached to virtually any commodity in order to lend the commodity value. Therefore, when the woman in the swimsuit appears in an advertisement for beer, the relationship between the sexuality of the female body and the commodity (beer) does not appear to be arbitrary. The sexuality of the female body has a general exchange-value lent in this case to the value of beer, but could just as easily be lent to the value of an automobile or cigarettes.

The general exchange-value of the ideal female body reaches far beyond advertising in this culture. This exchange-value is what Berger coined, a cultural "way of seeing." Ways of seeing the female body are culturally imbued codes which are consistent across not only advertising images but other visual images as well such as television programs, music videos and even portraiture. This consistency in representation helps define what is "natural" to be seen and enjoyed--what is ideal. A photograph or an advertising image is a selective view of reality. In this culture, advertising images of females frequently contain an invisible yet implicit man who approves of and defines the feminine ideal. Thus, the "point-of-view" in gender advertising is most always that of an implied male spectator. This implied approval by an often invisible male spectator is referred to by feminist scholars as the "male gaze."
Both male and female respondents in this study agreed that the codes of ideal female beauty and sexuality are both ubiquitous and consistent in this culture. Further, male and female respondents also agreed that these definitions of ideal female beauty are not predetermined or immutable. Instead, respondents in this study suggested that the image of ideal female beauty is continually reproduced by advertisers for cosmetics companies, and the fashion and dieting industries. The underlying assumption in these responses was that advertising does not simply offer a mirror of what people would innately find attractive, but instead, advertisers educate consumers by defining attractiveness in a consistent and ubiquitous manner.

Respondents reported that many of these definitions of ideal femininity offered up by advertisers, are enduring, such as thinness, youth and flawlessness, while other definitions are refined and recirculated cyclically, like body type (e.g. curvaceous vs. muscular vs. ultra-thin), skin tone (e.g. tan vs. pale) and style and adornment (natural vs. made-up, long hair vs. short hair, curly hair vs. straight hair), and so on. For respondents in this study the enduring definitions of ideal femininity, and not the cyclical fads, were seen as the pivotal point of influence by the advertising industry. Further, respondents also were more likely to link the enduring definitions of ideal femininity in advertising, such as youth, flawlessness, and thinness to injurious consequences experienced by individuals who feel pressured into "living up" to these structurally imposed prescriptions:

_The first thing that struck me about every one of the ads is they sort of depict somebody's idea--maybe a fashion creator's or fashion photographer's idea of what human beauty is. And most of them are female and I think there's the idea, preconception, that the slim, trim, often blonde--not always, but often--is the ideal. I don't know what the percentage is but I wouldn't think a majority of women in this country or society fit that. In that sense it's sort of an unreachable ideal for most... I think there's a conception that, among advertisers, this type of body, this type of image, is the one they want to project for their product. In a sense, that may be in presenting it so frequently, people will strive to be that way, whether or not they can or they really want to (Kevin, male graduate student)._
This one [Isabella Rossellini] is society's ideal because this is what I think society feels that women should look like. Being that she is a super model and she is plastered on every magazine. I am talking about her face and what she represents. I think people look at her at what they wish they could be. . . I think everybody knows her. They see her and know that she is a super model. . . I mean all that she represents, her hair, her face, her eyes (Nicole, female undergraduate).

Yeah, it's perverted, after all, making people into a few salable types. It makes them like cars that are sold for a 'look.' You get the idea that some powerful king or something decided how he wants his women to be and they serve him up what he wants, it's hard to believe that people would choose some of these parts on their own, more like these women are pimpled (Mike, male undergraduate).

. . . [T]here's an ideal, that's almost, that's being set that's almost unreachable. Rarely do you see females—or else a male also depicted in advertising—rarely do you 'see' these people [in real life]. I mean, they're almost out of reach. You wonder, and now everyone gets so stressed out about trying to live up to these ideals and you wonder whether, one, anyone can live up to these ideals and whether the ideal is worth living up to (Greg, male undergraduate).

I just find it a quality that persists through advertisements. . . . I also know that the photographs are touched up and air-brushed and stuff. So they are perpetuating an image that even the super-models can't achieve, let alone the average woman. So, I think it creates this unnecessary pressure to be something that you can never be. It's pointless. . . It bothers me because maybe women will look at this ad [Jordache jeans ad] and think that they can only be assertive and independent if they have the looks to do that, the certain dress, or style or body. Maybe I can only have that personality trait if I go along with it (Camron, male undergraduate).

Although both male and female respondents recognized that ways of seeing the ideal female body are culturally defined and recirculated through particular social structures, women in this study gave responses suggesting that they were critical of the arbitrary nature of the implied male spectator across the spectrum of advertising. Female respondents deconstructed the "naturalness" of the male address of the female body across all advertising forums, finding some forums more inappropriate, or more arbitrary, than others. For example, female respondents in this study found the use of the overt male gaze in advertisements in women's magazines particularly offensive, stating that these advertisements suggest to women that if they are not the recipient of this same type of male
attention, there is something wrong with them. This concept of women being sold the male-defined, ideal image of themselves is what has been described in cultural studies literature as the "split-consciousness" of the surveyed female. In this way of seeing females are the objects of the gaze as opposed to the subjects of the gaze:

Well, the majority of these ads are in female magazines. They are directed toward a male audience but women are only going to see them. So it kind of makes us feel bad about ourselves as women because we don't look like them. That is why I put them in pile number one because these don't appeal to me at all... It disturbs because of the fact that they are selling to women but they are really selling to men. They are in women's magazines and they are selling to men (Nicole, female undergraduate).

...So many of them [ads] are images, society's ideals that have been conjured up by men and what they want to see. They are unattainable, these thin bodies, perfect hair, fine clothes, faces. This is the cause of so much distress and poor self-images of women today. At the same time I do rather envy them, their bodies, despite my better judgment, I do (Rachel, female undergraduate).

Further, female respondents suggested that the pervasive male gaze in advertising perpetuates a male fantasy of women styled on a vision of femininity that is one-dimensional. These respondents argued that the mass media's continual perpetuation of one-dimensional images of women based solely on appearance, serve to prevent men from seeing, and therefore valuing, women as multi-dimensional beings. According to these female respondents, the pervasiveness and consistency of images of the one-dimensional female, which are generally coded for strong visual and erotic impact, contribute in a significant way to males' stereotypical visions of femininity. These respondents suggested that such images perpetuate the belief that women should be judged foremost on appearance and sex-appeal:

I think [advertising] helps to contribute to people, and how they think about women. I think it is harmful, what we are seeing is one dimensional things and we are not, men aren't trained to deal with us like regular human beings. Not a lot of them. I mean some of them are. But, everybody including women and including myself, who thinks I'm sort of aware of this, [is] still influenced to see woman as one dimensional things (Laura, female graduate student).
Ways of looking

Coward contends that the male gaze encoded in photographic images is an extension of how men view women in the streets. Male looking is imbued with power and status. Female looking, on the other hand, is generally relegated to private viewing, such as at magazines, television and the cinema. This study supports these arguments. While both males and females discussed the pleasure of looking at attractive females, males made their comments within the larger context of the way they look at women in general, and not just in advertisements:

I focused on the sexual aspect of [the ads]. They're good looking... The way I was brought up in society from my interactions, watching TV, and everything else, looking a Playboy magazines. I just kind of equate a nice looking woman with a pleasurable response. The sex and the pictures does that for me. It just makes me feel good... From all the TV advertising, magazine advertising, record albums or whatever it is, you know someone is trying to attract you to their product...

I guess just looking at good-looking women, really. Whether it be on TV, magazines, or newspapers, or on the street. If I would see someone attractive of the opposite sex, it catches my eye. Not that it's that big of a deal--it would be just like 'Wow! you know? That's a nice-looking woman.'... It does please. How it pleases me is this visual stimuli kind of thing. I find women attractive and it makes me feel good to look at them. Basically, that's it. It's a pretty quick thing that I don't have to linger on with... I guess I equated that with having a lot of fun. You know, being at a party... kind of like being on a beer commercial (Art, male graduate student).

They're good-looking. These girls here--something I would--I definitely wouldn't mind having a girlfriend that enjoyed being outside in the sun and drinking beer... They're hot! Just by what I see--these are women that obviously make money by being good-looking. They probably make lots of it... I wish I was on the blanket too. (Craig, male graduate student).

Reality. Like if you are walking down the street and you see a girl with a hot body, what's behind it comes next... I guess it hinders me because you don't get to meet people who are different and beautiful in their own ways (Shawn, male undergraduate).

I think I'm like any other guy. If a pretty girl walks by, there, I'm gonna look. But, I don't know, I hope, that... I could look past that and try to at least, because it's only skin-deep... But, I do admit, a pretty girl walks by, it's almost hard to not just look at them... I guess every guy likes to look at a pretty girl. So in that way it pleases you (Greg, male undergraduate).
Female pleasures in looking, in contrast, are confined to the immediate viewing object, in this case, advertisements. Further, female respondents rarely focused on the body when discussing pleasures in looking at women. Instead, female respondents found pleasure in facial features and fashion apparel:

[Naomi Campbell's] just a gorgeous girl. End of discussion. She's plain Jane gorgeous. I see her in all the TV ads, magazines, videos, that type of thing. . . She has a pretty face, she has a very pretty skin tone, unblemished. . . She's borderline perfect, which is hard to come by (Collette, female undergraduate).

I do find [Isabella Rossellini] personally appealing because she has a really beautiful face. She's pretty. I guess some people would find that [referring to Bud ad] pretty too, but I don't find it appealing. She doesn't have too much make-up on. I wouldn't wear that much make-up, but she doesn't look overly made-up to me. . . She is looking right at the viewer. So she looks like she is on equal footing and her eyes look kind to me (Bobbi, female graduate student).

Well, I like her dress, something about it. I guess I would wear it to a nice affair or something. Her face is pretty to me, she has on all the right shades of make-up. . . She's dressed in the latest style with big costume jewelry on, and a pretty dress. Something about her, I don't know. She's confident and happy in her outfit. . . I would love to dress like that and have nice clothes in my closet. But of course I am a poor college student who has no money to spend it on clothing. But when I do graduate and get a nice job I hope to have stuff that's nice (Jamie, female undergraduate).

The naturalness of this way of seeing the female body, that places men as the controllers of the look and women as the recipients of the look, follows from its pervasiveness in all arenas of female representation as well as experience. Lacan argues that the right to control others through the look, even the stare, is a cultural logic of patriarchy. Possession of the phallus, thus allows direct identification with The Law, while non-possession does not. For Lacan, the phallus is a socially organized symbol of the difference between male/female, in patriarchal societies it is a symbol of male power and privilege. An undeniable source of male power and privilege is the right not only to
define female attractiveness, but also to render the female spectator absent in the defining process.

Culture, therefore, privileges male looking. Male respondents in this study offered comments concerning not only the consensual nature of looking at female bodies, but the importance of learning how to look at female bodies:

... I remember reading magazines when I was younger and they didn't really have ads like these, if you wanted to see pictures of women you looked in Playboy. I guess those weren't really ads either but they did affect my idea of what it is to be male, to be able to look, but, that was one of those things you could only do pretty much in private... I don't think men really look at pictures of men in the same way as women look at pictures of women... Well, there isn't any way to say anything politically correct about Playboy, is there. I mean, that's what pisses me off about the whole thing, with those ads in the piles. You can't talk to a woman about it. It's just grosser to have women posing with clothes on than with clothes off... Playboy at some point in growing up helps you see through the bullshit, not to be funny, I don't know why I mentioned it, but every teenage boy has been taught to fear a woman's body it seems, and then they get to stare and they have to get over it, and learn to handle it or they'll never be a mature male--can't relate to a woman if you can't look at her, can you? (Mike, male undergraduate).

In sharp contrast, no female counterpart existed in responses for either consensual female looking at men or women, or learning how to look. However, as the experiential recipients of male looking, female respondents discussed the phenomenon of male looking extensively, never in terms of the artful subtleties of looking at women, but instead in terms of the degradation they felt at the expense of the male stare:

What bothers me is that it is a cologne for men and they have three naked women. I guess it represents society in a way because women are men's obsession. And they are naked so they are more of men's obsession... I think it hurts because this ad is trying to show that we are supposed to be there for men. We are men's obsession. We are just lying there, waiting for them (Nicole, female undergraduate).

I think no matter who we are, there's that idea I just want to be flaunted about because I'm just so incredibly sexy. We want men to be attracted to us because of our physique. This as idealizes what it would be like to look like [Jordache woman]. I probably feel envy again. I envy her appeal (Rachel, female undergraduate)
Yeah, they are making women appear to be objects which people look at this, men and women, and it hurts women's image to men. They'll look at this and think what silly women with their dresses being blown up and they will think that is how women are. It does hurt women who are serious and aren't floosies (Claire, female undergraduate).

In an even further differentiation from their male counterparts, female respondents expressed a certain impatience and a profound annoyance at being the recipients of male looking:

*I hate having to go places, like events and guys stare at me. Yeah, I'm not a piece of meat. They act like they are starving for affections. I wish people would grow up and stop acting like sex and good looks is all that counts. That's b.s. Dressing in skimpy outfits, really wouldn't make me happy. Not at all. That's not the meaning of life, to look good. What about my personality, my mind? People forget about that (Jamie, female undergraduate).*

*It's not personally appealing to me to gawk at women... All through my life I've never liked people who gawk. If you're paying attention to someone or listening to someone, you're not gawking at them. But if you're just staring at them for the way they look, good or bad, that takes no intelligence. That's just dumb and ignorant and, once again, I have no time for ignorance (Collette, female undergraduate).*

Split-consciousness and narcissistic damage

An understanding of the gender relations that frame the content of ads, ways of seeing, coupled with an understanding of the gender imbalance in permissive looking provide a context for exploring gendered decoding. Feminist scholars of gender advertising argue that how one sees herself or himself in relation to gender representations in the media is contingent upon one's awareness of, and/or one's ability to, negotiate with the construct of the "split-consciousness" of the female subject. The split-consciousness of the self-surveyed female is her embodiment of the object of the sight and simultaneously her awareness of being the object of the sight. The split-consciousness of the self-surveyed female also allows for a way of seeing that seems natural in appeal to both male and female spectators. If aesthetic appeal of the female body is naturalized for both males
and females, it also seems natural that the female body is represented as sexualized more than the male body:

*I just feel like I know what is attractive to men. All these pictures fit that category, skinny people are more accepted and attractive people are more accepted in society... Other than the fact that I would like to be built perfect, it doesn't really have that much affect on me... I mean, if you are attracted to a man and he doesn't think you're attractive then there is nothing you can do about it. I don't think it is that important to me... I think it would help if I looked more like they do. It would help me because people like to be around attractive people. Not everybody is like that. Attractive people are more well-liked and popular. That could help you in the future. In that way it could help me... It hurts me because if I don't look like this I won't be looked well upon society. Especially as I get older and I don't have the body and the face I think it will hurt more too. Women are supposed to be young looking and your skin is supposed to be nice but men don't have to worry about it because they get better looking as they get older* (Claire, female undergraduate).

This study found that women in this study almost always, and men very rarely, possessed the ability to theorize how advertising works to further encourage women to view themselves as objects to be improved upon for the male other, rather than to view themselves as subjects of their own femaleness. However, awareness (conscientization) or understanding of the process does very little to alleviate inner conflicts experienced by these women as a result of split consciousness. If anything, a heightened awareness of the fact that women turn themselves into the objects of vision (sight) instead of substance, and that they actively participate in surveying themselves for and from a male perspective, adds to a sense of anxiety and self-loathing.

