

# **READING AND WRITING**

# **ABOUT POPULAR CULTURE**



**COURSE BOOK**

**by:**

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SEMARANG  
2018**

## FOREWARD

In the Faculty of Language and Arts of Soegijapranata Catholic University, students majoring in Linguistics or Literature are required to conduct a study and write a thesis. In order to conduct a research, students need to have a good understanding of the basics of a number of courses that becomes the basis of their thesis research writing. Although this handbook or module is for Literature major students who want to make use of Popular Culture products, such as music, song lyrics, film, television shows (serial film, film documentary, box movies, cooking and game shows), comic books, graphic novels, fashion, and advertisements as their major research data; it can also be combined with the theories learnt in linguistics courses to write their pop culture analysis.

This course book aims to provide an overview of pop culture. It is a compilation of articles and chapters of numerous books on pop culture, including American and Indonesian pop culture. Written samples from the lecturer herself is also compiled in this module to open-up students' minds about the application of pop culture analysis. This book consists of five chapters. Chapters 1 to 3 focus more on general discussion of what popular culture is and what popular culture made of is. Chapters 4 to 5 are intended to give students more in-depth knowledge about popular culture through further reading and writing. I hope that students have a better understanding of pop culture and are able to make use of this book to help produce an academic paper on a certain pop culture product/ phenomena.

I would like to thank the writer of this book for her time and effort of creating it. Finally, I do hope that students do benefit from this book.

Angelika Riyandari, Ph.D.

Dean of the Faculty of Language and Arts

## SYLLABUS

**Course description:** This course takes students to the definition of culture in general to understand about the characteristics of popular (pop) culture by making a contrast between high and low culture. Although American pop culture products with its myths, beliefs, icons, heroes and rituals become the focus of attention, the discussions brought from the book's readings is made lively by comparing it to the Indonesian pop culture. The culture of what students see and experience in the current modern society, such as what is seen in the film, television, publishing, advertising and news media industries are discussion samples for University students' pop culture class.

**Course objectives:** The students using this book are expected to

- ❖ know the definition and criteria of pop culture
- ❖ discuss the difference and similarities of American vs Indonesian pop culture, in order to
- ❖ produce a systematically academic paper on a certain pop culture product/ phenomena.

**Course format:**

- ❖ lecture, individual and group work, in-class discussions, student assignments and presentations.

**Course policies:**

- ❖ Students are required to attend at least 75% of in-class time in order to participate in the Mid and Final Tests.
- ❖ 15 minute lateness is the maximum time for attendance. Other than that a telephone call or text message on the D-day, followed by a written letter acknowledged by a parent/ guardian and Vice Dean of Academic Affairs is required to explain an absence.

**Course outline:**

NO	TOPIC
1	Introduction: Course description, module, syllabus, target, evaluation, classroom rules, culture, folks, mass/pop culture terminology – What is it? Why study it?

2	PopCul & satisfaction, reflection, mindsets
3	PopCul's house & misconceptions
4	Reading & writing about PopCul, Barbie
5	The Nature of Beauty
6	One Size does Not Fit All
	On Beauty, The Beauty Myth
7	MID TEST
8	In the shadow of an image
9	Masters of desire
10	Skin Deep
11	Comprehending Advertisements
12	Cracking the Code
13	Framing a Globalized Cultural Identity
14	The Transnational Success of Cosmopolitan Magazine
15	A Popular Culture Research on American Hegemony in Transnational Women Magazine Advertisements
16	FINAL TEST

**Course evaluations:**

1. Class participation/ task/ small test = 40%
2. Mid Test = 30%
3. Final Test project = 30%

**Primary Text:**

Dukut, Ekawati Marhaenny. (2018). *Reading and Writing about Popular Culture*. Semarang: Soegijapranata Catholic University.



Semarang, March 2018

Dr. Dra. Ekawati Marhaenny Dukut, M.Hum.

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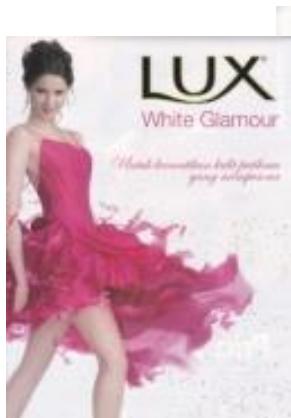
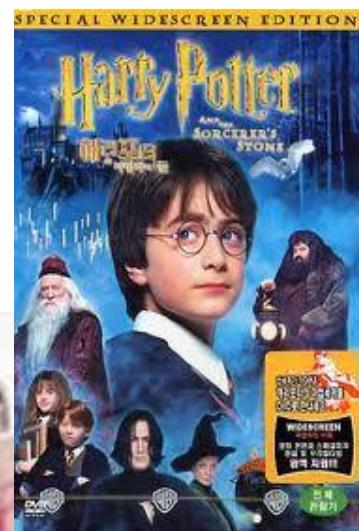
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# Reading and Writing about POPULAR CULTURE



## *Building the Statue of Liberty*

The French sculptor Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi designed the Statue of Liberty as a giant three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle. Over 300 thin sheets of copper, cast of it from a copper mine in Karmoy, Norway, fit together to form the statue's outer skin. Each copper sheet is 3/16 of an inch thick, or about the thickness of two coins.

The sheets were shaped in France using the *plaqué* or *clad* method, in which the metal is hammered onto a wooden core.

With large wooden and paper molds, the finished pieces were then shipped to the United States where they were assembled and supported.



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF POPULAR CULTURE<sup>1</sup>

Danesi notes a landmark in 1923 about a Broadway musical, *Running Wild*, which helped popularize a sexually vulgar and crude dance called the Charleston to the young at heart (2008, p. 1). It is an event, which showed the American society's yearning of a carefree public form of sexuality. This dance find its way roaring in the 1920s that it crystallized the terminology of *popular culture*. By the 1930s the popular (pop) culture spread through all corners of America and other parts of the world, challenging people's morality with the unstoppable aestheticity of the earthly yet expressive culture. What is popular culture about? Is it only about the sexual dance of the Roaring Twenties or does it include other artistic cultural products? In answer to this, let us firstly start with the working definitions of *culture*.

#### A. Definitions of Culture

Etymologically, the word "culture comes from the Latin word *cultura*", which means "to cultivate" (Douglas, 2001, par. 1). However, many other writers and thinkers have offered interesting expansions of this definition. The following are five anthropologists' definitions that highlight not only what culture is but also with what culture does.

First, culture is the "learned, socially acquired traditions and lifestyles of the members of a society, including their patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling and acting" (Harris, 1983, p. 5). Second, the word culture means the "knowledge, belief, art, custom" of a member of a society (Nye, 2006, p. 3) which includes the "values of a particular group" (Hall, 1998, p. 2).

<sup>1</sup> Discussion in this chapter is partly taken from the writer's dissertation "Transnationality of Popular Culture: A Study on American Women Magazine Advertisements". The citation is using an APA style.

Third, culture refers broadly to “forms through which people make sense of their lives, rather than more narrowly to the opera or art of museums” (Rosaldo, 1989, p. 26). Fourth, culture is also “the medium evolved by humans to survive because nothing is free from cultural influence”, as culture is the “keystone in civilization’s arch and is the medium through which all of life’s events must flow” (Hall, 1976, p. 14). Fifth, culture is “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbolic forms by means of which [people] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” (Taylor, 1991, p. 91).

Although from the definitions above, it can be understood that *culture* is an art that mediates communication among people, it is like an iceberg because it includes the tip of the iceberg which is equivalent to the behavior of the people that is the smallest part of culture (Weaver, 1999, p. 14). Most culture like most part of the iceberg is actually submerged underwater so it is often not seen. This is because people’s culture that is mostly submerged is related with internal culture. According to Weaver, the internal culture is usually located inside people’s head as it contains the way of thinking and perceiving, which includes the values and beliefs that are unconsciously learned by people, who are growing up in a particular culture (1999, p. 15). It is this internal culture, which determines most behavior, and when culture collides, it is this part that makes people become aware of the differences and similarities of whatever values makes a country different from each other. Henceforth, in studying a culture many things should be observed and learned. One of those observable one is how people would have different kinds of behavior towards different kinds of cultural artifacts.