For many women in this study the awareness of a split-consciousness of the female signified a kind of "loss." Respondents suggested that this overdetermined preoccupation with one's own sense of being a sight for others robs women of the ability to look at other women and appreciate beauty for its own sake. Instead, feelings of appreciation are generally mixed with envy or jealousy, and these women ended up feeling a deep-seated need to emulate, displace or even eclipse the beauty of the other woman:
... Physical appearances are too important. It has become too important and it shouldn’t be. And yet it is, I can’t avoid it. I wouldn’t mind looking at things from the artist’s sense, and saying, oh, this is beautiful or this is natural. But, I don’t know, I don’t look at it that way. ... You have a physical appearance, which is whatever it is and you can’t do anything about it. You can brush your teeth, brush your hair, and take a bath or something, but to worry about it is misery inducing because you have so little control over it. In the end it is just a stupid thing, it bothers me a lot. ... I mean just because it’s not an ideal world and everybody can’t be perfect. So then, it’s very hurtful to wish that it were or expected that it is—just causing you misery (Laura, female graduate student).

She [woman in Obsesion cologne ad] just seems like perfect. She’s got the perfect body. She’s got blond hair. She just seems like she would be really conceited. ... No, I don’t have to worry about being too attractive. ... It makes me sort of jealous. It is like a ping of jealousy but it is not overcoming. I don’t think it really hurts me. She is just one person. She is not representative of all models. She strikes me as being sort of vain (Claire, female undergraduate).

Well, it is the kind of figure you would want—most women want. We’d all like to have long legs and flat stomachs and just that overall perfection—no spotty skin. ... I would just like to be that way. Probably eating anything you want as well. ... It’s pleasing because it seems so easy to them but they are probably watching everything they eat, so it may not be so easy. ... It’s displeasing in the way that you don’t look like that (Jeannette, female undergraduate).

Williamson suggests that advertisements attempt to represent to us the central object of our desire, the unified and perfectly aesthetic self, an "Ego-Ideal." Advertisements suggest that one can become the person in the image in front of them. Advertising feeds off our desire for coherence and for meaning. However, creating and sustaining a coherent, unified self actually is oppositional to the major objectives of advertising, which could be said to be: to de-center the subject into believing that she is a project made up of many separate parts each needing continual improvement. The last thing that advertisers want is viewers who have a unified sense of self and who thereby can avoid frivolous product choices marketed at self-improvement. Part of advertising’s magic, however, is that by at once alienating our identity and constituting us as one among many objects, it then allows us to make the exchange for an image that gives us back our own value. Whenever we
make that exchange to gain back our own value, we supposedly move closer to a unified self. An ominous consequence to this process is that with every exchange comes a change to self until the desire to change becomes an end in itself:

. . . Probably the sadness I see in the effort and time women put in to make themselves the supposedly ideal woman. Too many times I think it backfires on them because it makes them even more unattractive cause it's not what they really are (Rachel, female undergraduate).

I think it is very counter productive and destructive to women to be kind of forced into trying to change who and what they are based on the need of a company to sell products (Megan, female undergraduate).

Women in this study talked at length about their desires to change themselves. As stated earlier, an awareness (conscientization) of the processes at work to make them want to change themselves was of little consolation, but was instead a source of frustration and guilt. Interestingly, awareness often resulted in anger toward other women, not men. Female respondents often saw themselves and other women as perpetuating the problems of split-consciousness far more than men. Through their full participation in this culture's demands that females are judged foremost on appearance and should spend considerable personal and financial resources succumbing to "self-improvement," female respondents discussed how they and other women are implicated in perpetuating their own exploitation:

All my life people have told me, even my friends, that 'oh, you'll look better if you only did this, or that,' stuff like that. Of course I would listen to them, most of the time. I was trying to be the best I could be, looks wise. . . We all characterize ourselves and others by the outer appearance. Women more so than men. Women spend more time in the mirror, we buy things to enhance ourselves to be that perfect woman. What do men buy? Not that much. I don't see too many men in tight clothing. Yet you see women all the time. People will do what is best for them, I guess, and not realize what they are doing to society at large. Women continue to exploit themselves, therefore it is easy for men to exploit them too. If women stop the madness and stop obsessing about the physical side of them, then I think men will change their own attitude towards women (Jamie, female undergraduate).

This study, therefore, strongly supports Coward's contention that "narcissism" as an explanation for women's obsessions with surveying themselves and other women is
extremely inadequate. A theory of narcissism holds that woman are innately vain, finding pleasure in scrutinizing and assessing their outer images. The result of these assessments is the need to masque the appearance in order to improve upon personal beauty. One of the by-products of the pleasure of self-adoration is the need to gauge one’s own beauty by assessing the beauty of others critically. The “others” referred to here are not only other real women, but also the women in the mass media.

Coward suggests that it is not self-love that leads to a woman’s obsession with her own image, it is actually a form of self-hate. Coward calls this form of feminine self-hate “ narcissistic damage.” In Coward’s view, yes, women are fascinated with their own images, but not so much out of a sense of desire or pleasure as out of a sense of anxiety and urgency to change and to improve:

Yeah, women are not as self-centered as you think they are. We care about other things in life. I care about my health and my well-being, my family, and my friends, things like that. We are more well-rounded than the media, magazines give us credit for.

... We are not on this earth to be casted as a piece of meat, or somebody’s play toy. We are more than just a piece of flesh. We have a mind and depth to us, all that stuff is over-looked by people who just buy into stereotypes of women. Well, before we had this women’s movement, we didn’t reveal much of ourselves. Not our minds or abilities and especially not our bodies. Now we have freedom and men and women abuse it. They try to dictate what is good and bad and what’s wrong or right. I don’t think we should let people like advertisers decide what is right for us. Let us decide what to wear because we like it or feel comfortable. Not pressured into a dress that you can’t fit into then starve yourself trying. We need to think for ourselves, then we can help others, not dictate, but help them be themselves (Jamie, female undergraduate).

Coward argues that in a highly visual and image-conscious society such as this, a woman learns at a very early age that physical appearance is probably the most crucial way in which men form opinions about her worth. However, the image of the flawless magazine cover girls and Hollywood screen goddesses set the standard for this assessment of feminine beauty, not flesh and blood women. In real life, women work toward this
standard as a goal of achievement, measuring their success by the reflection in the mirror and more importantly, the attention gained by men as well as other women out in "public."

Therefore, feelings about appearance and self-image easily get mingled with feelings about security and comfort. Absorption into the world of one's own image can be seen as a means of cultural survival, a bid for acceptance. Female respondents in this study did not so readily identify with the images they consumed, but they sometimes desired them, not as an object of possession, but rather an object of emulation. For these women, the visual image presented clues for proper conduct which can open doors to happiness and fulfillment:

Classic beauty? You grow up in this society wishing that you were one. Right? I mean it's hard to avoid, comparing yourself. I don't know, I always fell kind of short, in that sense. You are always looking around and trying to judge people by appearance or best on the scale is a classic beauty, so yeah it figures that in my life I'm that way. It interferes. It's problematic and it bothers me a lot that I even worry about something like that. I wish I could just look and appreciate some things, whatever, for what it was, and not always judgmental against it or something. . .I mean, I spend too many of my waking hours worrying about classical beauty or looking beautiful and that's the standard on which you judge things. It's a drag. . .Well, I just know that about myself. Other things matter to me. . .that I can carry on an intelligent conversation and that I can do well in school, but the thing that eats me away, maybe because I have no control over it, right? Well, it's that you are judging yourself on this physical standard that women are really beautiful. 'Well, at least I look better than that one,' or whatever. 'or gee, I can't go out tonight because I look like a piece of shit.' And I know that's the case. I hate to admit it, but it is. I find it extremely disturbing and I don't like it all, but it is part of me. . .Well, I judge myself by that and other people but in a way, unfortunately, it's an ideal that I don't think everybody is going to have to be, on one side logically you think about it everybody doesn't have to look like that. Not everybody has to spend 4 hours a day in a gym. And yet I feel bad because I don't, because I have lumps in my thighs. That's how it relates to my life. . .I mean I have this reaction. I wish I didn't have this reaction. But it is a part of you. You know what I'm saying? And I do judge people on and if I look at somebody who looks like they are physically in shape then I find it appealing, in that sense. It's a pleasing reaction, but in another sense, I wish it weren't what you judged somebody on, having a bad reaction (Laura, female graduate student).
Narcissistic damage, therefore, can be seen as the consequence of the pervasive male gaze, a kind of trap where cultural ways of seeing define what is beautiful and women are thereby attracted to those images. At the same time the woman in this study were often repulsed by these same images. It was not so much the image of other beautiful women that was repulsive, but the surge of envy that such images evoked:

... They are unattainable, these thin bodies, perfect hair, fine clothes, faces. This is the cause of so much distress and poor self-images of women today. At the same time I do rather envy them, their bodies, despite my better judgment, I do. ... In the past I envied every single woman I saw in these magazines–her hair, her eyes. I'm slowly realizing I don't have to envy them but just look at them, admire them as well as admire myself. I think it's just a realization that I do envy them, that I can look at them and admire them without having to be them. It hurts me because when you envy something, you want something and you drive to get it. When you don't it's a feeling of failure. You feel that failure when you don't lose 10 pounds or you don't have blue eyes, but that's how it is (Rachel, female undergraduate).

I look and I see a beautiful woman walking across the screen or in a car or something and I go look at this crap [ads]. And me I think that's a beautiful-looking woman and then at the same time I'm complaining about this use of woman and then I see the beautiful woman and all this gunk goes into play. 'Oh, wouldn't I like to be like that.' So, that's what I mean. It must subconsciously reinforce, those images are there in front of your face and I guess if I only saw women in Columbus, I'd see that 10% look really beautiful, lots of them look fine or a few of them are disfigured. The only thing is it would be a lot more perspective or something. But on TV it's just like beautiful women on the TV all the time and that must reinforce the dumb notion that [we] have--beauty counts (Laura, female graduate student).

Weight and discipline

Consistent with the argument for "narcissistic damage," just as the female body is the site of idealization and spectacle for the male gaze, it is also the site of anxiety and insecurity for women, who, constrained by the gaze, feel less embodied than objectified and reach out for ways to transform the body into the ideal, or as close as possible. Women are made to feel, especially through advertising and other mass mediated images, that embodiment is achieved through striving for the ideal feminine form. This idealized
feminine form, of course, has been predefined through the male gaze. Fulfilling the potential of ideal femininity in this culture involves a constant focusing on the body as the site of improvement and as the object of judgment. Without question, the overriding factor in achieving idealized femininity in this culture is the control and discipline of one's weight.

All respondents in this study, male and female, alluded to one or a number of ways in which weight plays a pivotal role in society's judgments of individuals, and our judgments of one another, especially of women. In response to the question, "what could make the females in those ads unattractive by society's standards?", in particular, every respondent mentioned weight or fat, in some way. Discussions of weight and fat showed up in other places also, of course, but a distinct pattern existed in response to that particular question. There was a very strong consensus among this group of respondents that this culture despises fat. Their major indication of the truth of this claim was the rare, if not absent, depictions of overweight persons as idealized objects in popular iconography. Further, according to respondents in this study, fat people are discriminated against interpersonally and in the work place in this culture. Respondents saw fat as iconic for "unattractive."

These strong statements about society's loathing of fat were often riddled with anxieties that point out a striking gender similarity in responses. In both male and female respondents the anxiety about weight was rooted in personal experiential knowledge. Those who were happy with their weight at the time, were fearful of gaining weight as they get older. Those who were overweight at the time, feared that they will never be thin, and so on. For these respondents fat was a "devil term." Being overweight was often described as a "burden," or a "problem." Those not overweight counted themselves "lucky," feeling "grateful" to be thin in a culture where thinness is held at such a premium:

Overweight people always get the short end of the stick. To society you are just not attractive and you are missing something. You may be nice but that's not good enough. You have to be cute and slim. You see it in all the
ads, just cute women with slim bodies. . . . They all are thin and shapely, that’s what you have to be in society. That’s the ideal woman. . . I don’t show off my body at all. I’m overweight and I’ve been like this for a long time. I’m very self-conscious about what I wear. I often compare myself to other people, then get mad at myself. Stupid, yeah? My mother tells me never compare yourself to others cause you’ll always come up short. So I try not to do it. But I wish at times I was not so big. . . It hurts because these women show off everything. What if you don’t want to? Or have the right equipment. I mean your body’s not in shape. What about handicap people. How do you think they feel? It’s unfair (Jamie, female undergraduate).

Society’s view of fat people being unsuccessful has hindered me, whether it be conscious or subconscious as a constant pressure that I have to maintain some type of physical image in order to be accepted. Even though I don’t really worry about the feelings of other people in the general sense, it [being overweight] still would be a burden I wouldn’t want to be around (Richard, male graduate).

[Overweight] is what society considers unattractive especially today with health conscious as people tend to be. Exercise constantly, trying to be a little more healthy, in shape. I guess society always, especially for the drink ads, would think more of people drinking and having parties with better looking women than somebody way overweight or something, I don’t know. I know that’s why they use women that look like that (Jim, male graduate student).

It is important now as I’m getting older that I start watching things like my weight. Because if I don’t then I will start to look like people who are not wanted by society. . . . It helps you because it keeps you motivated and on the right track. . . . It is really disturbing because it is impossible to be the people that you see in the ads. It is frustrating because you can’t (Nicole, female undergraduate).

One thing I’d have to say right off the bat is if they weighed more, if they were heavier set or something that would make them unattractive. If this one didn’t have the attractive face. . . . I’d probably have to stick with the weight one. I think that’s what society looks at as most important (Mario, male graduate student).

I think it [thinness] is the prevalent characteristic of women depicted in advertising. . . None of the women are overweight. I can’t think of any advertisements that I have seen with overweight women. I really can’t. Unless it was an advertisement for a store that sells clothes for larger women. . . . I guess, whether I should feel this way or not, I feel lucky because I’m not overweight. And that is a characteristic about me, but that is also a characteristic that crosses gender lines. Men that are overweight aren’t attractive. I guess it makes me feel lucky that I don’t really have to try to keep my weight down. It’s not something I worry about. It’s a huge burden that I am glad that I am free of (Camron, male undergraduate).
In the war against fat and for control over body reduction, respondents often found themselves situated at the intersection of several competing discourses. For example, aerobic exercise has become a magic tonic for women, staving off the processes of aging, under the guise of physical and emotional health. "Health food" has replaced "diet food" in common parlance, and being physically "fit" is preferable to being simply "thin."

Respondents, therefore, often couched their discussions of anxiety-ridden weight loss in discussions of "health," suggesting that some of the most positive images in advertising today emphasize exercise and fitness, as a societal ideal and a personal ideal. However, respondents admitted that these ads showed only a slight and subtle shift from presenting the aesthetically perfect body for mere appearance, to presenting the perfect body as representative of health and fitness. Nonetheless, respondents regarded this as a positive shift in representation. A distinction respondents made between perfection for the sake of appearance, and perfection for the sake of health and fitness, was that achieving perfection in appearance targets the outside world, the other, to gaze upon and enjoy. However, perfection for health and fitness is something the individual does for herself or himself. In this slight shift in representation, then, mere "appearance" becomes secondary to the "pleasure of discipline."

*Once again, that spills over into my own life and what I do... She's staying physically fit, healthy. That's probably the best thing. She's staying healthy for herself. She's able to run on her own two legs. Not everyone in America can say that they are healthy and run on their own two legs. I think that's nice... It's like a catalyst. Just do it.* (Collette, female undergraduate).

*I associate exercise with a healthy lifestyle of getting out and around and doing things. I personally feel a lot better about myself when I'm able to exercise and go out and do things, especially when I'm able to exercise outside.* (Mario, male graduate student).

*I think it is definitely an ideal because society is really health conscious. The ads on television are constantly talking about eating right and keeping fit. This [Johnnie Walker ad] is a perfect example. Two women running on the beach. It kind of gives you the impression that it could be fun to go running with your friend. It has nothing to do with the ad. I mean, when I*
look at the ad I didn't know what it was for... I think the focus on society, right now, is being fit and eating right and they are concrete things for Jenny Craig or Weight Watchers. That is what society really looks for. Not only do you have to be attractive and make a lot of money, but you have to be thin and in good shape. (Nicole, female undergraduate).

The woman looks healthy, she's all in healthy pursuits, and I think society—that's what society is interested in... Well, I guess everyone wants to be in shape even though obviously I'm not. (Dean, male graduate student)

It pleases me in some way that people should be more aware of their bodies... It hurts because everybody is not going to have a perfect body even if they work out for hours everyday, they are not going to look like the people in the ads. I think that is bad because people shouldn't worry about what they should be (Nicole, female undergraduate).

Spitzack argues that these competing discourses surrounding body reduction help to position the discourse of thinness with "health," thereby positioning weightiness or fatness in binary opposition with "health," as "disease." These discourses work with other numerous institutions and practices to encourage self-correction and, therefore, "liberation" from the disease of fat, especially for women.

It can be argued that the penetrating male gaze throughout this culture, incites women to impose discipline on themselves, especially their bodies. Women in this culture internalize the panoptic logic of split-consciousness that insists that the woman must identify herself as the principle of her own subjection, playing the roles of tower guard and prisoner simultaneously. She is spectator and spectacle, one who, at the same time, sees and is seen. Spitzack suggests that this arrangement is aided by an ideology of women's health that condones policing the body in order to reap the reward of "freedom" or "release" from the unhealthy fat body. In order to maintain the healthy liberated body, one must continuously discipline it, policing its cravings and excesses, and reprimanding the self when discipline falters. Female respondents suggested that they are not always conscious of where the drive to self discipline comes from, as if an unconscious force propels them into working on the body:
I'm always dieting and different times I get on an exercise kick and I don't know why. See, that's a good question, why? That's just because personally, that would make me feel better and maybe if my attitude was, 'that's the way you should look,' that would be good--but it's a hindrance, because that's not my attitude (Collette, female undergraduate).

Aerobic exercise helped usher in the ideal of the "female physique." Like the other beauty industries, aerobics offers a "solution" to the disjuncture between the image of fashion models' bodies and real women's bodies by disciplining the body in the name of fitness--the triumph of culture over nature. The 1980s ushered in a new female physique complimentary to aerobic exercise and activity. This curvaceous, muscular look, which is now most closely associated in its ideal form as super model Cindy Crawford, is the combination of cultural antitheses: thin and muscular, hard and curvaceous, it suggests power and yet a slender boyishness; furthermore those very muscles which empower are also the material of feminine curves.

Achieving this combination of attributes is difficult, involving an investment of large amounts of time, money and effort on "body work." The ultra-thin look of the 1960s and 1970s could be achieved through starvation diets alone, but today, thinness without muscle tone falls short of the ideal feminine physique. The ideal must be achieved through a regimen of diet plus exercise. Female respondents exhibited exasperation with the acknowledgment of this extra cultural pressure to be not only thin, but muscular and fit.

For females in this study this added "requirement" for ideal femininity simply widens the chasm between idealized female bodies and the flesh of their own bodies:

I think that if you aren't body beautiful it doesn't matter. You have to be beautiful or look 100% in shape or have the world's best shape to be in any ads (Jane, female graduate student).

I guess not it is something I strive for, to maintain health and stay well and stay in shape so I think that's a goal for and I think that's why I relate well to these articles and advertisements... It helps me maintain that goal, to go after and reach that goal... Sometimes you want to do things and you feel like you have to be very disciplined because it would be a lot easier to take off and not do it. I find myself saying I could go do this. I do give myself breaks when I don't want to do things... It's not like I do these things
constantly. I take breaks. It does help. You know, that aspect of everyone expecting you to look 100%. Sometimes you think I could just go with them and forget this whole thing (Jane, female graduate student).

That I had to be thin, in shape, attractive. Not only thin, but physically fit. I think I got those ideals from ads and women on television. I have learned how to eat right and stay thin. It constantly has reinforced the importance of physical beauty... Every time you read a magazine or you turn on the television or see someone walking on the street it is always there. It also shows you the people who are overweight or who are fat as people who are not looked at as positive as some other people (Nicole, female undergraduate).

Disciplining the diet

For most individuals, the first step in gaining a thin healthful body and releasing the fat diseased body, is gaining control over the appetite by disciplining the diet. This type of self-surveying and extreme discipline, however, can often exceed societal parameters of "health" or even beauty. For some women the self-surveying gaze becomes overwhelming and, in turn, distorted. For example, the anorexic can no longer gauge the image in the mirror against the ideal with any objectivity. No matter how thin the anorexic becomes, she still sees a fat, and therefore powerless, body in the mirror. In time, any plumpness of flesh on the body looks like unwanted fat and must be ridded from the body through starvation and exercise—the ultimate discipline.

Female and male respondents in this study cited societal pressures for women to conform to ideal body images, presented throughout society, as a prominent contributor to the epidemic of eating disorders in this society, such as anorexia nervosa (self-starvation) and bulimia (binge eating and purging). These respondents considered advertising images, especially in fashion magazines, major contributors to the problem of eating disorders. Although most popular and academic literatures on anorexia nervosa and bulimia present these eating disorders as complex psychological pathologies, the respondents in this study did not discuss the phenomenon of eating disorders in terms of psychological problems generated from within particular individuals. Instead, both male and female respondents
characterized eating disorders as a societal or sociological problem being generated by cultural pressures to conform to the ideals of thinness and attractiveness:

Just in a general sense I have that that's [weight] what women are preoccupied with for looking good. There seems to be quite an emphasis on exercise and diet and all that... I know women who are concerned, if not obsessed with not being overweight. I know people who have eating disorders probably because of the feeling society gives them—that they must be overweight. I know one person in particular who's had a very traumatic experience probably somewhat directly due to society's ideal... I find it disturbing that society has this ideal and that it leads women to hurt themselves (Bill, male graduate student).

I'm of an age where it was just growing up past the Twiggy sort of thing, idealizing women who were not necessarily tall but who had bodies like boys. For the generation of women who came before me and during my time and somewhat afterwards, it was an objectification of bodies, but not in this way [current ads], but little boy bodies. That affected all of us females in thinking you could never be too thin. I can't help but think that contributed to the whole burgeoning of the anorexic behavior. This real need to just be as skinny as you could possibly be and this is healthy (Chrisit, female graduate student).

It hurts me to see people who I think are, have absolutely no weight problem at all, and to me, you don't have to be a model in order to be of ideal weight. To me, I think there's nothing wrong with having a little chubbiness, to be not necessarily of a model's proportions. But I see people that I think are of good, average, healthy weight do nothing but worry about losing more weight. I've known friends of friends of mine that weigh 110 lbs., they're 5'8" and weigh 110 lbs. And they always talk about, 'oh, I got to lose another 10 lbs., oh, I got to lose another 10 lbs.'... . I've actually known people with bulimia and anorexia and it really, really hurts... to think that people, I don't know if it's a self-image problem or what, that people think that. So people think that the only way they can be attractive is if they lose more weight, more weight, more weight? (Mario, male graduate student).

I guess because being overweight is so looked down upon. If you're overweight you must be a slob, you must not like or care about yourself. We never see overweight women shed in a positive light... In the past I was overweight when I was young and I remember always being told I needed to diet. I needed to lose weight. So many times I think people attributed my weight to not having tons of friends... I think it made me unhappy. It held me back in being what I wanted to be in school... It doesn't please me. I see these women [in the ads] and say I'm not them. I don't have to be them to be happy. It disturbs me because these images are so harmful to women. They become bulimic and anorexic. That disturbs me and makes me angry (Rachel, female undergraduate).
For many female respondents the pathology of eating disorders has touched their lives very personally. Either they have suffered from the disorder themselves at some point in their lives, or have known other women, sometimes family members, who had suffered from it. Although a few male respondents commented on how eating disorders had affected women they knew, none of the men in this study had ever been afflicted with an eating disorder. Consistent with national statistics, in this study eating disorders are a "woman's disease." Female respondents contextualized their own experience with eating disorders as symptomatic of societal pressures to conform to an unattainable physical ideals. Eating disorders were seen as a killer of women's spirits:

I have gone through a lot of conflicts with other people and with myself. There was a time in which I would have starved myself to get a slimmer body, but not now I know that is not the right way of going about it... In junior high school guys said about me, 'oh, she's cute but fat.' This one guy would always tease me about it, then when I lost weight in 12th grade, he asked me for a date. He claimed that he got to know me and now he likes me as a person. That's b.s.. I know all he cares about is my looks. I got a lot of that. I wish it didn't happen, but it did...

It hurts every woman with a weight problem. Some women will starve to death just to achieve a look. I think that is horrible. What has society come to? Allowing women and men, I guess, to starve their bodies. I have friends who have done this. It's crazy. We need to change, if we don't we will have people dying of malnutrition. I don't want my children to go through all the things I did. They will learn that the body is a machine and without proper tools and nutrition the machine malfunctions and dies. I hope they won't be stressed out over material things like I was when I was young (Jamie, female undergraduate).

Female negotiations

The findings of this chapter thus far have strongly supported the conceptual frame that the conventions of the "male gaze" in popular mediated images and the "split consciousness of the self-surveyed female" as a socially constructed response to those images are strongly evidenced in female, and even male, responses to advertising. However, as many feminist critics of female spectatorship have theorized, there is more to female viewing than can be analyzed within the parameters of the male gaze and the self-
surveyed female. Women actively "negotiate" with these dominant conventions and in some cases, learn to resist them altogether. Women have developed their own ways of looking that cannot and should not be defined only as the result of seeing representations through a masculine lens.

The remainder of this first section of this chapter will explore how female respondents negotiate with the dominant male gaze in advertising and in culture. There are dimensions of female spectatorship that do indeed exceed the parameters of the controlling male gaze. Female spectators wrestle with their experience of the male gaze in culture; they negotiate with it and in rare cases even manage to resist it altogether.

Gledhill's definition of negotiation, a feminist interpretation of Hall's notion of articulation, frames the analysis to follow: The term negotiation implies the holding together of opposite sides in an ongoing process of give and take. As a model of meaning production, negotiation conceives cultural exchange as the intersection of processes of production and reception, in which overlapping but non-matching determinations operate. Meaning is neither imposed or passively imbibed, but arises out of a struggle or negotiation between competing frames of reference, motivation and experience.

Feminist scholars analyzing "female spectatorship" suggest that the place to find female spectatorship that reaches beyond the parameters of the male gaze is in female "pleasures in looking." Indeed, analyses of the audiences of particular media that are consumed by women specifically, such as romance novels and soap operas, support the notion that breaks from the confines of the male gaze reside in female pleasures in viewing. However, in this study, where the chosen cultural form was gender advertising, women rarely framed their negotiations in terms of "pleasures." In fact, female respondents expressed mostly extreme displeasure in negotiating with advertising images:

*I guess I'm glad that I notice it, but at the same time, it really makes me so mad, that when I think about pleasure and this reaction the two don't go hand-in-hand. It just makes me so mad that it happens. If I would say I*
was pleased with this reaction, I wish the thing didn't happen. I wish advertisements weren't like that (Laura, female graduate student).

"Pleasure" plays a minor role in this analysis, and yet this study provides ample evidence that female spectatorship is not completely confined within the parameters of the male gaze. This suggests that perhaps "pleasure" is actually a sub-process of the larger phenomenon of negotiation. If the motivation to actively negotiate with advertising images constructed through the male gaze is not only to gain female pleasure in looking at these images, what is the motivation of this type of negotiation?

Betterton argues that a result of the evolving feminist consciousness that has seeped into the popular imagery and discourse of this culture over the past twenty years, is the ability of many female spectators to switch points of view between the position of surveyor (active, voyeuristic) and the position of the surveyed (passive, narcissistic). This ability empowers the female spectator with the ability to take up a critical position of looking that is not traditionally masculine or feminine. For example, when looking at a glamorous actress half-nude in a favorite soap opera, it is possible to be both fascinated and attracted by the image and at the same time, be well aware of the difference between the image and one's experience. This study did find evidence to support Betterton's position. Some female respondents discussed their abilities to glean the positive from dominant representations while at the same time being highly critical of them:

_They're strong, they are images of strength and also being feminine because there is no great attempt to hide that. I mean she [Virginia Slims ad] still has the purse and a pink coat but she is in a suit even though she disregards her health completely. This one's [Nike ad] tough. She is not afraid to wear her tights in public and she doesn't care if she is too fat for them. I'm learning to live with that one. yes, it is emotional. I'm attached to these women who represent me... I haven't always and I'm learning to appreciate myself... I'm excited that I can look at these pictures and actually get excited about saying that these women represent me... I think this is an image that even if society or I don't think society likes it, it doesn't bother me... I think we've all tried on different roles in our life and these are not offensive since I can say that I've lived through them neither are they pleasing because I am in the process of trying to re-mold or reshape them, discard them, change them in some way, so they don't look like this_
anymore. . . Sure, I've tried all kinds of images on to see which one works (Patricia, female graduate student).

Although this study offers evidence for Betterton's position, the weight of evidence in this study points to another conception of the two sides of female negotiation with dominant images. This conceptualization of female negotiation most closely resembles the theories of Waldman, who argues that once we begin to theorize about the possibilities of the critical, and at the same time responsive female spectator, it is helpful to distinguish the positions that are "feminist" from those which are strictly "female." This ability to move between culturally defined male and female viewing positions is not the innate province of the female psyche, but is instead the result of a disruption in traditional ways of seeing which can be directly attributed to multiple feminist discourses in society.

In this study, the domain of the "female" (as opposed to the feminist) responses ranged from female spectatorship that was uncritical of the male gaze, helping to perpetuate this cultural way of seeing through beliefs, behaviors and discourses, to spectatorship defined by the beginnings of reflection upon personal experiences with split-consciousness and resultant narcissistic damage.

At one end of the spectrum, a dominant, or uncritical, reading of the male gaze in representation offers a mirror of the dominant themes in gender advertising:

*I just feel like I know what is attractive to men. All these pictures fit that category, skinny people are more accepted and attractive people are more accepted in society. . . I think it would help if I looked more like they do. It would help me because people like to be around attractive people. Not everybody is like that. Attractive people are more well-liked and popular. That could help you in the future. In that way it could help me. . . It hurts me because if I don't look like this I won't be looked well upon society. Especially as I get older and I don't have the body and the face I think it will hurt more too. Women are supposed to be young looking and your skin is supposed to be nice but men don't have to worry about it because they get better looking as they get older (Claire, female undergraduate).*

While an uncritical dominant reading is exemplary of one type of "female" looking, the beginning of consciousness of the male gaze in advertising and culture is also part of
"female" looking, primarily because beginning reflections on, and questioning of, dominant representations are often based on personal experience and through intuitive reasoning, rather than formal feminist messages:

I've looked back. I've wondered about that, you know, the fact that we were talking about this ideal beauty that you have so much of your own self-worth wrapped up in. I was wondering where on earth that ever came from. Advertising has always been implicated, and I look at advertising and all I do is complain. I criticize and I keep thinking, could it be getting me subconsciously? I'm not really sure, but it certainly must be. I don't know where those things came from and that's the most disturbing, although advertising sometimes is just stupid. That bothers me. And the other thing that bothers me is how women are portrayed and how, it's hard for me to think about all the developmental terms. I can just think about how I feel right now (Laura, female graduate student).

"Feminist" looking, in Waldman's conceptual frame, is in no way confined to formal education in feminist theory and politics, which would be considered an advanced stage of conscientization. "Feminist" looking is a conscious awareness not only that the male cultural gaze has the potential for injurious personal and societal consequences, but that as women, we have all actively participated in this system of exploitation and oppression.