McCarty makes another interesting point about culture. He says the kind of themes culture brings within a society is not only learned but also adaptive and shared (McCarty, 1994, pp. 23-25). Culture is learned because people are not usually born with culture; rather it is learned through “socialization” that is brought in by “parents, peers, the media, and the educational and religious institutions of the culture” (McCarty, 1994, p. 25). McCarty continues to explain that some culture may need to be explicitly taught such as the U.S.

“belief of freedom”, whereas others, such as the culture of “turning the other cheek” when someone has been wronged by another can be implicitly taught. Those from other countries entering the U.S. culture, however, usually learns distinctive values of a culture through a process called “acculturation”, which is a more active and conscious way of learning a culture than socialization (McCarty, 1994, p. 26). It is in this kind of condition that people can either resist or adopt the new culture. When a person’s subjective culture is involved it will usually include individual’s ideals or beliefs. One of the characteristics of culture is for it being adaptive in that it is developed as a response to whatever physical and social experiences a certain group of people must deal with, thereby making culture as a result of a human’s construction (McCarty, 1994, p. 24).

Another characteristic for culture is for it being shared because it is “not idiosyncratic to an individual”, thus there is something universal about what is shared among the people of a society (*ibid*). It is not to say, however, that individuals do not have their own tastes and traits. McCarty says that no one individual will have the same thinking on, for example, political issues. In the individual level, the thinking on a political issue would be totally different for each person. Yet, in the collective level, some but not all humans have something in common that is considered a group’s culture. An example of this is the language used by a particular group of society.

Virtually all of the definitions or illustrations above recognize that culture is learned. Culture is the learned behavior of members of a given social group. It is about the way people behave and act which usually carries and is led by the cultural background they come from. In other words, people would have, bring, and live with their cultures in society. Danesi offers yet another definition of culture as follows:

*Culture* is a system that include beliefs, rituals, performances, art forms, lifestyle patterns, symbols, language, clothing, music, dance, and any other mode of human expressive, intellectual

and communicative behavior that is associated with a community during a particular period of time. (2000, p. 82)

In other words, culture is WHAT WE ARE and WHAT WE DO. With regards to this definition, Baran illustrates that when talking to friends; when a parent talks to her child; when grandparents pass on recipes; when politicians campaign; or when media professionals produce content that people read, listen to, and watch, “meaning is being shared and culture is being constructed and maintained” (2007, p. 10).

An example of a constructed culture is how the U.S. accepts thinness as the culture of the popular mass at a particular time. Through advertisements from many kinds of media, constructed culture have influenced women to go on unhealthy diets and go through dangerous surgical procedures in search of a thinner body. There has been an astonishing report that 81% of 10-year-old American girls are afraid of being fat and 42% of them in grades 1 to 3 want to be thinner kids (Kirk, 2003, p. 9). It is not the case for mothers to say to their children that being thin is what is culturally accepted by the mass society. Being thin, is instead a popularly constructed culture that has been shaped globally through the many forms of pop culture’s advertising media, such as television and magazines

Culture, is understood therefore to serve some kind of purpose because culture helps people categorize and classify their experiences. It also helps define the world people live in. Yet, in doing so, culture can have a number of conflicting effects. Because a culture’s learned traditions and values can be seen as patterned, repetitive ways of thinking, feeling, and acting; culture can limit people’s options yet at the same time provides useful guidelines for behavior. For example, when making a conversation, a speaker would not consciously consider how far away or close she should stand in front of the listener. A person would just stand where she thinks she should stand, without any consideration of the minimum distance required by a society.

As another example, after a hearty meal with a friend’s family, a person may not need a mental self-debate of whether or not the culture she is in

would allow her to burp or not. If the person is dining in the U.S. or Indonesia, the sign of burping is considered impolite, however, in a Japanese culture it will be a sign of satisfaction. For a Japanese host, the sign of her guest burping will make her happy. Thus, it is within culture that a RIGHT and WRONG, APPROPRIATE and INAPPROPRIATE, GOOD and BAD, ATTRACTIVE and UNATTRACTIVE behavior is provided. In studying a culture many things should be observed and learned. Just like our family, friends, and school -- pop culture is part of your learning environment. It supplies our ready-made images, ideas, and patterns of behavior that we draw from, whether consciously or unconsciously, as we live your daily life. How is culture defined, in respect to high and folk culture?

## B. Elite and Folk Culture

Browne (2006) divides culture mainly into the minority and majority categories. The minority is the high culture or High-Cult, and the majority is the Low-Cult. He classifies culture into

High-Cult, Mid-Cult and Low-Cult, or High-Brow, Mid-Brow and Low-Brow [with] leaving out, apparently, the level that would perhaps be called Folk-Cult or Folk-Brow, though Folk culture is now taking on, even among the severest critics of popular culture, a high class and achievement unique unto itself. [But] Most of the discriminating observers agree, in fact, that there are perhaps actually four areas of culture: Elite, Popular, Mass and Folk, with the understanding that none is a discrete unity standing apart and unaffected by the others. (Browne, 2006, p. 15)

With regards to High-Cult, Mid-Cult and Low-Cult, Danesi (2008, p. 6) exemplifies the written works by James Joyce, Emily Dickinson, or the music by Bach and Mozart as classified under high culture. Whereas, anything written in newspapers, discussed in CNN or displayed in public museums are considered under the category of Mid-Cult. Whatever is published in the

tabloids and seen in *American Idol* talent show as well as Jerry Springer's comedy on television are then, classified under Low-Cult.

With the four areas of culture mentioned by Browne above, according to Harmon (2006, p. 63) popular culture is usually contrasted with the 18<sup>th</sup> century's elite culture or High Cult, and with its non-commercial counterpart, folk culture or Low Cult. In one way or another, folk culture can be understood as the traditional culture people have, so they can be created by amateurs. Harmon (2006, p. 63-64) explains further that the circulation of folk culture is usually orally, if it is not material. If it is a material thing, the passing down of creating the material is done orally. Next, the purpose of folk culture is to improve a living situation, whether it is through a song, a saying, a piece of quilt, or story. The participants of folk culture are mainly folk people who are unschooled, thereby they are generally unaware of the product they created within the traditions of their group, and the exchange of information is mainly through oral communication. Folk culture is the culture of people relatively living in isolated non-technological society such as the pygmies of Africa or the American Indian community of the Appalachian Mountains.

Elite culture is the culture for the elites or nobles. As informed above, some people also refer to elite culture as High Cult, because it used to be only the elites that can afford to consume cultures of superior value from the high class society. In comparison to folk culture, High Cult is the culture of those who experienced schooling. With regards to this, Petracca and Sorapure (1998, p. 2-3) define High Cult as those consisting of artifacts that are traditionally considered worthy of study in an academy, such as the classical music of Beethoven's or the fine art of the impressionists. The success of someone obtaining elite culture is "measured by critical or scholarly reception" (Harmon, 2006, p. 65). Because of education, the purpose of elite culture is usually to criticize and raise consciousness rather than entertain.

The creator of elite culture is not a group of people, but rather a professional individual. If she is in a group, then she would be a team leader

of the group. For this reason, then there are relatively a small number of people within this form of culture. What then is mass culture? How about popular culture? Are they related in some way or they are actually the same thing?

### C. Mass and Popular Culture

The term popular in pop culture may at first seem contradictory. According to Petracca and Sorapure (1998, p. 2) *popular* in its broadest sense, means ‘of the people’, while *culture* as informed above is often associated with something that is polished to its perfection and is in accordance to a superiority in the intellectual sense. If something is prepared for the High-Cult or upper class, elite, and educated people, we might then ask ourselves – how is it that culture is also something for the common or popular class?

If we think of culture in an anthropological sense, it is comparable to the “distinct practices, artifacts, institutions, customs, and values of a particular social group” (*ibid*). In this way, we can distinguish nowadays with that from the culture of our parents, grandparents or even up to our great-grandparents. For example, if the carefully crafted knives used in Asian cooking rely on a folk tradition, then the mixer, juicer, microwave becomes their pop counterpart.

Popular culture and mass culture is more or less the same, in that both are about a “widespread social reality” (Danesi, 2008, p. 2). Yet being a “parody” (Macdonald, 2006: 9) of High Cult, mass culture is “designed to seek out a mass audience, irrespective of class” (Caroll, 1998, p. 186), which is unlike popular culture that “aims mainly at the protean and capacious middle class” (Kammen, 1999, p. 15). If popular culture is for the middle class or Mid-Cult, the mass culture, however, is for the Low-Cult people. As a product of America’s industrial technology, the television was once expensive. However, when it was later mass produced in the 1950s, it went from being exclusively

expensive to becoming a popular and affordable necessity for the home (Kammen, 1999, p. 18).