In this study, respondents' active female negotiations with images reflected the tension women felt between being active participants in an oppressive system and an awareness that they wanted to break free of that system, not only for themselves, but for other women:

I am fine with myself now, I don't care what others think of me. As long as I'm happy, then that's all that matters... I have to live with it all. I feel it has made me a better person. And also a better, or more aware person of what I want and how I go about and get it... I have been hurt, but I look at it as a growing experience. I can laugh at my actions and previous thoughts. Yet, I am afraid for other women who might buy into the stereotypes. That scares me because they will go through most of the same pain I did, that's really unnecessary (Jamie, female undergraduate).

Gaining this "feminist" awareness is, for most women, an historical journey. A repeating pattern in female responses involves a journey from adolescent years to the
present. These women reported that as adolescents, they fully and uncritically participated in perpetuating the dominant conventions of the male gaze. However, the repeated attempts to live up to these standards continuously resulted in differing types of personal pain. Through the pain, and often other competing structures also, such as feminist thought, an awareness grew in them and active negotiations with images began:

Well, I try to become pretty myself, I mean, I don't try too hard or anything. I just want to look decent. Yet, there was a time in my life that where I couldn't leave the house without looking into the mirror several times, and not leaving until I had the perfect look. I was conscious about everything, shoes and hair. Vanity, I guess one would call it. Yet, now I don't have much time to put much into looking good. I've got school and other things to tend to. I don't have time to worry about my looks as much. I dress kind of casual now, sometimes I don't care how I look, as long as I get my papers in on time and keep up with my responsibilities. I have a boyfriend now and I don't try to impress him because I know he loves me for me. Why should I go out of my way, for who? Certainly not the people on campus. The could care less. But I'm sure they look at me funny cause I don't wear stuff that's flashy or make-up or junk like that (Jamie, female undergraduate).

... In junior high and high school we were supposed to wear so much make-up and get up at six o'clock to make ourselves pretty. Now I think I'm at the point where I don't bother with it as much... I think it's helped me to be more real with people and who I am whereas in the past I was so busy being who they wanted me to be that it made me very unhappy at times. ... I think it's only helped me in realizing that more natural is more beautiful. It made me more brash to people cause I'm not willing to be fake to people. ... I think it relates to my life now in realizing that I'm not those things but I'm just as intelligent, just as sexually appealing, I'm just as good... In my past it [hurt]. It made you think you weren't good enough to be loved but now it's different (Rachel, female undergraduate).

I think, especially being a teenager, this is what everyone was doing. A product would come out, that's what everyone wanted. But, as I started to get older, it's easier to see that not everyone fits into the mold of how advertisers place women in photographs or commercials. Looking at that and saying I don't fit into that or I do... Just as I've matured, I've cared less with trying to identify with the images of women in the materialistic side of advertising (Megan, female undergraduate).

I've almost gotten to the place where I don't try the images on anymore. I just sort of settle into whatever I am or whoever I am. ... I went through a very awkward, gawky duckling stage as a teenager. It took me a number of years to recognize that I had a) grown out of it, and b) wasn't really [an ugly duckling]. But, there is always part of me that remembers that it is a surface characteristic, it's what everybody sees although it may not be
important. . . I think there was a time when I was willing to do anything to be part of that acceptable role including making myself unseen like this woman without the head [Montana ad]. Keeping my thoughts to myself, forgetting that I had a voice. I think I've gotten over that particularly when you speak up and people still pretend that you don't have a head (Patricia, female graduate student).

For women in this study, active negotiation with dominant images of femininity involved trying to find comfort in themselves and their bodies when all the messages in society were telling them that they were not pretty enough, good enough, and especially, not ideal enough. It was the search for the embodied unified self beyond what could be gained through the consumption of products. The women in this study reported that this is one of the biggest and on-going challenges in their lives: feeling comfortable with themselves in spite of how closely they fit society's ideal. These women were struggling to truly appreciate "difference" among women while actively fighting the homogeneity of dominant images of representation:

Looking at the pictures, I wasn't what they were so it made me think, well, am I appealing to people? Am I appealing to someone I like it I'm not that? . . . I still think I question it now, whether I'm appealing or not, but not as much as I did when I was younger. . . . Sadness that so many women don't have confidence because they're not society's ideal. . . . In the past I was incredibly sad because I wasn't this or I wasn't that. It made me doubt myself and I think it makes a lot of other people doubt themselves, but now that I'm older and mature I feel smarter than that in knowing that I am appealing for who I am. . . . It may assist me in knowing that I'll strive even more to be who I am, if that makes sense. To know that I'm not feeding whatever it is that makes other ideals better than me. . . . It makes me angry at myself to know that I still feel like that, that I would still feel sad about not being one of those [women in the ads]. . . . In the past I wanted one of these bodies because I thought it would make me happy. I thought it would make me a better person and that more people would like me, although I realize I don't have one of these bodies and I need to put myself in a situation and a mind set where people love me and accept me for what I am, not what society says I should be. . . . It might assist me in that it really drives home how much I need to be thankful for what I really do have and that it's not necessary to be ideal. . . . I think once you realize these women are different from you, that you don't have to be them, you're much more confident (Rachel, female undergraduate).
For most of the women in this study, negotiation with images was a personal and psychological process, a daily affirmation of worth and ability. For others, especially those who were further along on their journeys, active negotiations resulted in conscious behaviors to subvert the male gaze. This active subversion was achieved in a multitude of ways. One way that a female respondent described subverting the dominant gaze was through offering an alternative concept of "body size" and appropriate apparel:

... Society doesn't think you are at your full potential when you have all your clothes on... Yeah, in my life I've always had big clothes. So I don't look too fat, and people have to guess my weight. I'm not going to easily expose myself. I like going to the amusement parks, cause there is always some guy trying to guess my weight. He never does, so I win a prize. That's the only game I will play. Sometimes I think I look better in clothes that fit me tighter, but I'm still not comfortable wearing those things. So I wear what I'm comfortable in, big clothes (Jamie, female undergraduate).

An advanced stage of negotiation is resistance. Much like Hall's concept of oppositional decoding, resistance to dominant images constructed through the male gaze implies a rejection of the preferred meanings encoded in the text of the image. Female respondents reported that as they advanced on their journeys, negotiating with images, many reached a point where negotiations are fewer and far less difficult and personal. This stage of resistance was reached when a woman finally felt embodied and no longer looked to societal definitions of beauty and attractiveness to define herself. At that point she defined her gender identity by her own criteria and not as the self-surveyed female:

I'm not saying I've known this all along, but at some point you realize how fake these things were and to not let it personally both. I suppose it could if you let it. So at some point I reached a stage that stuff was meaningless. It doesn't make me feel bad. It doesn't hurt me anymore. If I wanted to talk about larger things about how it reflects a woman's position in society, that's a whole other question. For me, it wasn't personally upsetting (Heather, female graduate student).

Just maybe in the past I wouldn't have been so prone to laugh at it, until I started realizing how women are used in ads to be more sexual for their allure than for the actual product. It's just stupid and redundant and completely unnecessary... It pleases me that I can think [the ads] are stupid. In the past I really liked these ads and as I got older an matured I
think I realized how unnecessary they are and how faulty they are in the way they portray women (Rachel, female undergraduate).

I suppose if I got into a debate with some guy who really thought this was a neat ad, my high horse might come out. Five years ago it probably would have been worse. Now its more like, 'you like the ad? So what do you like about it? Oh, yeah, great, fine.' Please me, help me? Nope. Hurt me? Doubtful, unless I had a real militant on my hands and I got real militant back, which I've been known to do on occasion (Patricia, female graduate student).

Summary

Gender differences in responses to subjectivity and negotiations with advertising differed greatly from gender differences in responses to advertising content explored in chapter 4. One of the greatest differences was the strategies that women employed to deal with the overwhelming constraints dictated to them by the male gaze in dominant societal messages. Female negotiations offer a disjuncture with the male gaze in looking, illuminating the female journey from a point of being defined by dominant messages about femininity to a point of defining their own gender identities about themselves, for themselves.

The objectification of the female body in this society is a cultural way of seeing. In this culture, advertising images of females frequently contain an invisible yet implicit man who approves of and defines the feminine ideal. This "way of seeing" is considered the point-of-view of the male spectator, or the "male gaze." The naturalness of this way of seeing the female body follows from its pervasiveness in all arenas of female representation as well as experience. The right to control others through the look, even the stare, is a cultural logic of patriarchy.

Both male and female respondents agreed that the codes of ideal female beauty and sexuality are both ubiquitous and consistent in this culture, and that advertising does not simply mirror what people find attractive. Instead, advertisers define attractiveness in terms of male fetishes of individual body parts. Only female respondents, however,
commented on the arbitrary nature of the male gaze across all advertising, finding some forums, like women's magazines, more inappropriate, or arbitrary, than others. Female respondents suggested that the pervasive male gaze in advertising perpetuates a male fantasy of women styled according to a one-dimensional vision of femininity, to be judged foremost on appearance.

Culture privileges this kind of male looking, which is imbued with power and status. Males in this study offered comments concerning not only the consentual nature of looking at female bodies, but the importance of learning how to look at female bodies. In sharp contrast, no female counterpart existed in responses for either consentual female looking at men or women, or learning how to look. Instead, as the experiential recipients of male looking, female respondents discussed the phenomenon of male looking extensively, never in terms of the artful subtleties of looking at women, but instead the impatience, annoyance and degradation felt at the expense of the male stare.

Consistent with the conceptual frame of the "male gaze" is split-consciousness of the surveyed female. The split-consciousness of the self-surveyed female is her embodiment of the object of the sight and simultaneously her awareness of being the object of the sight. This study found that women have the ability to theorize how advertising works to further encourage them to view themselves as objects to be improved upon for the male other, rather than to view themselves as subjects of their own femaleness. However, awareness (conscientization) or understanding of the process is rarely consolation.

Fulfilling the potential of ideal femininity in this culture involves a constant focusing on the body as the site of improvement and as the object of judgment. Without question, the overriding factor in achieving idealized femininity in this culture is the control and discipline of one's weight. All respondents in this study, male and female, alluded to one or a number of ways in which weight plays a pivotal role in society's judgments of individuals, and our judgments of one another, especially of women. In order to maintain
the fit, healthy body, liberated from fat, one must continuously discipline the body, policing its cravings and excesses, reprimanding self when discipline falters. This ideal must be achieved through a regimen of diet plus exercise. For females in this study this added "requirement" for ideal femininity of being not only thin, but "fit," simply widens the chasm between idealized female bodies and the flesh of their own bodies.

For some women, the self-surveying gaze becomes overwhelming and, in turn, distorted. The anorexic can no longer gauge the image in the mirror against the ideal with any objectivity. Female and male respondents in this study cite societal pressures for women to conform to ideal body images presented throughout society as a prominent contributor to the onset of eating disorders in women such as anorexia nervosa (self-starvation) and bulimia (bingeing and purging). Consistent with national statistics, in this study eating disorders were a "woman's disease." Female respondents contextualized their own experience with eating disorders as symptomatic of societal pressures to conform to an unattainable physical ideal.

The conceptual frame of the male gaze and the self-surveyed female does not tell us everything about gendered viewing. Women, for example, actively "negotiate" with these dominant conventions and in some cases, learn to resist them altogether. However, this study suggests that, contrary to much feminist literature, female "pleasures" in looking is not the primary place where breaks with the male gaze occur. "Pleasures" is actually a subprocess of the larger phenomenon of negotiation. A more fruitful division in analyzing female responses beyond the male gaze is the differentiation between strictly "female" and "feminist" viewing.

Gaining this "feminist" awareness is for most women in this study is an historical journey, beginning in adolescence where they attempted to construct themselves for the male gaze. For women in this study, active negotiation involved trying to find comfort in themselves and their bodies when all the messages in society told them they were not pretty
enough, not good enough, and especially not ideal enough. Active negotiation is the search for the embodied unified self beyond the mere consumption of products.

**Differences within gender**

Chapters 4 and 5, to this point, have discussed gender differences found in this study. Difference between genders, however, was not the only major division discovered in this study. Respondents also revealed major differences within gender. Feminist critics such as Barrett argue that analyses that focus exclusively on gender differences are essentialist in their biases. Male and female audience members bring their own experiences, situational constraints, socio-economic experiences, racial background and sexual orientation to the viewing. Barrett argues that the analyst should not assume at the outset that the differences between men and women are the only and most important divisions.

In this study, differences between genders offered a far greater diversity and variety of patterns than differences within gender. However, the differences within gender patterns to be explored below, offer considerable insight into the places where decoding strategies break out of both the imposing structures of advertising and the imposing structures of gender. The lopsidedness in variety and diversity of patterns of differences within gender, may be accounted for, in part, by the homogeneity of the sample. Because all respondents were university students, they share certain educational experiences and fall into similar socio-economic categories. Most of the respondents come from the US Midwest and are from middle-class families.

The remainder of this chapter focuses on three themes of differences within gender. The first of these themes examines a central factor that contributed to the ability of some female respondents to negotiate and even resist societal messages about ideal femininity
throughout their lives. As was examined above, most women at some point in their young lives, tend to buy into these dominant images.

The second difference within gender involves the felt symbolic annihilation of certain respondents who belong to marginalized societal groups: gays, lesbians and African American women. These respondents expressed that "who they are," either in definition of lifestyle or in appearance is not represented in the dominant images of what is supposedly attractive and normal.

The third difference within gender that will be discussed below involves male responses that revealed a heightened sense of feminist consciousness. This feminist consciousness most often manifested itself in terms of genuine empathy for female experiences with dominant images.

**Competing structures.** Every female respondent's journey through the negotiating of dominant images constructed through the male gaze is different. Some female respondents did not actively negotiate with images, at least in the "feminist" way suggested by Waldman. However, all women in this study reported some type of engagement with and against dominant conventions of seeing and looking in this culture at some stage in their lives. For most female respondents in this study, active negotiation resulted from a steady and growing awareness over time between the tension of society's messages about ideal femininity and a desire to be a self-defined, embodied individuals.

Some female respondents reported, however, that they have had the ability to negotiate with, and even resist, dominant messages about ideal femininity from a very early age. The explanation that they offer is that their families provided a competing structure for them by encouraging them from early childhood to be happy with their inner abilities and to be comfortable with their bodies:

*I'm not sure that I ever found [advertisements] that much of an influence on my own life because I was taught that everything I saw was fake. Those women on there didn't look like my mother or anyone I knew. We always,
we had our mother saying to us, a lot of that is garbage. Personally, I can't ever think of myself seeing a woman on TV and saying, 'that's what I want to be like or not like.' I didn't look at TV that way. Well, that was a good thing. It has saved me a lot of heartache in that sense. I don't let those beer ads bother, I suppose they could. I know that they bother some people (Heather, female graduate student).

I guess in college is when I really started--high school and college--is when I really started to deconstruct advertising. But, before that, my Mom and Dad always made me feel valued for what I was as a person, not what I looked like. Although they made me feel good about my body, good self-concept about my body. I knew I was valued for the kind of person I was. I was kind. I was sensitive. I was a good listener. I was intelligent. But even if I weren't intelligent, my parents always valued me. No matter if I failed or succeeded, as long as I tried. So I grew up with a good self-concept. So when I saw pictures like this even at a young age, I didn't see this as pictures of myself. I saw it as the twins up the street... They valued what clothes you wore to school rather than how you treated them... I had shorter hair, I didn't wear make-up and I was seen as sort of the smart kid in class, sometimes teacher's pet. I was also athletic and so I was known as super jock. I was not the antithesis, but I didn't fit this role, even thought my Mom offered to show me how to put make-up on and buy me clothes like this, I wasn't interested in this type of thing. So, I knew at an early age that there were different paths that girls could follow and were allowed to follow. This is not the one I chose... If I had grown up in a different atmosphere, my view of images would be different. If I grew up in a house where it was extremely important to go out looking a certain way, then my weighting of what is appealing and what is ideal would be different. So, I see that sort of socialization tied very directly to the way I view the world. Even though my parents would rate these very different than I do, I grew up with support that allows me to question critically things (Bobbi, female graduate student).