An example of popular culture targeted for the middle class is the McDonald's fast-food chain restaurant, which during the mid-1950s of America featured cleanliness. According to Kammen (1999, p. 19) the McDonald's restaurant was not a "joint" and it neither had "jukeboxes nor vending machines" because they aim to please the "baby boom middle class rather than the urban workingman and woman". This changed however, in the 1970s and 1980s when the McDonald's began to add downtown locations for teenagers and busy single people who did not have time to cook and ate on the run (*ibid*). As seen in the following advertisement in Figure 2, popularity is sought by claiming that the McDonald's burger is a past time favorite for families whose time for being together is scarce.



Figure 1: 1950s McDonald's

(<http://galleryhip.com/1950s-mcdonalds.html>)



Figure 2: 1970s menu at McDonald's

(<http://www.theburgernerd.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/McDonalds-1970s-Family-Print-Ad.jpg>;  
<http://www.yaplakal.com/forum3/topic1032796.html>)



Figure 3: 2010s McDonald's prosperity burger

(<http://www.bigsale.com.my/promotions/19864/introducing-the-mcdonald-prosperity-burger-mcvalue-lunch.aspx>)

Like popular culture, mass culture is also the culture communicated through the print, likewise electronic media. In reaching its mass audience, like popular culture, it usually makes use of mass technologies that has industrial techniques to market cultural products to consumers for profit (Strinati, 1995, p. 10). Popular culture is also like mass culture in that the above definitions of mass culture can be applied to popular culture, too, because products of popular culture is enjoyed by the mass and information about a product's existence is usually promoted through mass media. Unlike mass culture, however, popular culture deals with a certain period of time, because it usually encompasses the most immediate and contemporary elements of our lives (Hall, 1998, p. 448; Petracca and Sorapure, 1998, p. 3).

The word “popular” actually means whatever is “well taken up by people” (Storey, 1998, p. 79). This corresponds with Nye’s definition of popular which connotes a “widely diffused, generally accepted, approved by the majority” (2006, p. 23) kind of culture. Therefore, being a popular culture entails that it is something enjoyed by the majority or a group of people. It could be something to which people would “listen, buy, read, consume, and seem to enjoy to the full” (Hall, 1998: 446) and “do in their dominant culture” (Hall, 1998, p. 449). Meanwhile, Hall defines popular culture as “those forms and activities which have their roots in the social and material conditions of particular classes; which have been embodied in popular traditions and practices”. This entails that the welcoming of the popular product in a society also depends on how similar it bridges with the traditional culture or practices. If it is too different, then the embracement may not be an easy one.

From those definitions above, it becomes relevant to also accept Nachbar and Lause's definition of popular culture, which is about "the products of human work and thought which are (or have been) accepted and approved by a large community or population" (1992, p. 14). They continue to define that "the artifacts and events composing popular culture include everything from clothes and cars to weddings, movie stars and bestselling get-rich quick books" (Nachbar and Lause, 1992, p. 20). This is similar to Lally's definition of popular culture, which is about "the leisure activities with which the working or middle classes of industrial society enjoy" (2006, p. 55). Therefore, popular culture may be something that the middle class people would do or enjoy using, or doing with a large number of people around the society when not working or going to religious or political meetings.

In reflection to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the popularity of the pop singer, Britney Spears and Justin Bieber who became young adults' icon in almost all over the world is proven by the number of young girls and boys that follow their clothes and hair style. In the Britney Spears example mentioned, one of the reasons why most American teenagers may have gladly welcome the pop star as their favorite pop icon is because she symbolizes the American beauty and dream of prosperity. This is why Britney Spears painted her hair blonde like the once beautiful and popular film star Marilyn Monroe, and tries hard to maintain her attractive youthfulness character by being slim and sporty to support her sexy and attractive image. Crossing nations' borders, the popular Canadian young male singer, Justin Bieber who was born in London, has attracted fans to love his choice of hair style, clothing style, youthfulness and cool dancing movements that fans all over the world compete in imitating his looks and actions. For Americans, these two pop stars are favorites since both reflects the American Dream of being at first a nobody, but later becoming a somebody overnight through their globalized media singing in a YouTube program.



Figure 4: Britney Spears

<http://www.tower.com/britney-spears-biography-tim-oshei-hardcover/wapi/113548340>

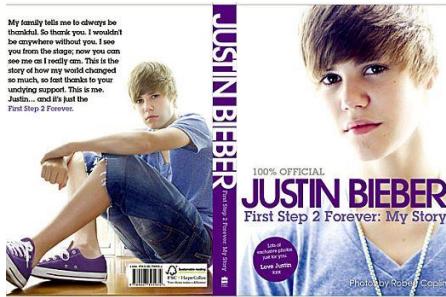


Figure 5: Justin Bieber

<http://www.biggerthanbeyonce.com/2010/10/justin-bieber-autobiography-on-beyonce-kimmel-on-biebs/>

Interestingly, pop culture is transitory in its nature. New images frequently appear on our TV screens. The Britney Spears and Justin Bieber example above may be popular during the 2000 up to the 2010 time frame, but afterwards they are replaced by new pop images like the sexy African-American Rihanna in 2015. We won't know how long will Rihanna's popularity last. Yet, we may say that in pop culture, unknown entertainers can become celebrities overnight, while others may just fade as quickly from the spotlight.

Several other terms also help establish a working definition of pop culture in comparison to mass culture. While mass culture is often regarded as juvenile or low, it has to be treated as an important component of pop culture by virtue of the large size of its audience.

#### D. Subculture and Counterculture

In opposition of pop and mass Culture, however, there are also the terms of subculture and counterculture. They suggest a desire to resist the pressures, implied or explicit with that of pop culture. According to Whetmore (1989) subcultures are the specific segments of society, which are outside the core of dominant culture. Minority groups such as the homosexual and teenager's groups in the United States are called subcultures, because they are distinct from the broader culture.



Figure 6: Hippies



Figure 7: Punks

([www.glogster.com/bailz123456789/60s-music-hippies-and-fashion/g-6lg7fs4thrdinmkkefq1ua0](http://www.glogster.com/bailz123456789/60s-music-hippies-and-fashion/g-6lg7fs4thrdinmkkefq1ua0); [blog.entercastle.com/post/89677221387/punk-startups-and-diy-culture](http://blog.entercastle.com/post/89677221387/punk-startups-and-diy-culture))

A counterculture, on the other hand, is a group or movement which defines itself specifically as opposing or subverting a dominant culture. As an example of counterculture are the hippies group of the 1960s and the punk-rockers of the 1980s with their spiky haircuts.

Although we may place ourselves in specific folk or high cultures, subcultures or countercultures, we are also aware of being immersed in the broader pop culture simply by living in a society. Notice that pop culture represents a common denominator, something that cuts across most economic, social, and educational barriers. If the notion of culture reflects a certain degree of social stratification and differentiation, then pop culture represents the elements of everyday life, and the artifacts or institutions shared by a society, and a body of common knowledge.

## E. Characteristics of Popular Culture

What is pop culture so far? Although it is difficult to define, some elements of a definition emerge from the aforementioned discussions, i.e. pop culture is the shared knowledge and practices of a specific group at a specific time. Because of its commonality, pop culture both reflects and influences the people's way of life; and... because it is linked to a specific time and place, pop culture is transitory, subject to change, and often an

initiator of change. Interestingly, if an icon of pop culture survives, it can often make the leap into high culture. For example, the drama plays of William Shakespeare or Wilkie Collins's 19<sup>th</sup> century horror stories were read as devouringly as Stephen King or J.K. Rowling's pop novels of today. What are the characteristics?

## **1. Pop Culture is about Satisfaction**

As informed above, pop culture remains as it is today because it is enjoyed by the masses. An important ingredient to be enjoyed is that it gives satisfaction to people. The kind of satisfaction talked about here is making sure that people can get what they want regardless of whether they need it or not. This is basically the reason why pop culture is giving us credit cards. It knows that people are commonly satisfied if they can spend their money to buy things easily.

According to Nachbar and Lause, pop culture knows that people do not want to sweat a lot in getting something (1992, p.1). Henceforth, pop culture pampers us by making us stay on our comfortable couch as long as possible by offering so many interesting things that sometimes we are overwhelmed and become occupied with the many TV channels. With the availability of Drive-in diners or restaurants, pop culture also makes us stay in our car and eat indulgently while driving.

With the ingenuity of the mobile phone, such as the blackberry, ipad or android, pop culture also let us stay home and reach out to someone without leaving our bed, or stay on our exercise cycle while listening to music and reading good book or chatting with loved ones through the phone, all done in one go. In offering satisfaction, pop culture has discovered "the secret of perpetual motion in the age of relativity" (Nachbar and Lause, 1992, p. 2). In other words, people are made to stay in just one place for everything to come round. People can go around the world to buy with a credit card, the things that satisfy them in thirty minutes by for example, just staying tuned to a favorite TV program.

## **2. Pop Culture is Easy to Obtain**

As inferred above, pop culture's products are so easy to obtain because it is available almost everywhere. With globalization and free trade, products originating from different parts of the world can be transnationalized to any countries of the world. Consider for a moment, the clothes that you are wearing. With mass production and the easy transfer to different countries through the media of advertisement, you may purchase a U.S.A. branded clothing in your nearby mall or favorite department store. Likewise, your favorite Indonesian dish can be found anywhere in restaurants all over the world, without needing to be in your own country. Just as water is necessary for a fish to survive, pop culture has made us dependent on the easy access of choices it offers to satisfy our needs.

## **3. Pop Culture is Eager to Please**

Pop culture is not merely easy to obtain for our satisfaction. Nachbar and Lause (1992: 2) explain that it is also eager to please. A soft, seductive voice narrating a promotional videotape for a famous shopping mall would most likely whisper to us the following: We know WHAT YOU WANT – WHAT YOU THINK and FEEL and BELIEVE... With its creativity, pop culture's factories can cleverly transform its products into images that have been kept deeply in our desires. Pop cultist know that you will spend your hard-earned money to buy their products because they have found a way to promise us a flawless reflection of an image that satisfies our hearts and minds. Producers of pop culture have gone to great lengths to mold their products to reflect our beliefs and values that it will be difficult to resist their call.

#### 4. Pop Culture is a Reflection of a Society

The study of pop culture as a reflective mirror of our wants usually focuses upon two aspects of the zeitgeist – the “transitory” and the “concrete” (Nachbar and Lause, 1992, p. 4). In more detail, Nachbar and Lause explains that the zeitgeist which characterizes a particular era is composed of transitory attitudes and perspectives which last only as long as the era itself and then fade from view – perhaps to return in later times, perhaps not. But an era's zeitgeist also expresses deep-seated, highly, significant “concrete” beliefs and values which transcend the specific time period and represent the fundamental character of the culture itself (*ibid*). Most elements of pop culture reflect both of these zeitgeist levels in important ways. For example, the American movie, *Fatal Attraction* demonstrates President Ronald Reagan's perspective on the emergence of independent, single career women, but also displays a firm belief for upholding the nuclear family and the sanctuary of the home which characterizes the American culture of the 1980s. In contrast, the once popular Indonesian TV series, *Si Doel Anak Sekolahan*, displays the belief that in Indonesia, the extended family plays a role in the decision makings of a comfortable home. We might as well say that the kinds of cinematography that are popular in Indonesia in the 2012-2014 time frame are Korean produced, but this is then changed into an Indian or Hindi cinematography in the year of 2015. Pop culture is thus, reflecting both change and stability. In other words: it tells us WHAT WE ARE NOW, WHAT WE HAVE BEEN IN THE PAST and where the two overlap to define WHAT WE MAY ALWAYS BE. Whatever is popular is thus, a reflection of a society.

Pop cultists argue that what is shown on MTV programs, video games, or game shows can serve as a kind of mirror in which we can see much about ourselves. Lipsitz (1990), for instance, suggests that perhaps the most important facts about people have always been encoded within the ordinary and the commonplace. Browne (1988), a noted scholar of

pop culture, puts pop culture as a very important segment of our society. Pop culture can reflect certain standards and commonly held beliefs about beauty, success, love, or justice. We also see reflected there important social contradictions and conflicts, such as the tension between races, genders, or generations, for example. Thus, using a Gender Studies perspective, for example, we can find out more about ourselves by turning into our own popular products and pastimes.

## 5. Pop Culture's Promotions are Manipulating

In order that products continually become popular, pop culture producers not only create a product which reflect and draw us to the mirror, so chances of being accepted by the dominant society is possible. However, pop culture deliberately comes chasing after us to instill values and beliefs that are likely to ensure their success of selling their products. Not only would the soft seductive voice of the mall whispers, "We know what you want" but it also whispers, "WE WANT YOU TO WANT IT" (Nachbar and Lause, 1992, p. 10). This is the assaulting aspect of pop culture that blurs the distinction between our needs and wants. Nachbar and Lause explains, while "needs" are literally biological – pop culture often convinces us that our "wants" are what we need when our needs have been satisfied (*ibid*). In other words, we are made to believe that we are made to feel to have these things in order to have a better life. Pop culture does not merely reflect our hearts and minds through its continuous promotions – pop culture is manipulating us to accept whatever it is offering to us.

The clearest example of the way pop culture tries to change our thinking into wanting it although actually we do not need it, is found in the multi-billion dollar industry of advertising. In her book *Are They Selling Her Lips? - Advertising and Identity*, Moog describes advertising's attack as follows:

Advertising shapes egos, influences our sense of self-worth. It reinforces our fears that we never have enough; we're never healthy enough, good-looking enough, or lively enough... It feeds our wishes, profits from our illnesses, plays on our insecurities, cautions us, exhorts us, reminds us of our past and future, and encourages us to behave in ways we have never behaved before ... The best we can do ... is to acknowledge and understand how it's influencing us... and then attempt to separate ourselves from the images, and, act objectively. (1990, pp. 222-223)

Advertising's hidden persuaders are a valuable example of how pop culture has the intention to sell us goods both literally and figuratively. This is why pop culture continually find ways to instruct and shape our beliefs to welcome the values offered through advertisements, which conditioned us to accept pop culture's products as a necessity.

## 6. Pop Culture's Themes

As informed above, pop culture reflects our society but at the same time it also changes our society. Pop culture is very tricky. We may be made to exercise control over what we believe in by choosing what we may also believe in rather than merely being forced to do whatever pop culture teaches us to do. But in reality, we are lured to do what pop culture wants us to do. In doing so, we do not realize that we are forced by pop culture because it has been exercised throughout our daily lives as something which we see as a necessity. Consequently, we are often permissive in accepting whatever pop culture offers to us.

The way pop culture lures us is by offering the following basic themes that usually revolve around the following: (1) availability of artifacts (objects and people) and events (activities surrounding the objects and people), (2) reflection of audience's beliefs and values, which audience beliefs and values, which arouses and frustrates us because

pop culture WANTS US TO WANT IT, (4) commerciality of pop culture's goal of making money, (5) imitation of itself as it hopes that what has worked before will work again, and (6) the making of surroundings that can become a fabric of our everyday lives (Nachbar and Lause, 1992: 10).

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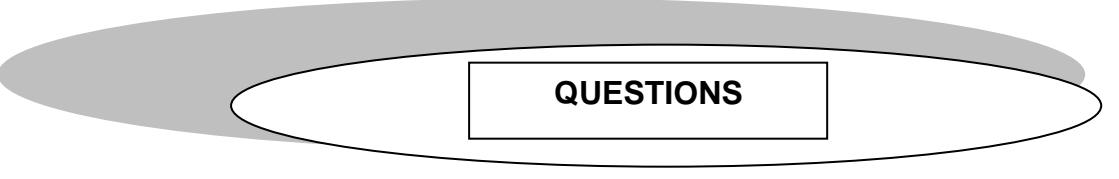
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### QUESTIONS

1. What is the definition of culture?
2. Why is thinness regarded as a globally constructed culture? Explain by giving evidence of what is happening in America and Indonesia.
3. Does culture develop or limit someone? Why?
4. Mention two examples each for Low Cult and High Cult?
5. What are the similarities and differences of Mass and Pop Culture?
6. Why does popular culture need to be related to dominant culture?
7. Rihanna is one of America's 2015's pop icon. Who is Indonesia's?
8. What does "pop culture knows that people do not want to sweat a lot?
9. What are the characteristics of pop culture?
10. How does pop culture manipulate people to need its products?