In this study, the family was reported as a young girl's only real defense against the overwhelming pressures to conform to society's ideals of femininity based foremost on appearance. Much more than males, as young girls, the women in this study needed constant reinforcement that they were valuable as multi-dimensional beings. Central to a competing family message on femininity is its ability to clearly and consistently define "appearance" as only one attribute amongst many that makes a person who she is. Parents cited in the examples above were careful to ensure a balance between emphasis on abilities/attributes and on appearances, whenever supporting or praising their children. For these women, their girlhood self-esteem was not built on the fragile veil of outer beauty,
but on a strong foundation of inner worth and ability. Unfortunately, in most families, female appearance is placed at a premium above all other attributes, if not consciously, then subconsciously through casual remarks and criticisms. These conscious and unconscious family messages, therefore, serve to reinforce, rather than counter, larger societal messages about female worth based on appearance.

**Symbolic annihilation.** In media theory, a conspicuous and serious underrepresentation of certain social groups has been coined "symbolic annihilation." A second pattern of differences within gender involve the symbolic invisibility felt by certain respondents in this study who belong to marginalized social groups: gay males, lesbians, and African American women. These respondents offer their own answers to the questions posed in chapter two: What if one rarely sees representations of themselves in mass media to emulate? What if one's identity is deemed unworthy of representation in the dominant ideology of images?

This study involved two lesbian respondents and one gay male respondent. Recent gay and lesbian film criticism on looking and spectatorship suggest that not only do lesbian women find different pleasures in looking at women than straight women, there are also differences between lesbian pleasures in looking and gay male pleasures in looking. This study found these statements to be true, although more similarities were found between the responses of lesbians and gay males than differences. In fact, the male respondent explicitly defined the link he saw between women's oppression and gay oppression:

> A lot of the work I do is combating the oppression of women. I find that very much intertwined with my identity as a gay male. A lot of the things I have suffered from and been hurt from have been because of heterosexism and homophobia and I think hatred of gay men is the perception of men as weak or feminine. So I respect anyone who combats that kind of notion and mentality (Camron, male undergraduate).

The overarching theme that bound the lesbian and gay male responses together and differentiated those responses from responses of their straight counterparts, was the fact
that their chosen lifestyle was symbolically annihilated from popular representation in a continuous and systematic fashion. Not seeing themselves in representation was painful and these respondents felt that this lack of any positive representation of homosexuality in the mass media helps to fuel societal prejudices against gays, often resulting in negative personal consequences:

Part of the frustration is that I don't look like any of these people [in the ads]. I'm not a person, my image isn't used to advertise a product and that's frustrating... It hinders my choices, the choices I have available. My frustration can lead to feeling excluded from the market...

[T]hat some would look at me and say, 'you don't fit the norm,' and then attack me in a number of ways whether through discrimination or verbal assault or something like that. That might not be the case because that hasn't really happened, but that people in general are judged by these kind of rules. It has nothing to do with who they are accept maybe what they look like. And consequently how they do live their life. So, maybe a woman who isn't married but, you know, that really isn't a reason to have problems based solely on that. That bothers me when people make those kinds of judgments and then base their feelings strictly on those kinds of criteria (Megan, female undergraduate).

These respondents described trying to "manufacture" their own meanings from these dominant representations that they knew were not meant for them. For one of the female respondents this meant finding pleasure in images that may have subtle, but never overt, references to intimate female relationships. The male respondent, however, combats symbolic annihilation of his chosen lifestyle by adopting a "homo-centric" way of seeing, as opposed to the hetero-centric ways of seeing that dominates popular representation:

I had to pause because at first this was very appealing to me because I thought this was two women and my chosen lifestyle is represented in an ad for a change. But when I was that they were speaking of a man, I knew it was actually heterosexual and not as personally appealing. But it's not unappealing. The pros outweigh the cons... There is sort of a subtle message at times. I think there is something very sexual about these two women running, half-naked together on the beach, and there is power... If you showed two women looking intimate in the way that you see a man and a woman looking intimate, perhaps more than weight, that would not be society's ideal. Lesbianism wouldn't be allowed, I think, in these photographs... (Bobbi, female graduate student).
Again, it goes along with the lack of advertisement with women of color or lesbians or overweight or elderly women. It bothers me that is lacking in this and if those things were present that I could take a second glance at it and I would take an interest in it and it's something I would like to see visualized... I guess I've become a little homocentric, if you want to call it that. So just like I said earlier, I've been so bombarded by images of heterosexuality and Caucasian people and the family structure that I just don't pay that much attention to them anymore. I've just become desensitized to them (Camron, male undergraduate).

One major difference was found between lesbian and gay male responses in this study that more closely mirrors gender differences in the larger sample. Lesbian respondents never discussed their attraction to other women in terms of pure objectification of female bodies. Like other females in the study, this form of objectifying female bodies was seen as a domain of male ways of looking. The gay male respondent, however, described the objectifying of other males in terms of their outer appearances. Although described in the form of a personal struggle, this response still suggested an overriding male way of looking that transcends, in some ways, sexual orientation:

... Just because I am gay, I guess. I don't really consider myself as masculine or macho and so it is a stress factor in my life because I am not what society is telling me to be. Yet, it feels a little empowering because this is who I want to be regardless of what others are telling me. It makes me feel strong because I have the strength to say this what I want to do, no matter what. Especially now, I have a real contradiction inside me about the things I should do now and the kinds of men I should be attracted to rather than who I am really attracted to. It's just like this internal conflict that really gets to me. Politically and socially I know that looks shouldn't matter, but the gay male subculture, that's the way it works... It pleases me because I like seeing macho men in the advertisements. To be honest, I enjoy objectifying men who are attractive even though I know I shouldn't. That pleases me... It makes me feel a sense of loss that I can't be objective without objectifying. It does hurt me because I do participate in those kinds of behaviors, what society sets to be the masculine qualities that are more valued. So that really bugs me and hurts me that it is an ongoing internal conflict. If I have a relationship with a man that doesn't fit society's ideals, yet, I'm in love with him, the relationship probably wouldn't work because sexually he wouldn't be as arousing to me (Camron, male undergraduate).
Another marginalized cultural group had representation in this study. Two African American women were respondents. Feminist scholars such as Roach & Felix suggest that we live in a culture where the dominant gaze is not only male, but white, and therefore, the gaze of the African American woman is doubly constrained. However, in this study gender was overriding for these two women. In fact, only one of the two women included reference to race in her responses. The observation she makes, however, is a powerful one.

Like the gay and lesbian respondents, this female respondent saw women of color as symbolically annihilated from popular representation. Cultural critics such as hooks and Larkin argue that "blacks," as the mundane "other" of this culture, have come to understand that in order to enter the mainstream media, one must look and sound as "white" as possible, altering voice, diction, and most importantly, appearance to present a close ideological "fit" with white culture, the white status quo. This female respondent saw this lack of positive representation as contributing to a profound desire of African American women to change themselves. Further, this respondent felt it was important to deconstruct the concept of "representation" by observing that when a group is "represented," those doing the representing are not always fair or just:

Because you see people changing their lifestyles according to what the fashion magazines say. Or that we buy this product because of this or that. We see white women as more beautiful than other women of color, not because they are, because they are depicted more in ads. They are represented more. So we start to buy into that type of thought. . . I feel that all types of women from black to white have beauty, but society mainly pinpoints on the white women especially if they are thin. What about women of color? Who represents them? It's true we do have a lot of Black magazines out to promote Black fashion and beauty but what about Asian and Indians who are Americans? Who represents them? And do they do it fairly? (Jamie, female undergraduate).

Male empathy. A third difference within gender found in this study showed that males are not monolithic in their responses, nor do they always decode images of females
through the dominant male gaze. Some male respondents in this study possessed a heightened sense of feminist consciousness and thereby showed genuine empathy for female experiences with dominant images.

This type of male empathy is most closely akin to Waldman's concept of "feminist looking." Feminist looking is a conscious awareness not only that the male cultural gaze has the potential for injurious personal and societal consequences, but that men and women both actively participate in this system of exploitation and oppression. A feminist consciousness by males in this study was rarely achieved through formal education channels, but instead through popular discourses and informal education from female family members, girlfriends and wives:

Well, it upsets me, the fact that, I personally am very glad that I'm male now, now in society, because there is emphasis on male, both male and female to be attractive, but I think it's 10 times worse for females. I hate to have to see my sisters growing up with this, because I know, that this is how they're going to be judged, unless things radically are altered. In the near future, they're going to be judged, number one, on their appearance. And then, if they pull, pass the test, then they'll be looked at for whether they're intelligent, athletic, you know, like determined, hard working, things along that line. So it does upset me (Greg, male undergraduate).

Friends of mine, and especially female friends of mine, come across discrimination from time to time, because they might not necessarily be the most beautiful or most attractive. I mean, they might have what it takes upstairs to--intelligence-wise--to perform on a job or do anything that really need to be done, but because they're not the most beautiful or the most attractive, I mean, they necessarily didn't get the job or they didn't get a position or even a lot of times it's a lot more covert than that. It's just, you know, they don't feel that they get the respect from society or from male coworkers or just from people in general, that someone who is very attractive gets. . . So, I would consider incredible people of substance that have been, not had all the advantages of life, because they didn't necessarily have the aesthetics to go along with it (Mario, male graduate student).

Like female respondents whose family provided a competing structure for the dominant view of women in this culture, conscientized males often confided that their families not only instilled in them competing values from those of advertising, but that the gender
relations they witnessed in their families, in their homes, also contradicted the dominating, active-male/submissive, passive/female dichotomy:

*The fact that I have values. It helps me decide what I like. The values that I grew up with and that I got from my family helps me make judgments in life and I appreciate that. ... Our family, I thought, worked pretty well together as a unit. While we could all come together and make decisions, we also all had the freedom to go our individual ways and everything. There was no strong, dominating type force that said, 'You do this or else.' ... Yeah, my father was certainly the provider of the family, and he was certainly the breadwinner, it was never like it was in the TV commercials. Heck! If Dad would of come home and said to Mom, Get me this, or get me that," Mom would have showed Dad the door (laughs). It was never anything like that at all (Mario, male graduate student).*

I think there's is a big contradiction between what advertisers are telling me and what my parents--especially my father--is telling me about [things]. Advertising in a lot of ways is presenting these sexual images things along the line that males must be, must have this macho, there's this macho mystique about it. ... It's gotta be this big, burly, mountain man type of guy. That's the image the media presents. Then, there's my parents, who are telling me to be very respectful of women, very respectful to elders, thoughtful, hard working, this and that. At least in my life there's a large gap between what I'm being told. ... It may just have been that I wasn't raised to think that way. I'm mainly no matter what everyone else is telling me, I know I'm not going to do it. I tried, and I think successfully, to stay away from acting in that manner. So, I see this image as kind of a negative image, something to stay clear of, those actions (Greg, male undergraduate).

**Summary**

This study found differences within gender as well as differences between gender. First, some female respondents in this study have had the ability to negotiate or even resist dominant messages about femininity most of their lives. These respondents attributed this ability to competing family structures in their girlhood that offered consistent messages that self worth should be based on individual abilities and aptitudes and not solely on appearance.

Second, this study found differences within gender by respondents who belonged to groups marginalized in mainstream society. An overarching theme that bound the
lesbian and gay male responses together and differentiated them from responses of their straight counterparts, is the fact that their chosen lifestyle is continuously symbolically annihilated from popular representation in a continuous and systematic fashion. One strategy respondents employed to combat this symbolic invisibility was to manufacture their own meanings from these dominant representations. One major difference was found between lesbian and gay male responses in this study that more closely mirror gender differences in the larger sample. In this study, the objectification of the body based on appearance seems to be a male way of looking that transcends sexual orientation.

Gender issues seemed to override race issues for the two African American women in this study. Only one of the two women included references to race in her responses. Like the gay and lesbian respondents, this female respondent saw women of color as symbolically annihilated from popular representation. This respondent suggested that the notion of "representation" should be re-examined. She observed that when a group is "represented," those doing the representing are not always fair or just.

A third difference within gender found in this study showed that males were not monolithic in their responses, nor did they always decode images of females through the dominant male gaze. Some male respondents in this study possessed a heightened sense of feminist consciousness and thereby showed genuine empathy for female experiences. This feminist consciousness was achieved through informal education from feminist discourses in society, female family members, girlfriends and wives.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSIONS

Research question 1

The first research question of this dissertation asked, *How do female and male
decodings of gender advertising differ in articulations with society, self and others?* The
conclusions addressing this research question will be presented in two sections. The first
section discusses conclusions about male and female decoding of advertising content in
articulations with society, self and others. These conclusions were drawn directly from the
analysis presented in chapter 4. The second section that answers research question 1, will
address gender differences in male and female subjectivities, identities and negotiations in
articulations with advertising, society, self and others. These conclusions were drawn
directly from the analysis presented in the first portion of chapter 5.

*Gender differences in decoding advertising content.* This research draws three
major conclusions about gender differences in decoding advertising content in articulations
with society, self and others.

*Conclusion 1.* First, this research found that gender differences in decoding images
of women's bodies in advertising content today are subtle, yet distinctive. By subtle, I
mean that the significant gender differences can no longer be read straight off language and
topic choices, as may have been the case in the past. In a cultural environment of imposed
"political correctness," men are "learning" to avoid the words that offend, such as,
"chick," "girl," "baby," and are also learning to employ the words that gain favor with women, such as "sexist," "exploit," "objectify." This informal cultural re-education program due in large part to 25 years of second-wave feminist discourse (at least liberal feminist discourse), has penetrated the everyday awareness and language of both men and women in this culture. In general, males are more aware of the politics surrounding the use of women's bodies as ornaments and sites of objectification more now than ever before, and women are better equipped than ever before with the language to name, and even protest, their experiences as the objects of "the gaze."

If the mission of 1970s liberal feminist politics, epitomized in early sex-roles in advertising research, was to increase women's public visibility, challenge traditional stereotypes, and raise the consciousness of the general public to issues of inequality in representation in order to begin changing those representations, then some small victories have been won. At least in form, if not in content, images of women's roles in advertising have greatly expanded beyond the dichotomy of the sex-object/household drudge, and perhaps the largest expanse in imagery has been in the realms of women in the work force and women in sports and fitness. Further, through this informal liberal feminist cultural re-education program, both men and women have gained the vocabulary to cry "foul!" when confronted with overtly sexist images either on television or in print, often presenting the illusion that men and women are now of like mind on issues of equality in gender representation.

However, there are major differences between the ability to cry "foul!" and the experience of being "fouled." Although men and women in this culture are now evoking similar vocabularies to denounce sexism in representation, similarities end when first-hand experiential knowledge of sexism is foregrounded. This study found that gender differences in decoding advertising content are most pronounced in situations where one's personal experience of being the recipient of male-dominated ways of seeing articulates
directly with those very images that perpetuate the dominant ways of seeing the female body in society. For almost every point of gender agreement in relation to gender advertising content in this study, female respondent's experiential knowledge of dominant gender relations and dominant gender representations offered points of departure for which no male counterpart in responses existed.