## CHAPTER II

### THE SIGNIFICANCE, THE HOUSE, AND THE MISCONCEPTIONS OF POPULAR CULTURE

#### A. The Significance of Studying Popular Culture

Pop culture is studied as it can become a valuable tool in aiding us to select cultural elements for research and at the same time, reminding us why and how to examine them. Students of pop culture often end their studies with conclusions which suggest that they have followed the advice of observing a lot just by watching rather than digging more deeply and ask WHY people choose one pop culture element over another. The study of pop culture is a complex QUEST FOR MEANING, not merely for facts or nostalgia or entertainment.

Although pop culture is increasingly accepted as a legitimate object for academic inquiry, educators still debate whether it should be studied or not. Some say that it would be more valuable to study the products of the High Cult's drama plays that are written by Williams Shakespeare rather than the pop culture's cinema works directed by Steven Spielberg or novels written by J.K. Rowling. Similarly, it can be said that it is considered more educated to study T.S. Eliot's poetry rather than studying the song lyrics sung and written by Eric Clapton.

The High Cult's arguments often center on the issue of *quality*, as they show that pop culture is transitory and often changes according to what becomes the trend of a society. This, thereby, gives pop culture a lacking and lasting value of being a strong artistic merit of a High Cult. Further, because pop appeals to a mass audience rather than to the educated elite, pop culture's products are argued to be of low quality and

are no better than average (Petracca and Sorapure, 1998: 4). Some critics have even remarked that pop culture is turning us into passive recipients of low-quality goods, thus, the satisfaction felt by obtaining pop culture has distracted us from higher pursuits. Although there are arguments that products with mass appeal are often qualitatively more inferior to those intended for an educated, elite audience; pop cultists remind us that the gap between the two is not always so wide. This is because the same basic activities of creation, refinement, and reception are involved in both pop and High Cult. It must be noted that the works of William Shakespeare that was once for the commoners or pop culture audience, have through time become a classic or High Cult due to its longevity as a mandatory subject in schools.

Another argument for studying pop culture focuses on the important influence it has on us. The media and other pop culture components are part of the storage of ideas and images that inform our daily activities. Sometimes they give a more compelling influence than family or friends, school or work. For example, when we play sports, we tend to mimic the gestures and movements of professional athletes; we also learn to dance from the videos of Michael Jackson; and we even name children after popular television characters. More importantly, we discover role models; we learn lessons about villainy and heroism, love and relationships, acceptable and unacceptable behavior; and we see interactions with people from other countries through pop culture. Even if pop culture is merely of low-quality amusement or a cheap means of escaping the demands of the ‘real’ world, it delivers important messages that we may be subjective towards it and later act on it, whether for better or for worse. Therefore, it is important to examine and analyze pop culture in order to assess or resist its influences.

## B. The House of Popular Culture

According to Nachbar and Lause (1992, p. 20) the artifacts and events composing pop culture are quite various because it includes

everything from clothes and cars to weddings, movie stars and bestselling novels. As disorganized as this may seem, however, there is a structure to pop culture which enables students to explore its artifacts and events in an orderly, productive manner. The structure is represented by the house of pop culture that has a basement and two floors, each comprised of two rooms (Nachbar and Lause, 1992, p. 22). In the "Whirlwind Tour of the House of Popular Culture", Nachbar and Lause (1992: 20-27) explains that the house of pop culture can be illustrated schematically as follows:

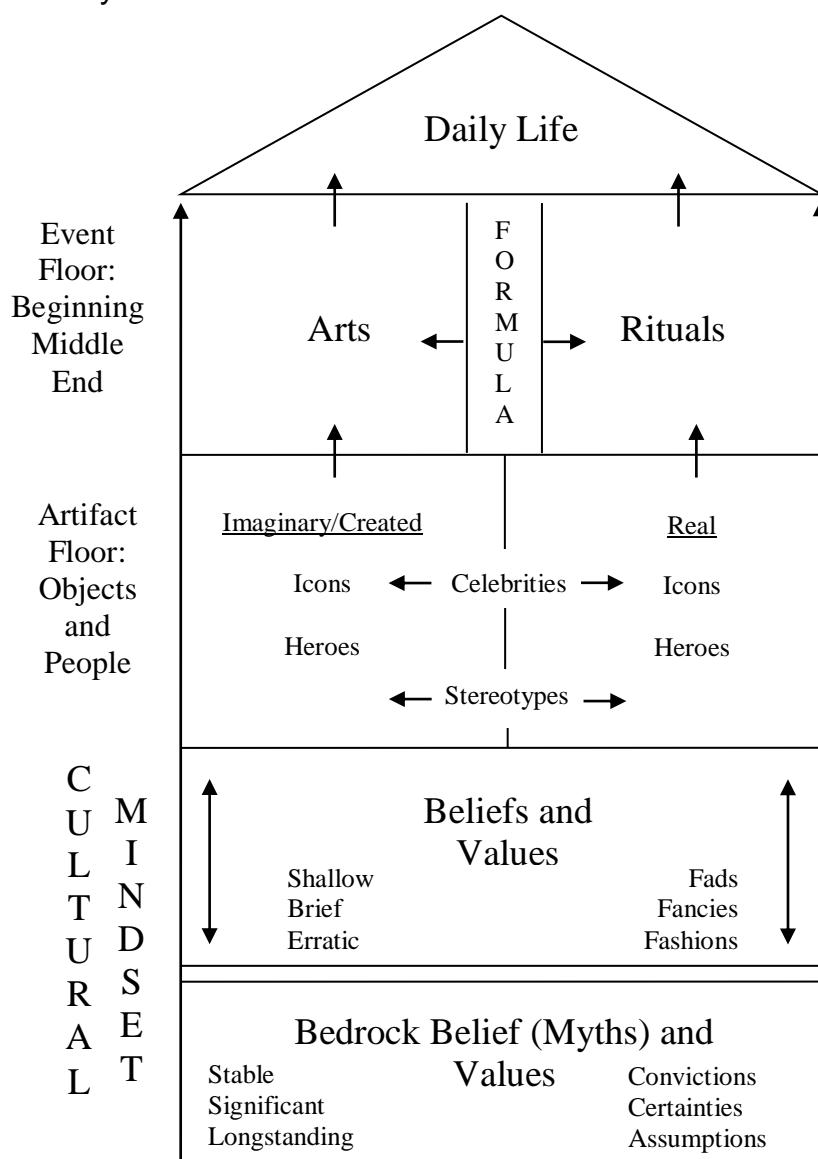
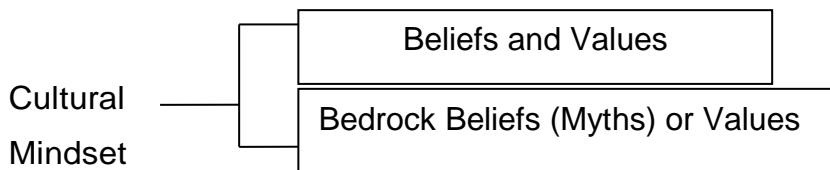


Figure 8: The House of Popular Culture  
(Nachbar and Lause, 1992, p. 21)

From the schemata, it can be seen that all of the rooms are related to each other in important ways. Each room draws from other rooms and, in turn, provides meaning to elements of other rooms in the house. The arrows between the rooms and levels reflect this important and yet complex relationship. Second, the visible aspects of our culture (artifacts and events) are expressions of the invisible parts (our cultural mindset). We do not study in one room alone, but we constantly return to the beliefs and values hidden from view in the basement to determine the meaning and significance of the contents of the rooms above the ground. The following is a more detailed description of each floor:

### 1. The Basement: Beliefs, Values, and Myth



The basement holds the beliefs and values forming the cultural mindset. Beliefs and values are in the basement because they are ideas which cannot be seen in and of themselves, because they exist in the cultural mind and in the minds of the individual members of the mass society. Beliefs and values closer to the surface are those which are most “transitory, shallow, and faddish”. For example, the popular belief among the hippie subculture of the 60s that “drugs are good for you” has been replaced today by a highly generalized “just say NO” belief.

Beliefs and values are located deep down in the solid rock of the house’s foundation, and can be termed as *bedrock beliefs and values* or *myths* because they are the most stable, longstanding and significant ones, which are characteristic of the broad components of the total population of a society. Bedrock beliefs in the American foundation include the belief in the *American Dream*, the belief in the

special mission of America as a *city on a hill* and the belief of the *nuclear family* as the most proper and rewarding mode of social existence.

Bedrock beliefs and values may be challenged or called into question at specific times. For example, the Great Depression of the 1930s offers a powerful challenge to the continued belief in the American Dream, but this belief is still carried over up to the present time. The fact that there is a constant exploration of the meaning and relationship to reality is important evidence of how significant the American Dream is to Americans.

Deciding what become the popular beliefs and values of a society is not simple because it is an ongoing discussion. Whether or not any specific belief or value is objectively true or false is an important question for each individual. But the question is irrelevant to the study of pop culture. As students of pop culture, you are concerned with determining what the dominant people believe to be true and how these beliefs are expressed and discussed. The American Dream of just about anyone to succeed in America through *hard work* and having some *good fortune* may or may not be true, but the question for students to answer is whether or not it is still POPULARLY ACCEPTED as true. If it still exist, then the next question is, what specific form does the believes assume at any given moment.

## 2. The First Floor: Artifacts (Objects and People)

<u>Real</u>	<u>Imagined</u>
icons	icons
heroes	heroes
Celebrities	
Stereotypes	

The first floor of the house contains pop artifacts, which consists of objects and people who are widely accepted or approved by the masses. The artifacts are visible expressions of the beliefs and values which underlies whatever becomes the basement of the house.

There are two types of popular artifacts: the popular objects (*icons*) and popular people (*heroes* or *celebrities*). Each of these categories is further subdivided into *real* and *imaginary* types depending on whether or not the hero or icon exists in the real world or only within the context of some fictional creation, which is often found in popular movies, television, and novels.

Celebrities cut across the real and the imaginary because even though they actually exist in three-dimensional form, by means these people are living and breathing like the rest of us, their *hyped-up* and *fabricated star persona* is often very distant from the real person that they are more properly considered as a type of fiction or unreal beings. Celebrities, like stereotypes, cut across the division between the imaginary and the real, but for a different reason. Celebrities are real people, who, like heroes, are famous. But celebrities, unlike heroes, are dependent for their fame on a manufactured image of who they are with regards to how their viewers want them to be like. They are famous not for what they have done but how the mass media defines them. This public image may be the real person or it may be a completely created personality. The American pop star singer, Michael Jackson, is one of America's celebrities who died from the cause of trying to fulfill the image that his society wants. If he never became a celebrity, he may not have transformed his physical features of his dark skin into a white one, his curly negro hairstyle into a wavy shoulder length one and his normal nose shape into a small, slimmer and more pointed one.

A brief sampling and a more extended example of each of the four categories that are formed by the rooms on the first floor below can help to clarify their meaning and relationship to each other:

*Real Icons* – cars, fast food restaurants, jeans, credit cards

*Imaginary Icons* – Guns in Western films, Michael Jackson's Black Suit, Harry Porter's wizard wand

*Real Heroes* – Martin Luther King, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln

*Imaginary Heroes* – Tarzan, Superman, Spiderman, Batman

### 3. Rituals

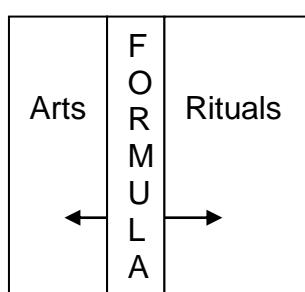
#### Rituals

Rituals are highly patterned symbolic events in which we all participate as a way of marking important passages. These passages may be in our individual lives or in a society as a whole, in which we celebrate our common beliefs and values together, in order to produce a socially acceptable, safe manner.

*Examples:* Family reunions, sporting events (Soccer game, Badminton tournament, Race Car event), weddings, funerals, holidays (Halloween *trick or treat* and Christmas *exchanging gifts*), etc.

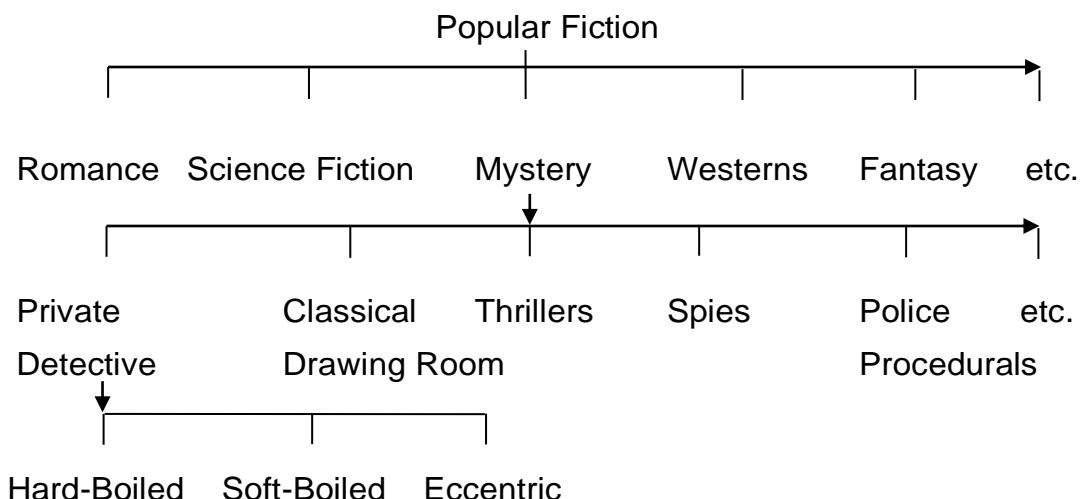
Rituals build upon the rooms by frequently integrating both heroes and icons into patterned events. In a soccer match, for example, participants often demonstrate their preferences by wearing mass produced colored T-shirts and celebrating their participation in the process itself by displaying their favorite team's stickers and signs.

### 4. Arts



The room of popular arts is one of the largest in the already expansive size of the house. This room is so crowded that critics of pop culture can almost be excused for often viewing it as the ONLY room in the house for confusing pop culture with *entertainment*. The arts are VAST and DIVERSE, however, they do not stand isolated from the other rooms and they derive their meaning and significance from the beliefs and values of the popular mindset that is situated in the basement.

*Examples:* Popular magazines, movies, television, recordings, comic books



The above breakdown illustrates an important tool of pop culture analysis. As various categories of each art is identified by grouping them together based upon shared characteristics which are known to both the popular artist and the audience, a formula tends to be produced from them. The *formulas* are the patterns which identify each type of fiction listed above. Story formulas are shared by author and audience in the way that romance novels and detective novels carry over specific plot, setting and character stereotypes.

In pop culture, certain objects, heroes, and events are discussed as though isolated from other pop culture elements. But it should be

realized that the basis of almost all visible pop culture is the popular beliefs and values and that each one of these beliefs and values is expressed. A brief examination of how one popular belief is reflected in various popular forms will illustrate this variety.

Imagine for a moment living in the American society where a work partner is selected for you by a committee. You are conditioned to wear the same uniform of clothing every day to show that you are part of the overall running of that society. You are then asked to perform some kind of office ritual before you could start and finally leave your work. For some Americans this may not be to their liking because Americans believe that every individual is promised their personal freedom. The bedrock belief that personal freedom is a natural right for everyone is developed in the religious and social foundations of colonial America and was expressed clearly in America's best known government documents, i.e. in the Declaration of Independence that declares liberty as an inalienable right, and in The Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution, which concerned with the freedoms of individual citizens to have the freedom of speech, religion, assembly and the press.

The bedrock belief that people have their rights to freedom have been captured by pop culture in creating credit cards like VISA and Mastercard, so an illusion of financial freedom is experienced by the owners. This illusion is encouraged by advertising campaigns of picturing happy and laughing people rushing from store to store or from country to country without any worries about their financial situation. With a credit card, many things are *freely bought* by just inserting the card into a machine and not having the need to directly pay in cash to the seller, but instead the payment can be made in certain periodic installments.