**Conclusion 2.** A second major conclusion about gender differences in decoding advertising content in articulations with society, self and others is the following: Men and women in this study see the power of advertising very differently. Although in agreement about the sheer quantities of advertisements consumed or actively avoided each day, and also the strategies for coping with this barrage of messages/images, male and female respondents did not agree on how and if advertising actually has the power to influence ideas and behaviors. Men in this study tended to judge advertising's power by the ability of one ad to directly influence purchasing decisions, behaviors and/or values of one individual. Because the males in this study believed they were immune to this type of direct persuasion, they believed that the influence of advertising messages on their lives is extremely limited. Women in this study, on the other hand, described the influence of advertising in terms of its ubiquity, and as pervasive images and dominant repetitive messages that reverberate throughout culture, not just in advertising. Female respondents reported that the influence of dominant messages in advertising operates not only at the conscious, but also at subconscious, levels. These women, therefore, felt that advertising is powerful, affecting their everyday lives in very profound ways, through their own actions and emotions and through the actions of others.

Conclusions 1 and 2 are closely interrelated in the discourse of respondents. Two major patterns of gender differences in relation to advertising content, which informed the structure of chapter 4, provide evidence for these first two conclusions: a) responses
about sexism in advertising and b) responses about particular gender displays in advertising.

**Sexism in advertising.** Second-wave feminism has imbued our language with the ability to name those images, remarks and actions that are "sexist." Both men and women in this study readily employ such descriptors as "sexual stereotypes," "sex-object," and "sexually-exploited," to discuss certain images, especially the images of women in advertising genres such as beer commercials and music videos. A surface reading of male and female responses in this study about what constitutes a "sexist" image or a "sexual stereotype" presents the illusion that men and women are now of like mind on issues of equality in gender representation. However, female responses to sexism reach beyond naming, to female experiencing. Female respondents suggest that the danger in sexist images is in the fact that they are merely the extreme of the ubiquitous and repetitious portrait of femininity circulated and recirculated throughout this culture, and therefore, the effects of sexist images must be viewed cumulatively and not as isolated images.

**Gender displays.** This study found that distinct gender differences appeared in how men and women decode familiar, over-codified gender displays in advertising. These gender differences, once again, relate directly to conclusions 1 and 2. Four familiar gender displays were discussed in-depth by respondents in this study: "body cropping," "action vs. appearance," "the new woman" and "motherhood." Both men and women agreed that the technique of cropping a woman's body in advertising images was dehumanizing. The definitive gender difference in relation to the display of body cropping, however, suggests that women have internalized the value that beauty in this society is ultimately defined in terms of body parts. Female respondents often found themselves judging their own worth in terms of their individual parts. This way of seeing was described by female respondents as a male vision of women's bodies and a reflection of male fetishes toward body parts.
The gender display of action versus appearance represents a prominent dichotomy that is often established in representations of gender in advertising: females appear and males act. Photographic cropping is an extreme form of representing the female as passive. The cropped female body is merely an appearance, suggesting no sense of purpose, action or motivation—the object, but never the subject of the controlling stare. Male respondents invoked the action vs. appearance dichotomy most often to illustrate why or why not the females in particular ads were personally appealing, confining their discussions to the spectrum of ads presented in the study. Female respondents, however, saw the action vs. appearance dichotomy in ads as a microcosm of the way women are assessed in larger society. Female respondents stated that the judgment of a woman's appearance always proceeds judgments based on other attributes, such as motivations, intelligence, ability and personality.

The highly "incorporated" gender display of the new working woman is now a highly recognizable image in the repertoire of advertising. Responses to this image uncovered stark gender differences in how men and women in this study see women's place in the work force. Male respondents gave "dominant readings" of this image, naming it an image of equality and accomplishment for women. For males in this study, the ad of the young business woman provided an easy and comfortable fit between liberal feminist discourses on equality in the work force and traditional conventions of femininity in advertising. In fact, males in this study suggested that this image of the new working woman is the "complete woman" of the 1990s.

In contrast, female respondents rarely identified this image as a positive one. Women in this study who approved of this image did so on a personal level, as a role model, but never deeming this an image of "equality." In fact, most women in this study resented the implication in the Virginia Slims' ad campaign that women have "arrived" and that all the struggles for social equality were now behind them. Women in this study had
no trouble describing the numerous ways that sexual inequality lives on in the working world. At the experiential level, then, women felt not a comfortable fit, but an actual disjuncture between the discourses of equality and femininity in the ad of the new working woman and their own personal experiences of being working women.

The gender display of young motherhood was highly accepted as an image of wholesomeness and happiness for both men and women in this study. One explanation for this positive reaction is the close ideological fit between femaleness, nature and domesticity in this culture. Gender differences appear in responses to the display of young motherhood when this image is discussed in terms of being a societal "ideal." For male respondents, this woman does exist in the world and she is the type to marry and have children with. She is, however, difficult to find. For female respondents this image presents a lifestyle that is enviable, but for very material reasons, being this woman seems virtually impossible. However, female respondents found another material reason why this image is positive. Only female respondents pointed to the fact that the woman pictured could be a single parent and therefore a positive image for alternative families, therefore broadening traditional definitions of family beyond the nuclear family.

**Conclusion 3.** A third conclusion drawn in relation to gender differences in the decoding of advertising content is very closely related the findings about familiar gender displays in advertising discussed above. This study found that men and women in this study disagree on what constitutes a positive alternative gender display in advertising. In the abstract, female respondents suggested that positive alternative images of femininity could be achieved by presenting images of females that are three-dimensional instead of one-dimensional, such as women who are combinations of attributes such as: active, responsible, strong-minded, independent, confident and intelligent. The ad for Nike used in this study of a woman running was considered by both males and females to be "alternative." When responding to this image, male and female respondents agreed on the
positivity of the over-all message in the ad, but disagreed upon the positivity of the image as an alternative aesthetic in female body image.

Males in this study offered very rigid definitions and preferences of attractiveness in female representation. As was the case with the image of the new working woman, these definitions and preferences most often correlated with dominant conventions of femininity in advertising. By these strict male-defined boundaries of attractiveness, any alternative image of the female body was doomed to failure. The woman in the Nike ad was deemed unattractive by males in this study.

Female respondents anticipated that men would find this alternative image unattractive. Female respondents described male tastes in attractiveness as synonymous with society's definitions of female attractiveness. Female respondents anticipated, therefore, that the image in the Nike ad would be seen as out-of-cinch with male fantasies of submissive femininity. Females, however, found the image to be a positive alternative aesthetic because it defies dominant, male-defined conventions of femininity in advertising. Further, female respondents defined this image as alternative because it pictures a woman in the process of achieving health and fitness, not as the posed product, or commodity, of fitness.

This second section that addresses the question, "How do female and male decodings of gender advertising differ in articulations with society, self and others? focuses on gender differences in male and female subjectivities, identities and negotiations in articulations with advertising, society, self and others. These conclusions were drawn directly from the analysis presented in the first portion of chapter 5.

Gender differences in subjectivities, identities and negotiations. Respondents saw themselves as the subjects of advertising, not so much because they could see themselves
in representation, but because they recognized that they are part of the process of interpretation of advertising meaning. Respondents suggested that it is through their continual engagement with ads that ads have the ability to signify cultural codes. For respondents in this study, ads acquire their cultural currency not in a dominating or autonomous fashion, but in the active transfer of meaning to commodity that is achieved in the moment of engagement with the major messages of ads.

However, even though respondents did not see advertising as autonomous and independent from individual interpretation, they did, on a whole, see advertising as a dominating structure. Although engagement with it fuels its power and intensifies its currency, respondents for the most part, felt that they have very little reciprocal power in shaping or changing those messages. Their individual power comes from their ability to resist or negotiate with those dominating, structural messages.

**Conclusion 4.** Gender differences in decoding ads are more numerous and less subtle when emphasis is shifted from the content of ads to how respondents see themselves as the subjects of ads. When respondents directed their comments toward advertising content, a distinct pattern developed. Because of respondents' shared vocabulary and liberal feminist sensibilities, many of the responses began in gender agreement over naming and identifying phenomena, but then turned into gender differences at the level of female experiential knowledge. However, no such pattern emerged when respondents positioned themselves as the subjects of gender advertising. The definitive pattern that emerged from the analysis of portion one in chapter 5, was that there was very little gender agreement on how male and female respondents see themselves as the subjects of gender advertising, how they construct gender identities from those understandings, and how they negotiate with advertising messages. In fact, on many subjects, such as in how men and women experience "male looking," the gender differences were all but incommensurate.
Conclusion 5. This study found that the stark gender differences in how men and women see themselves as the subjects of gender advertising, how they construct gender identities from those understandings, and therefore how they negotiate with advertising messages, is directly related to the level of comfort that an individual feels with the dominant representations of females in society. Further, the more the discomfort an individual feels with these images, the wider the repertoire of communicative strategies he or she will employ to deal with that discomfort.

This study found that, overall, male respondents felt a high level of comfort with the dominant representations of females in society. Therefore, male respondents employed far less communicative strategies to deal with these images. These males were accepting of these dominant representations, rarely negotiating with the dominant messages about female bodies or femininity. In contrast, at some point in their lives all the women in this study had experienced discomfort with dominant representations of femininity in this culture. This discomfort ranged from slight to extreme, varying from situation to situation. The various communicative strategies that females employ to deal with their discomfort will be discussed below.

The most outstanding evidence for conclusion 5 is in the area of female "negotiations." Female respondents employed a wide variety of strategies to negotiate with images of ideal femininity in advertising. In this study the category of female negotiations had no male counterpart. Quite different from the male respondents, for women in this study, the negotiation and resistance of dominant images of sexuality holds a central place in their experiences of gender relations throughout their lives. Female respondents discussed how these dominant structures help to define women's gender identities to themselves and to others. It can be argued that for women, personal gender identity is rarely divorced from gender identities prescribed through dominant messages about female sexuality circulated throughout the mass media and especially in advertising.
The following exemplars provide evidence for conclusions 5 and 6, which are: a) In contrast to subtle gender differences in responses to advertising content, gender differences are stark in terms of how individuals see themselves as the subjects of advertising, how they construct their own gender identities and how they negotiate with dominant images of ideal femininity, and b) differences in how men and women see themselves as the subjects of gender advertising, how they construct gender identities from those understandings, and therefore how they negotiate with advertising messages, is directly related with the level of comfort that an individuals feels with the dominant representations of females in society.

The objectification of the female body in this society is a cultural way of seeing. In this culture, advertising images of females frequently contain an invisible yet implicit man who approves of and defines the feminine ideal. This "way of seeing" is considered the point-of-view of the male spectator, or the "male gaze." Culture privileges this kind of male looking, which is imbued with power and status. Males in this study offered comments concerning not only the consentual nature of looking at female bodies, but the importance of learning how to look at female bodies. In sharp contrast, no female counterpart existed in responses for either consentual female looking at men or women, or learning how to look. Instead, as the experiential recipients of male looking, female respondents discussed the phenomenon of male looking extensively, never in terms of the artful subtleties of looking at women, but instead in terms of their impatience with, annoyance at and degradation felt at the expense of the male stare.

Consistent with the conceptual frame of the "male gaze" is split-consciousness of the surveyed female. The split-consciousness of the self-surveyed female is her embodiment of the object of the sight and simultaneously her awareness of being the object of the sight. This study found that female respondents had the ability to theorize how advertising works to further encourage them to view themselves as objects to be improved
upon for the male other, rather than to view themselves as subjects of their own femaleness. However, awareness (conscientization) or understanding of the process is rarely consolation.

Fulfilling the potential of ideal femininity in this culture involves a constant focusing on the body as the site of improvement and as the object of judgment. Without question, the overriding factor in achieving idealized femininity in this culture is the control and discipline of one's weight. All respondents in this study, male and female, alluded to one or a number of ways in which weight plays a pivotal role in society's judgments of individuals, and our judgments of one another, especially of women. In order to maintain the fit, healthy body, liberated from fat, one must continuously discipline the body, policing its cravings and excesses, reprimanding self when discipline falters. This ideal must be achieved through a regimen of diet plus exercise. For females in this study this added "requirement" for ideal femininity of being not only thin, but "fit," simply widens the chasm between idealized female bodies and the flesh of their own bodies.

For some women in this culture, the self-surveying gaze becomes overwhelming and, in turn, distorted. The anorexic can no longer gauge the image in the mirror against the ideal with any objectivity. Female and male respondents in this study cite societal pressures for women to conform to ideal body images presented throughout society as a prominent contributor to the onset of eating disorders in women such as anorexia nervosa (self-starvation) and bulimia (bingeing and purging). Consistent with national statistics, in this study eating disorders were a "woman's disease." Female respondents contextualized their own experience with eating disorders as symptomatic of societal pressures to conform to an unattainable physical ideal.

Recently, many feminist writers on female pleasures in looking, especially in film theory, have expressed a growing discomfort with framing concepts such as the "male
gaze" and "split consciousness of the surveyed female." These scholars argue that analysis of female decoding through the lens of the male gaze limits the range of possibilities for female pleasure in viewing. Many of these scholars contend that although the conventions of the male gaze in visual images are dominant conventions in our society, it is wrong to theorize that female spectatorship can only be seen as an activity that is dictated by the male gaze. Women have developed their own ways of looking that should not be defined through the masculine lens only.

This recent movement of scholarship on the "female spectator" would ask of this study: if the male gaze is the pervasive address of visual images in Western societies such as this, and if the male gaze is an extension of permissive male looking in larger society, how and where do women find pleasure in looking at these images? In the case of many advertisements where the commodity is marketed to women, but the visual construction is for the pleasure of the male, how do these images "work" for women?

Conclusion 6. This study problematizes the central arguments of the female spectatorship literature in two respects. First, this study problematizes the criticism against the viability of the male gaze and split-consciousness of the surveyed female conceptual frame for analyzing female viewing. The conclusions just discussed, for example, suggest that the concepts of the male gaze and the split-consciousness of the surveyed female are still extremely viable for examining the ways in which men and women are positioned as gendered subjects in this culture. The male gaze also has a powerful affect on how men and women construct gender identities for themselves. In this study, female respondents, especially, tended to name their feelings of exploitation and subjugation within the context of rigid societal pressures to achieve an ultimately unachievable ideal femininity. This ideal female is a perfect "sight" defined and perpetuated through the disciplining male gaze.

However, as the analysis in chapter 5 on female negotiations showed, there are dimensions of female spectatorship that do indeed exceed the parameters of the controlling
male gaze. Female respondents wrestled with their experiences of the male gaze in culture; they negotiated with it, and in rare cases, even managed to resist it altogether. This suggests the second respect in which this study problematizes the arguments of the female spectator literature. The concept of "pleasure in looking" imposes its own set of limitations. This literature suggests that the place to find female spectatorship that reaches beyond the parameters of the male gaze is in female "pleasures."

This logic is cultural-form bound. Indeed, when analyzing particular media that are purposefully consumed by women, such as romance novels and soap operas, adequate support could be gathered that the breaks from the confines of the male gaze reside in female pleasures. However, in this study very little pleasure in viewing was reported by female spectators of advertising. Pleasure plays a minor role in this analysis, however this study provides ample evidence that female spectatorship is not completely confined within the parameters of the male gaze.

This study concludes that "pleasure" is only a sub-process of "negotiation." Negotiation is defined as the holding together of opposite sides in an ongoing process of give and take. As a model of meaning production, negotiation conceives cultural exchange as the intersection of processes of production and reception, in which overlapping but non-matching determinations operate. Meaning is neither imposed on or passively imbibed, but arises out of a struggle or negotiation between competing frames of reference, motivation and experience.

In negotiations with images constructed for and through the male gaze, female spectators negotiate their gender identities in relation to the controlling male gaze. Further, it is only through active engagement (awareness, conscientization) that women begin to negotiate with the controlling gaze of images. Resistance can rarely be achieved without going through this process. In this study, women tended to progress from initial reflection to active negotiation, to resistance, as they aged or underwent life experiences with highly
constraining gender situations. For women in this study, active negotiation involved trying to find comfort in themselves and their bodies when all the messages in society told them they were not pretty enough, not good enough, and especially not ideal enough. Active negotiation is the search for the embodied unified self, but not through the act of consumption of products.