### C. Misconceptions about Popular Culture

In studying pop culture, there exist four major misconceptions that need to be studied and understood: the simplicity, triviality, the dealing

with the immediate, and the exclusionary. The following discussion is based on Nachbar and Lause's understandings of pop culture's misconceptions (1992, pp. 31-34):

### **1. Popular culture is simple**

While no one argues that most of pop culture's artifacts and events are as complex as many of those listed in the various canon of classical works, the study of pop culture is far more difficult and challenging than it may first appear. This can be seen in two ways:

- a) Lack of distance between student and subject.

Pop culture is *our* culture, so it is much more difficult to achieve an objective analysis when you are directly involved in and surrounded by the very thing you are trying to understand. The student of pop culture is on the playing field itself and is often too busy trying to *win a game* to survive as an individual and make proper choices. Thus, the student will be under pressure when she must at the same time analyze the action, sounds, and messages which surround her. Even when turning our attention to the pop culture of past times we still encounter this problem of achieving distance and perspective, because much of our evidence is often tied directly to the perceptions and experiences of those who were directly involved in the future of those we want to analyze. Pop culture is widely experienced but is little known. It is well-traveled, but it is also uncharted.

- b) Complex messages are carried by popular artifacts and events.

While the products of pop culture may be *simple*, by means they are imitative, predictable, and familiar – the meanings they carry are usually quite *complex*. This is because pop culture reflects and shapes the cultural mindsets of people who are doing a delicate dance, thus it is often impossible to see the details. The challenges

of analysis is often magnified by often fixing its messages in a complicated web designed to appeal to as many an audience as possible. Because of this, pop culture is actually as a complex and mysterious phenomena.

## 2. Popular culture is trivial

This misconception usually arises from the wrong understanding that pop culture consists of only *one* of the rooms in the house of pop culture. Much like the accusations of being simple, the pop culture misconception is based upon the confusion between the artifacts and events forming a popular lure, which are often simple and transitory. With the *study* of that culture, which is neither simple or having mindless entertainment can be countered in three ways:

- a) We do not study the artifacts and events of popular culture as ends in themselves but as a means of examining the cultural mindset which reflects and molds those artifacts and events.
- b) Popular culture includes far more than the popular arts; because it also includes icons, heroes, stereotypes, rituals, and, most importantly, the beliefs and values of the masses. While any single example of popular culture may or may not be trivial, the culture as a whole has both surround us and forms the great majority of our cultural experiences, which are far from being insignificant.
- c) Popular culture's seemingly trivial characteristics as imitative and repetitive actually enhance its performance of a very serious function. Because of its familiarity and accessibility, it provides people with both a comforting escape from the tiring routines and problems of daily life *and* forcing an order on whatever is chaotic in life, too. A popular ritual like eating out, for example, relieves us of preparing our own meals after a tiring day. It also enables us to escape that tiring day by entering a fun and happy environment,

where we are served quickly and without a lot of fuss. This would make our lives in a more orderly way.

### **3. Pop culture is immediate because it deals only with that which is popular right now**

We already know that we can study the popular culture of past times to understand the mindsets of people in earlier times and we know that we can compare past mindsets with the present in an important effort to define the most long lasting beliefs of a society's values which characterize its culture over time. But there is another misconception in connection with this idea. We not only study that which is *immediately* popular and that which has *been* popular, but also examine that which has never been *widely accepted* or approved of.

If a given cultural artifact or event is an *unsuccessful* example of a popular form, then we can learn a great deal about the cultural mindset by analyzing why this specific attempt failed to attract an audience. On television, for example, it is interesting to find out why the game show, *Family Feud* and *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* withheld their popularity up until this century, and how it has been transnationalized to other countries, such as Indonesia with its variations of games. Likewise, it is interesting to see what factors have made other game shows only become popular in such a short time.

### **4. Pop culture is exclusionary**

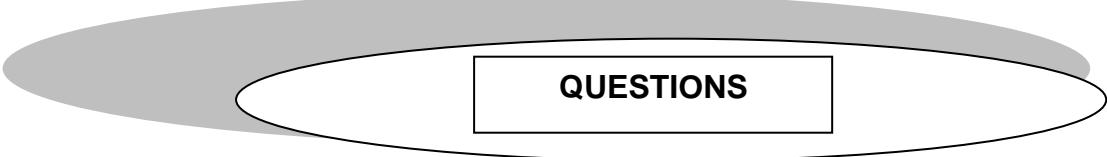
This misconception criticizes students of pop culture for examining popular artifacts and events *instead* of studying the canons of classical works. Much like the previous misconceptions, this one is also based upon a confusion of the artifacts and events which form the raw data of pop culture and the *study* of that data. Two points stemming from this important distinction is clarified as follows:

- a) Pop culture is not evaluative. The study of pop culture is not an attempt to argue that popular artifacts are as *good* as those of a *classical canon*, or that pop culture says little or nothing about the quality of the materials it examines; but it only *comments* upon their meaning and significance. *Romeo and Juliet* the movie is not as good as the original drama made by Wiliams Shakespeare – it is an entirely different kind of artifact and is examined *in* a completely different manner. An analysis of a canon looks for eternal truths, whereas a pop culture student seeks evidence to define a cultural mindset.
- b) Because canon works and popular works are examined in different ways and provide different answers and information, they both need to be studied. Pop culture does not seek a place in the canon but it seeks to be *beside* it.

The study of pop culture, therefore, will not tell us WHO we ought to be. On the other hand, it makes us WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT WHOM WE REALLY ARE, from both good and bad perspectives. Pop culture studies what MOST people choose to do MOST OF THE TIME in their everyday lives. It helps us get to know others and more importantly, it also helps us to know about ourselves.

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**QUESTIONS**

1. How valuable is pop culture for research?
2. Is studying pop culture simple? Why?
3. Is pop culture influential? Why?
4. In which house floor is pop culture's beliefs and values?
5. Mention a sample of an American Dream and explain how some people get it!
6. Are celebrities real or imaginary? Why?
7. How can attending a soccer game be referred to as a ritual in pop culture?
8. Where does the art form of Private Detective come from and branches out to?
9. How does pop culture manipulate people by making use of American freedom as bedrock of belief?
10. What are the four misconceptions of pop culture? Explain by giving examples!

## CHAPTER III

### READING AND WRITING ABOUT POPULAR CULTURE

**P**op culture is a study that analyzes advertising, television, music, journalism, sports, movies, leisure activities, and other such kinds of culture. The readings and assignments of pop culture in this handbook will encourage you to observe carefully, to question, and to construct and defend your own interpretations of some of the institutions and events, the beliefs and practices, the media and the messages of your everyday life. Thus, before beginning a serious study of pop culture works, let us look at the methods of reading and writing based on Petracca and Sorapure (1998) that will help us participate fully and critically in reaching the goals of the pop culture class' reading materials.

#### A. Active Reading

From reading previous chapters, it should be understood by now that there is an importance of paying attention to the commonly found culture that surrounds us in order to recognize its meanings and influences on our lives. In this chapter, you will learn some reading strategies that you can apply to the pop culture essays. The more you are exercising your interpretation to pop culture readings the more you will be encouraged to learn about the culture that immediately surrounds you.

Petracca and Sorapure (1998, p. 6) believe there is a crucial difference between passively receiving and actively reading. Passively reading information requires very little effort or interest, and it gives very little in terms of reward or stimulation. Active reading demands you to give more of your time, effort, and thought, to develop a better understanding of ideas presented in the article you are reading.

Although reading is generally a solitary activity, you should think of active reading as a discussion or dialogue with another person. When you listen carefully, you compare what the person tells you to what you already know; you question statements that you think as complicated, confusing, or incorrect; you identify ideas that are particularly interesting and important to you; and you respond with ideas of your own. As a result of your active participation in questioning the reading materials, you have new insights and opinions of your own. You may even be encouraged to find out more information from other sources in order to clarify the thoughts that you have about the reading.

When you read actively, whether printed texts or other products of pop culture, you will be using very similar strategies of questioning and responding, and speculating about what you are reading. You are no longer a disinterested bystander who is simply listening in. On the other hand, you become an active participant who is energetically engaged with the author's ideas.

## B. Strategies for Active Reading

There are a number of specific stages and strategies involved like suggested by Petracca and Sorapure (1998, p. 7) in active reading, which can be represented by the diagram below.