Research question 2

The second research question of this dissertation asked, *How do female and male decodings of advertising differ within each gender in articulations with society, self and others?* The conclusions drawn that answer this research question relate directly to the analysis presented in the second portion of chapter 5.

This study found differences within gender as well as differences between gender. These findings suggest, foremost, where individual respondents "break" with both the dominant structures of advertising messages and also the imposing structures of gender. Therefore, the conclusions to research question 2, although fewer in variety than the responses to research question 1, provide insight into "interpretive freedom."

Conclusion 1. In some cases, "interpretive freedom" reflected its namesake, a sense of freedom, a breaking out of constraining structures. The first difference within gender that this study uncovered involves this kind of break with the imposing structure of the dominant male gaze. For most female respondents in this study, active negotiation results from a steady and growing awareness over time between the tension of society's messages about ideal femininity and a desire to be a self-defined, embodied individuals. Some female respondents reported, however, that they have had the ability to negotiate with and even resist dominant messages about ideal femininity from a very early age. The explanation that they offered was that their families provided a competing structure for them by encouraging them from early childhood by offering consistent messages that self worth
should be based on individual abilities and aptitudes and not on appearance. These women were encouraged, by their families, to be happy with their inner abilities and to be comfortable with their bodies.

In this study, the family was reported as a young girl's only real defense against the overwhelming pressures to conform to society's ideals of femininity based foremost on appearance. Much more than males, as young girls, the women in this study needed constant reinforcement that they were valuable as multi-dimensional beings. Central to a competing family message on femininity is its ability to clearly and consistently define "appearance" as only one attribute amongst many that makes a person who she is. Parents cited in the examples above were careful to ensure a balance between emphasis on abilities/attributes and on appearances, whenever supporting or praising their children. For these women, their girlhood self-esteem was not built on the fragile veil of outer beauty, but on a strong foundation of inner worth and ability.

Another difference within gender, and a point of "interpretive freedom" discovered in this study also involved a type of freedom and breaking out of constraining structures. In this second case, some males in this study offered points of view that departed sharply from the dominant male gaze. This difference within gender found in this study showed that male responses were not monolithic, nor did they always respond to images of females through the dominant male gaze. Some male respondents in this study possessed a heightened sense of feminist consciousness and thereby showed genuine empathy for female experiences. This feminist consciousness was achieved through informal education from feminist discourses in society, female family members, girlfriends and wives.

*Conclusion 2.* Although the term, "interpretive freedom" connotes a kind of light positiveness, this study found that respondents often employ interpretive freedom at moments of great disjuncture, incongruity or even distress in their lives. Responses showing the greatest interpretive freedom were often moments of most active negotiation or
complete opposition to the images or messages encountered. In this study, these types of responses most generally belonged to those respondents belonging to groups marginalized in mainstream society.

For example, the distance between one’s own gender identity and the idealized vision of femininity portrayed in advertising is larger for some than for others. Symbolic annihilation occurs by degrees. The overweight white woman, for instance, may never see her body shape held up as an ideal, but she can see herself in the dominant representation of whiteness. For lesbian women their bodies may be found in idealized images of femininity, but their chosen lifestyle is prohibited. However, the African American woman who is not fine-featured or medium-to-light skinned, may grow up never seeing herself in representations of ideal beauty, assuming that the only way to be beautiful is to completely change the body and ultimately, the self. For those women who rarely, if ever, see themselves reflected in dominant representation, negotiation with images is perpetual and intuitive. This type of negotiation proceeds conscientization through experience, and full resistance to dominant images of idealized female beauty is almost impossible, practically the equivalent of resisting one’s own culture entirely.

Still another example of differences within gender responses that reflect the "interpretive freedom" defined by disjuncture and incongruity involved the gay and lesbian respondents in this study. An overarching theme that bound the lesbian and gay male responses together and differentiated them from responses of their straight counterparts, was discussion of the fact that their chosen lifestyle is continuously symbolically annihilated from popular representation in a continuous and systematic fashion. One strategy respondents employed to combat this symbolic invisibility was to manufacture their own meanings from these dominant representations. One major difference was found between lesbian and gay male responses in this study that more closely mirror gender
differences in the larger sample. The objectification of the body based on appearance seems to be a male way of looking that transcends sexual orientation.

**Theoretical research questions**

This study was guided by two research questions that reflect the larger metatheoretical contest within which this study is located. These guiding questions are: 

*Where are the particular sites of struggle for control over the meanings of gender by men and women in relation to dominant gender messages in advertising? Where are the sites of compliance by men and women with the dominant messages about gender as prescribed through advertising?* These two questions are dialectically related and will be treated as such in the conclusions to follow. These questions were derived from the debate discussed in the problem statement over where the struggle over the "meaning" of gender, as prescribed by advertisements and/or society, resides -- in the text, in the audience, in society, or in a complex web of signification that links all three. In other words, this study examined the relationships between structural constraints imposed by the dominant messages about gender in advertising, how those messages articulated with messages about gender in society at large, and when and how individuals have the interpretive freedom to negotiate with and even oppose (depart from) the dominant messages in advertising and in society at large.

These larger questions, then, will be addressed together first by discussing patterns found in male responses in relation to these larger issues and then by discussing patterns found in female responses in relation to these larger issues.

**Males.** This study found that male responses to gender advertising are generally framed in terms of compliance to dominant prescriptions of gender in advertising content, the male gaze, and male looking in advertising, personally and in society. Males in this study rarely "negotiated" with dominant images or prescriptions of femininity. When not in
compliance with these dominant prescriptions of gender and dominant ways of seeing and looking, males in this study offered stark departures (oppositions) to these dominant messages.

Males in this study felt little need to "negotiate" with dominant images of gender or ways of seeing. Males in this study either complied with dominant messages or opposed them, they rarely felt compelled to "accommodate" them. Therefore, male responses in this study lacked a sense of "struggle." Males in this study experienced very few emotional or psychological "gaps" between their familiarity and comfort with images of gender in this society and their own personal experience of gender relations. Two examples of male compliance with the dominant images in this study were especially illustrative:

When male respondents gave dominant readings of the image of the new working woman, they were demonstrating that their comfort level and familiarity of ideal femininity was not confined only to traditional representations, but was elastic enough to accommodate the incorporation of new, "progressive images." However, this comfort level reached its limits with the alternative aesthetic of the female runner. Male respondents insisted on "reading" this image through the dominant conventions so easily applied to the image of the new working woman, conventions of which they were most familiar. Therefore, this alternative image was deemed "unattractive."

A definitive concept in male comfort levels with dominant images of gender is "distance." Males in this study possess a certain psychological distance from these dominant images. For the women in this study, the need to negotiate with or accommodate an image is generally indicative of a close psychological connection to it. Males in this study rarely felt this kind of connection. Where their responses offered oppositional readings (or departures), they were rarely offered up in the midst of personal struggle, but more from pre-formed opinions about these points of departure. For example, responses from the gay male perspective offered an interesting mix of opposition and compliance.
Although extremely oppositional in his responses to dominant gender messages in advertising and larger society about heterosexual lifestyles, his description of looking at potential romantic interests gave all indications of compliance with seeing through the male gaze.

**Women.** This study found that patterns in female responses to gender advertising were sometimes in compliance with dominant prescriptions of gender in advertising content, and sometimes offered stark departures (oppositions) to these dominant messages. However, the distinguishing feature of female responses to gender advertising was women's on-going "negotiations" with and "accommodations" of dominant images of ideal femininity. The females in this study were involved in on-going struggles to *find* psychological distance from these images, and the dominant messages about gender that these images help to promote throughout society. Women in this study were extremely aware that the address of dominant images of gender were male-defined, and therefore, implied in female spectatorship was always a comparison between the image and themselves.

The particular moments of compliance with dominant images of femininity in female responses were very specific. For example, women and men in this study have internalized a hate of fat. Whether the reference to fat applies to themselves or to others, fat was seen as something to loathe and to fear. Other moments of compliance for female respondents showed up in responses to the image of motherhood in advertising. Motherhood was read as good, wholesome, a sign of positive family values. Overall, the vision of young motherhood presented in the Pier One ad was accepted by women, for the most part, as unproblematic, as "natural."

The particular moments of departure or opposition by female respondents to dominant images of idealized femininity were equally specific. In the context of this analysis, perhaps the most outstanding of these moments was when some female
respondents reported that their families, and most specifically, their mothers, had served as competing structures for them against the influence of these images from a very early age. These women were spared much of the journey of negotiation that the majority of the women in this study travel and have traveled with these images.

Another example of a moment in departure was when the female respondents in this study embraced the alternative aesthetic of the female runner as a positive "break" in dominant representation. The act of enjoying the ad itself was not oppositional, after all, Nike was trying to "break" with convention. However, the reasons these women gave for embracing this image were moments of opposition. Females in this study found the image of the female runner to be a positive alternative aesthetic because it defies dominant, male-defined conventions of femininity in advertising. Further, female respondents defined this image as alternative because it pictures a woman in the process of achieving health and fitness, not as the posed product, or commodity, of fitness.

Moments of opposition to dominant images of ideal femininity by female respondents were relatively rare. Instead, female "negotiation" with these images permeates the entire set of female responses in this study. For example, in response to particular advertising content, female responses consistently paralleled male responses at the level of identification and naming of phenomena, but then contrasted sharply when these women brought their own experience to the moment. In other words, women do achieve a certain psychological distance when describing and identifying dominant gender images and relations, but they can rarely maintain that critical distance when they apply what they have identified or named to their personal experiences.

Female negotiations with dominant images of femininity intensify when emphasis is placed on how women see themselves as the gendered subjects of these images. Women in this study possessed a very strong and clear sense of themselves as the objects of male looking in all aspects of their lives. Women respondents actively attributed their own
internalization of this disciplining stare of the male gaze to their feelings of insecurity and self-loathing and their almost unconscious obsession with disciplining their bodies.

For most women, the journeys from moments of compliance to moments of resistance with dominant images of ideal femininity are riddled with continuous "struggles." These struggles usually take the form of "negotiations," because when women view images of other women in this society, no matter how pleasant that viewing experience is, they are seeing the standard by which their own strengths and weaknesses will be judged.
APPENDIX A
Hi,

My name is Rich DiCenzo. I'm a doctoral student in the department of Communication. Currently, I'm helping head a research team interviewing people in-depth about their reactions to magazine advertisements. We are paying respondents $20 for a one-time interview to be conducted on the OSU campus. Your name was selected randomly from the OSU student directory to be contacted about being a respondent for this study.

Would you like to hear more about this opportunity?

[if no, thank them for their time]
[if yes, continue]

Interviews last from 1 1/2 hours and respondents in the pilot studies reported that they enjoyed the process very much. You will be asked open-ended questions in response to some pre-selected advertisements and ads you select yourself.

All interviews will be held either at the Ohio Legal Center or in Neil Hall, both on South campus. You will be interviewed by myself, one of 7 individuals on our interviewing team. Your responses will be tape-recorded and all your responses will be completely confidential.

Do you have any questions before we set up your appointment?

[if no, give appropriate directions]

O.K., your appointment is for [day], [date], [time], [place]. I will will meet you at the front door.

Thank you. Good bye.
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

UP FRONT....
explain and re-emphasize to R that a great deal of redundancy is built in...the reason for
that is that everyone of us is different and unique...so we cannot anticipate where you have
the most to say.....so we offer many opportunities as we can for you to respond to
questions.
If there is nothing else to say, you just tell me and we'll go on.

PART I: BROWSING A MAGAZINE

THINGS TO EXPLAIN TO R
*BROWSING: For this part, I want you to take 10-15 minutes to browse through 1 or
two of these magazines....
*CHOOSE 2 ADS THAT STAND OUT MOST FOR YOU THAT PICTURE AT LEAST
ONE FEMALE IN THEM:
(by stand out: please, disturbs, is eye-catching, attractive, unattractive, sexy, etc. . .)
*REDUNDANCY: Again, some of the questions I will ask may sound redundant . .
*ROAD MAP: For each ad, I'll be asking you the following questions....[GIVE PINK
SHEET] You can follow along if you like
*I'll also be writing some of your responses down in order to refer back to them.

FOR EACH AD
1. First, I'd like you to tell me what reactions you had to this ad...

   What images or ideas or thoughts did it bring to mind
   What questions did it lead you to ask
   What emotional reactions did it lead you to have...

FOR EACH IMAGE/IDEA/THOUGHT/QUESTION/EMOTION:
2. Can you tell me something about what leads you to have this response
[REPEAT RESPONSE]?

3. Is there anything else you could tell about how this reaction [REPEAT
RESPONSE] relates to your life, now or in the past?

HELPS AND HURTS:
Given that you have had this reaction-- [REPEAT RESPONSE] -- to this
ad, what I want you to do now is think about how having this reaction may
help or facilitate or assist you....or may hurt or hinder or disturb you.
4. Does having this reaction -- [REPEAT REACTION] -- please, assist, help or facilitate you in any way? How?

5. Does having this reaction -- [REPEAT REACTION] -- disturb, hinder, impede or hurt you in any way? How?
THINGS TO EXPLAIN TO R
*PLACING ADS:
  1. Under these three index cards, place the 8 ads according to what you feel is society’s ideal. . . how you think society would rank the ideal image of the females in these ads. 10 being society’s ideal and 1 being not society’s ideal.
  **If there are ties, simply stack ads one on top of the other.

*REDUNDANCY: Again, some of the questions I will ask may sound redundant. . .
*ROAD MAP: For the next two parts of the interview I’ll be asking you the following questions....[GIVE GREEN SHEET] You can follow along if you like.
*Again, I’ll be writing some of your responses down in order to refer back to them.

PART II: SOCIETY IDEAL:

FOR EACH PILE OF ADS:
  6. What I want you to talk about now is what you think leads you to judge this ad (these ads) in this way. You could have any number of things that lead you to judge them in this way....you could have images or ideas or thoughts... questions...emotional reactions...any of which and all of which you may see as explaining your judgment. What * do you see as possibly explaining your judgment?
      *images or ideas or thoughts?
      *questions?
      *emotional reactions?

FOR EACH IMAGE/IDEA/THOUGHT/QUESTION/EMOTION:
  7. Can you tell me something about what leads you to see this response -- [REPEAT RESPONSE] -- as explaining your judgment?

  8. Is there anything else you could tell about how this reaction [REPEAT RESPONSE] relates to your life, now or in the past?

HELPS AND HURTS:
  Given that you have had this reaction-- [REPEAT RESPONSE] to this ad (these ads) what I want you to do now is think about how having this reaction may help or facilitate or assist you....or may hurt or hinder or disturb you.
  9. Does having this reaction -- [REPEAT REACTION] -- help or facilitate or please or assist you in any way? How?

  10. Does having this reaction -- [REPEAT REACTION] -- hinder or hurt or disturb or impede you in any way? How?
COMPARISON OF PILES 1 & 5 TO TOP PILE
11. What accounts for your putting this ad (these ads) in this pile...and not in the top pile -- the 10 [OR WHATEVER IS TOP FOR THIS R] pile. What reasons did you have?

FOR EACH REASON
Now I want you to look at each of the reasons you named and think about whether each helps or hurts you in any way. Like before you might see both helps and hurts or only one or the other or none.
12. Does this reason -- [REPEAT REASON ] -- help or facilitate or please or assist you in any way? How?

13. Does this reason -- [REPEAT REASON -- hinder or hurt or disturb or impede you in any way? How?

WHAT COULD MAKE THESE FEMALES UNATTRACTIVE TO SOCIETY
[Top pile only]
14. When you look at the female(s) in this ad (these ads), what characteristics would she/they have to have to make them very unattractive by society’s standards?

FOR MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTIC NAMED:
15. What leads you to name this characteristic?
16. Does this characteristic [REPEAT CHARACTERISTIC] relate to your life, now or in the past?

HELPS OR HURTS:
How has this relationship to your life been helpful or hurtful?

17. Would you say that this relationship to your life has pleased, assisted, helped or facilitated you in way? How?

18. Would you say that this relationship to your life has disturbed, hindered, impeded or hurt you in way? How?
PART III: PERSONALLY APPEALING:

THINGS TO EXPLAIN TO R
*PLACING ADS:
  1. Under this second set of 3 index cards, place the 8 ads according to how you judge the females in these ads as personally appealing to you.
Remember, "appealing" can mean anything you want it to mean, like "they are someone you would like to look at," "someone you'd like to know," "someone you would like to spend time with," "be close to." or anything else that describes what an appealing image of another, is for you.
  **Again, if there are ties, simply stack ads one on top of the other.

*REDUNDANCY: Again, some of the questions I will ask may sound redundant. . .
*ROAD MAP: I'll be asking you the same questions as before....[GREEN SHEET] You can follow along if you like.
*Again, I'll be writing some of your responses down in order to refer back to them.

FOR EACH PILE OF ADS
19. What I want you to talk about now is what you think leads you to judge this ad (these ads) in this way. You could have any number of things leading you to judge them this way....you could have images or ideas or thoughts...questions...emotional reactions...any of which and all of which you may see as explaining your judgment. What * do you see as possibly explaining your judgment?
  *images or ideas or thoughts?
  *questions?
  *emotional reactions?

FOR EACH IMAGE/IDEA/THOUGHT/QUESTION/EMOTION:
20. Can you tell me something about what leads you to see this response -- [REPEAT RESPONSE] -- as explaining your judgment?

21. Is there anything else you could tell about how this reaction [REPEAT RESPONSE] relates to your life, now or in the past?

HELPS AND HURTS:
Given that you have had this reaction-- [REPEAT RESPONSE] to this ad (these ads) what I want you to do now is think about how having this reaction may help or facilitate or assist you....or may hurt or hinder or disturb you.

22. Does having this reaction -- [REPEAT REACTION] -- please, assist, help or facilitate you in any way? How?

23. Does having this reaction -- [REPEAT REACTION] -- disturb, hinder, impede or hurt you in any way? How?
COMPARISON OF PILES 1 & 5 TO TOP PILE

24. What accounts for your putting this ad (these ads) in this pile... and not in the top pile -- the 10 [OR WHATEVER IS TOP FOR THIS R1 pile. What reasons did you have?

FOR EACH REASON
Now I want you to look at each of the reasons you named and think about whether each helps or hurts you in any way.
25. Does this reason -- [REPEAT REASON] -- help or facilitate or please or assist you in any way? How?

26. Does this reason -- [REPEAT REASON] -- hinder or hurt or disturb or impede you in any way? How?

WHAT COULD MAKE THESE FEMALES UNATTRACTIVE FOR YOU
[Top pile only]
27. When you look at the female(s) in this ad (these ads), what characteristics would she/they have to have to make them very unattractive for you personally?

FOR MOST IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTIC NAMED:
28. What leads you to name this characteristic?
29. Does this characteristic [REPEAT CHARACTERISTIC] relate to your life, now or in the past?

HELPS OR HURTS:
How has this relationship to your life been helpful or hurtful?

30. Would you say that this relationship to your life has pleased, assisted, helped or facilitated you in way? How?

31. Would you say that this relationship to your life has disturbed, impeded, hindered or hurt you in way? How?
PART IV: LIFE HISTORY WITH ADS:

THINGS TO EXPLAIN TO R:
*LIFE HISTORY: Now I would like you to focus on your life and your life history with advertising. Let's look at the larger picture of your life.
*ROAD MAP: I'll be asking you the following questions...[GIVE BLUE SHEET] You can follow along if you like

32. Looking back over past periods of your life, what do you think advertising has had to do with your thoughts and actions relating to being male/female?
Can you recall advertising leading you to have any thoughts, questions, images or emotional reactions about how to live your life as a male/female?

What images or ideas or thoughts did it bring to mind?
What questions did it lead you to ask
What emotional reactions did it lead you to?

FOR EACH IMAGE/IDEA/THOUGHT/QUESTION EMOTION:
33. Can you tell me something about what leads you to have this response--[REPEAT RESPONSE]?

34. Is there anything else you could tell about how this reaction [REPEAT RESPONSE] relates to your life, now or in the past?

HELPS AND HURTS: (for each response)
Given that you have given this response--[REPEAT RESPONSE]--what I want you to do now is think about how having this reaction may help or facilitate or assist you...or may hurt or hinder or disturb you.
35. Does having this response--[REPEAT RESPONSE]--help or facilitate or please or assist you in any way? How?

36. Does having this response--[REPEAT RESPONSE]--hinder or hurt or disturb or impede you in any way? How?
PART V: DEMOGRAPHICS

THINGS TO EXPLAIN TO R
*BASIC INFORMATION about yourself
*CANNOT CHOOSE NOT TO ANSWER, but please remember that your answers are confidential and the info. will greatly help this research project.

38. AGE
39. ETHNICITY
40. GENDER
41. UNDERGRAD. OR GRAD.
42. KIND OF PLACE WHERE GREW UP: farm, town, city, other
43. WHERE YOU RAISED WITH BOTH PARENTS?
44. (If applicable) WHERE DID FATHER WORK?
45. (If applicable) WHERE DID MOTHER WORK?
46. ABOUT HOW MANY HOURS A WEEK DO YOU WATCH TV?
47. ABOUT HOW MANY MAGAZINES DO YOU READ A MONTH?
48. WHAT ARE THE MAGAZINES?

Thank you very much for participating.
CODES

1. **MEAN AMB**  Meaning ambiguous
2. **ATTR**  Attractive people
3. **WELL KN**  Well-known people
4. **ANN**  Annoying
5. **PL**  Pleasing
6. **SXIST**  Sexist, exploitative
6A. **SX EX**  Sexually explicit
7. **STU**  Stupid
7A. **UNINT**  Uninterested, ambivalent
8. **AD WRKS**  How advertising works  (theorizing about what ads do and how they fit into culture)
9. **IM/PIC**  Seeing ad as image/picture  (separate from context of advertising)
10. **SLL PROD**  Seeing ad as selling product  (connecting image to selling product)
11. **IN-TEX**  Intertextual reference  (celebrities, TV, other magazines, characters in other ad campaigns, etc.)
12. **SX=COMM**  Sex=commodity  (buy beer, get the women)
13. **POS IM**  Ads=positive images/messages  (health, fitness, powerful image, beauty)
14. **NEG IM**  Ads=negative images/messages  (stereotypes, extremes, deception, underweight, links sex w/ danger, links looks w/ brains)
15. **BUS W POS**  Business woman image positive  (it's great women are now in work force)
16. **BUS W NEG**  Business woman image negative  (we have not come a long way, baby)
17. **MOM IM POS**  Mother image positive  (it's great to see her having fun w/ child)
18. **MOM IM NEG**  Mother image negative  (she is too pretty and energetic)
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<tr>
<td>18A. <strong>RNR POS</strong></td>
<td>Runner image positive</td>
<td>(she is health-conscious and independent)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18B <strong>RNR NEG</strong></td>
<td>Runner image negative</td>
<td>(she looks unkept, tomboyish)</td>
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<td>19. <strong>SFT PRN</strong></td>
<td>Fashion ads are like soft-porn</td>
<td>(&quot;at least Playboy is more straight-forward&quot;)</td>
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<td>20. <strong>DEF BTY</strong></td>
<td>Ads define &quot;beauty,&quot; attractiveness</td>
<td>(by excluding women of color, for example)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>20A. <strong>DEF GN RLTS</strong></td>
<td>Defining gendered relationships</td>
<td>(men are alone in ads or in a sexual relationship with women but men and women are never pictured as just friends)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>21. <strong>BD PRTS</strong></td>
<td>Ads focus on body parts</td>
<td>(&quot;this woman has no head&quot;)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>21A. <strong>AD RLTS PRODA</strong>d does/not relate to product</td>
<td>(running along a beach has nothing to do with alcohol, these images are straight to-the-point of what is being sold)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>21B. <strong>HET REPS</strong></td>
<td>Ads are heterosexual representations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>21C. <strong>CONT SOC</strong></td>
<td>Message directly contradicts society's standards</td>
<td></td>
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<td>22. <strong>REF=EM</strong></td>
<td>Self reflection prompts emotion</td>
<td>(anger, annoyance, hurt, distaste, distrust, self-criticism, inferiority)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>23. <strong>REF=BEH</strong></td>
<td>Self reflection on behavior</td>
<td>(refuse to buy product, turn off TV, flip page)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>23A. <strong>REF=GLS</strong></td>
<td>Self reflection reveals goals/values</td>
<td>(it is a goal of mine to stay healthy and fit)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>24. <strong>REF=QS</strong></td>
<td>Self reflection prompts question</td>
<td>(why can't I be like that?, I question my own values)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>25. <strong>NEG R TM</strong></td>
<td>Negotiation in real time</td>
<td>(&quot;they are unattainable...and cause so much distress...at the same time I envy them, their bodies)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>26. <strong>NEG HST</strong></td>
<td>Negotiation, historical</td>
<td>(self-growth, maturity in relation to ads, coming to peace with images, raised consciousness)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. <strong>INJ CONS</strong></td>
<td>Linking body images to injurious consequences</td>
<td>(anorexia, bulimia, gang-rape, harassment, low self-esteem)</td>
<td></td>
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28. **STER**  
Stereotyping gender attributes  
(women are x, women like x, men treat women like x, men think if they buy x . . .)

28A. **ST GN RLS**  
Stereotyping/defining gender roles  
(she is playing out the nurturing mother)

29. **BY HBTS**  
Buying habits  
(I refer to ads when I want new clothes, ads must be useful—not artsy—to get me to buy)

30. **DNT BLV**  
Don’t believe ads  
(you just can’t believe advertising)

31. **STL/P PSS**  
Style/peer pressure  
(when your friends are all looking good, you want to go out and buy new things to look good too)

32. **COMP STR**  
Identifying competing structures  
(parents’ support was stronger message that ads)

33. **AD=PWR**  
Ads not powerful  
(ads have no effect on me, only use ads for information)

33A. **ADS=PWR**  
Ads powerful  
(ads influence what we buy, how we dress and how we act)

34. **IM=RLTY**  
image is realistic, natural  
(we think men and women are equal, but these ads show that we are not; she looks more natural than the others)

35. **EMPTH**  
empathy for women  
(it puts a lot of unnecessary pressure on women)

36. **ASS ACTS**  
Assessing the actions of others  
(“when family member smokes it’s selfish act”)

37. **REF=R PERS**  
Ad not true reflection of person endorsing product  
(it doesn’t really depict her [Liz Taylor] as intelligent person she is)

38. **CONF MSS**  
Ads contain conflicting messages

39. **MLE EQ**  
Identifying male equivalences  
(you have to be large, have chisled features. . .)

40. **DESCR**  
Mere description of photo  
(here are two women running on the beach and here are two women laying on a towel)

41. **ACT V. APP**  
Action/substance vs. appearance  
(the difference is some sort of action, here. . .All the others are simply appearing)
42. **BD GN EX**  Bad gender experience  

(my old girlfriend looked like this, wouldn't stand by me when I couldn't take her to the dance)

**CODING RULE:** Do not double code when one code is more specific. Code on the specific.
APPENDIX D
Description of ads chosen

The author was unable to obtain permission to reproduce all the ads used in this study here. What follows are full descriptions of the 8 ads used in this research.

Fig. 1, #L: This is a full-page, color print advertisement for Budweiser beer. The photograph features three women laying next to each other on a beach towel that looks like a reproduction of the Budweiser label, wearing bathing suits. One of the women is laying on her stomach reading a book, so we see a back view of her. The middle woman is addressing the camera directly, sunglasses on, smiling at the camera. The third woman is laying on her side, holding a can of Budweiser and listening to a CD player. The most striking feature of this ad is that the three women's bathing suits are actually part of the beach towel. The women, therefore are seen as part of the towel.

Fig. 2, #K: This is a full-page color ad for Johnnie Walker Scotch Whiskey. The photograph features two women jogging on the beach together, apparently engaged in light conversation with one another. We see the women from the back, they are caught by the camera in the moment of action, facing toward each other, feet in motion. Each woman is wearing exercise apparel resembling a two-piece bathing suit. Each is wearing baseball caps. The text at the bottom of the ad reads, "He loves my mind. And he drinks Johnnie Walker."

Fig. 3, #G: This is a two-page black-and-white ad for Jordache System (clothing). The ad features three men and one woman walking together down a deserted city street. The woman is the center of the ad. She is walking directly and quickly toward the camera. She is dressed in a low-necked midriff top and short skirt. The woman has dark sunglasses on and a very stern look on her face. She is holding one hand up as if to "brush off" the man walking closely with her on her right. This man seems to be talking at her while keeping up with her stride. On her other side, walking equally close, are two other men. They are both staring and smiling toward the woman. However, one man has his arm around the other man's shoulders, and that man has his arm around the other's waist.

Fig. 4, #J: This is a full-page color ad for Montana (Miss Deanna) clothing. The ad is a purple figure on a white background. The figure is a torso of a woman, cropped at the head and at the mid-thigh. The torso is at profile, featuring the curves of the breasts and the hips. Only one arm is seen. On this arm is a purple leather bracelet that covers the entire forearm. The bracelet is made up of 9 purple metallic
buckles. The text, "Montana," is scrolled, as if by hand, across the photograph in matching purple letters.

Fig. 5, #H: This is a full-page color ad for Pier One Imports (clothing). The ad features one large photograph and two small insets. The large photograph pictures a woman, late twenties, early thirties, dressed in a bulky sweater, jeans, and cowboy boots. This woman is standing at profile to the camera and her head is turned toward the camera and she has long, curly hair. She is carrying a female child on her back, piggy-back style. The setting is somewhere in the country. On the ground are autumn leaves and in the background is corn. The insets are both adult-child pairings, also. The top insert features a woman and a boy by a haystack and the bottom insert features the same woman and female child as in the large picture, only in different clothing.

Fig. 6, #I: This is a full-page color ad for Virginia Slims cigarettes. This ad features a photograph of a young woman executive. She is walking directly toward the camera addressing the camera with a big smile on her face. The way she is walking suggests a playfulness. She has long hair and is wearing full make-up. She is dressed in a man's tailored business suit with feminine accessories, such as a colorful pink tie, earrings, broach, pumps and a bright pink overcoat. She is carrying a handbag and a briefcase in her left hand and a cigarette in her right hand. There is an inset (supposedly antique) photograph in the lower left of the ad featuring three women in turn-of-the-century corsets. Under the insert is the text, "There used to be a lot more pressure for a woman to succeed in middle management." To the lower right of the woman is the Virginia Slims logo, "You've come a long way, baby." In the lower right corner of the ad is the Surgeon General's warning.

Fig. 7, #M: This is a full-page color ad for Lancome cosmetics featuring Isabella Rossellini. The ad features Rossellini's face. She is in a sitting position with her knees pulled up to her chest. The photograph is framed from her chest up to her face. She is addressing the camera, head tilted. She is wearing a gold, long-sleeved top. She is pictured in front of a blue, sky-like background. The Lancome white rose logo is overlaid across the bottom of the photograph.

Fig. 8, #N: This is a full-page black-and-white ad for Nike athletic shoes. The woman featured is running across a bridge. Trees are in the background, suggesting this may be a park she is running through. The camera is looking up at the woman as she is in the process of running by. The photograph has the texture and feeling of a candid, amateur photograph. The woman is not made-up and her hair is not styled. She is dressed in tight-fitting spandex running pants, running shoes, and a tee-shirt. Below the photograph is the Nike logo, "Just do it."
REFERENCES