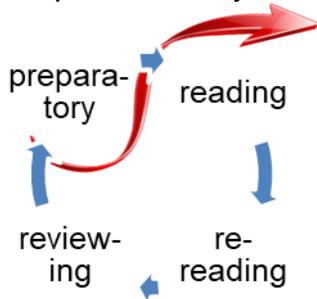


Figure 9: Active Reading Stage

The *preparatory stage* gives you a general sense of what the reading article will be about. In the *reading stage*, you begin the actual dialogue with the author by paying close attention to what he or she has written,

identifying key points, responding to certain ideas, and asking questions. Next is the *re-reading stage*, in which you go back and read through the essay again to get a clearer and firm understanding of the essay. Finally, in the *reviewing stage*, you take the time to draw conclusions, evaluate the author's position, and develop your own responses. At this stage you may want to go back to the essay and read certain sections even more carefully or to turn to other sources to help you formulate your response. In the actual practice of active reading, these four stages circle back on one another as well as spiral outward, prompting you to do further reading and exploration.

Active reading is quite different from passively receiving or consuming information. By reading actively, you will be able to clarify and develop your own ideas and your responses to those influencing you in your everyday life. You can become a more proficient and accomplished writer by increasing the range and precision of vocabulary found in your readings so that in return you can construct sentences and paragraphs, by creating different stylistic effects that have been exemplified from your readings.

### C. An Active Reading Case: Three Reading Selections on Barbie

This section deals with the three reading selections a poem and two essays about Barbie doll that can demonstrate the strategies of active reading and suggest the kind of reading you should be doing to any pop culture reading materials.

The readings on Barbie, is chosen because of her “longevity, popularity, and cultural significance” (Petracca & Sorapure, 1998, p. 7). Since created in 1959, the United States’ Barbie has been a worldwide celebrity. Many Barbie dolls have been sold and her variety of products, such as Barbie’s transportation such as her van, beach bus, Ferrari or Chevrolet. Other products range from her clothing, make-up kits, bag and jewelry accessories. All of these continually bring in hundreds of millions

of dollars every year for Mattel Inc., the owner and America's biggest toy company. In addition to her extensive accessories and her many friends (among them, her boyfriend, Ken, and her African American pal, Shani), Barbie has her own magazine and fan club and her own corps of press agents, advertising executives, and personal secretaries to answer her fan mail. Yves St. Laurent and Bill Blass have designed clothes especially for her; Tiffany created a sterling silver version of Barbie; and New York City's Fifth Avenue became "Barbie Boulevard" to mark her twenty-fifth birthday (Petracca & Sorapure, 1998, p. 8).

For a number of decades, not only girls but also boys have been playing with and learning from Barbie. She serves as an important icon in conveying America's cultural attitudes and values such as the achievement of the American Dream and freedom of expression. Petracca and Sorapure (*ibid*) mention that Barbie's critics argue that her improbable measurements in inches (36-18-33), her even more improbable hair, and her inexhaustible supply of clothes and accessories have influenced not only young girls but also grown women models to have the same kind of body measurements that some women's bodies have suffered from this. However, defenders argue that her influence has also been positive in influencing young girls and women to project on careers such as being a "corporate executive, airline pilot, medical doctor, animal rights activist, and even presidential candidate" (*ibid*). It is ironic, however, to learn although Barbie's wedding dress is one of her most popular outfits, she is never officially married to her boyfriend Ken (or G.I. Joe), and she remains a single, independent career woman, providing what some observers say, as an alternative to the view that women's roles are only as housewives and mothers. In sum, Barbie serves as a symbolic reference point for broader debates about femininity and masculinity, about beauty and success, and about consumerism and lifestyle in our culture. Barbie is a good example of the way elements of pop culture can be interpreted in order to reveal some fundamental aspects of our society.

Let's put to practice how to use the active reading stage for the reading materials on Barbie. While reading, you can think of your own experience as

a child playing with Barbie or with other dolls and toys that look like Barbie, and speculate about how they may have influenced you in the way you use your make up, wear your clothing, and shape your body.

### **1. Preparing to Read Stage:**

Let's turn now to the first selection, a poem about Barbie written by Hilary Tham. The headnote for the poem "Barbie's Shoes" (cited in Petracca & Sorapure, 1998, p. 9-10) is as follows:

*Our first selection is a poem by Hilary Tham. Tham was born in Kelang, Malaysia, and currently lives in Virginia with her husband and three daughters. She teaches creative writing in high schools and has published several books of poetry, including No Gods Today, Paper Boats, Bad Names for Women, and Tigerbone Wine.*

The headnote is helpful as you can get an idea of what to expect from the poem both by reading it and by recalling what you know about poetry in general. The headnote tells you that Hilary Tham is originally from Malaysia and now lives in the United States. You might conclude from this information that Tham brings in her Asian thoughts, in addition to features of beliefs and cultural values of the United States. The headnote also points out that Tham has three daughters and teaches high school students, thus, she brings in also some viewpoints that she may have received from seeing her children and students play or give opinions about the doll. Before you read the poem, then, try to speculate first on how being a mother and a teacher would influence Tham's thoughts about the Barbie doll.

### **2. Reading and Annotating Stage:**

In the reading stage, Petracca and Sorapure (1998, p. 9) also suggest that one of the most useful strategies you can use is your active

reading stage is *annotating* the text with a pencil or pen to mark key words and phrases in the text and to write questions and responses in the margins. Words that you need to look up in a dictionary and phrases that you find particularly interesting, forceful, important, questionable, or confusing ought to be underlined. The margin is also an opportunity for you to record your reactions, thoughts, questions, and ideas. By annotating in this way, you can have a file of what the author is saying and of what you are thinking about the reading materials.

Here is one student's annotation of Tham's poem ... but keep in mind that your annotation would probably identify different elements as particularly important.

### **Barbie's Shoes**

Hillary Tham

I'm down in the basement  
sorting Barbie's shoes.

sequin pumps, satin courts,  
western boots, reebok sneakers,  
glass slippers, ice-skates, thongs.  
All will fit dainty, forever arched  
feet of any one Barbie: Sweet Spring  
Glitter-Eyed. Peaches and Cream,  
a Brazilian, Russian, Swiss, Hong kong  
Hispanic or Mexican, Nigerian  
or Black Barbie. All are cast  
in the same mold, same rubbery,  
impossible embodiment of male fantasy  
with carefully measured  
doses of melanin to make  
a Caucasian Barbie,  
Polynesian Barbie  
African-American Barbie.

Everyone knows that she is the same  
Barbie and worthy of American Dream  
House, the Corvette, opera gloves, a  
hundred pairs of shoes to step into. If only  
the differently colored men and women we know  
could be like Barbie, always smiling, eyes  
wide with admiration, even when we yank  
off an arm with a hard-to-take-off dress,  
Barbie's shoes, so easily lost, mismatched,  
useless; they end up, like our prejudices,  
in the basement, forgotten as spiders  
sticking webs in our darkest corners,  
we are amazed we have them still.

*Why basement?*

 *Different shoes show  
Barbie many activities*

*Barbie's are different  
but also the same*

*Barbie -  
American Dream*

*Simile, Barbie's shoes  
are like our prejudices -  
forgotten, but still there  
in the basement like  
spider webs.*

### **3. Re-reading Stage:**

After you have done your second reading while annotating the poem, your next task is to fully understand it and formulate your own response to it. After doing the first reading, most students just close the book without realizing that there are still two other stages, i.e. re-reading and reviewing. These two other stages are important in discovering the significance of the reading material. First, in the re-reading stage, you should go back and read through the poem and the annotations in order to develop a good understanding of the writer's ideas. Then you begin to articulate those ideas in your own words. Here is an example of a response from "Barbie Shoes."

*I'm really drawn to the simile in the last few lines: that Barbie's shoes are "like our prejudices, / in the basement, forgotten as spiders / sticking webs in our darkest corners, / we are amazed we have them still." Tham is saying that Barbie's shoes are more than just tiny plastic footwear. They represent prejudices which we think we've thrown away but in fact still have in our "basements" (our subconscious thoughts?). And by comparing these prejudices to spiders' webs "in our darkest corners," perhaps Tham is suggesting that our prejudices still "catch" things; they still operate in our lives even if we've forgotten them or don't see them. (Petracca & Sorapure, 1998, p. 10)*

Here is another response sample:

*When I began reading this poem I wasn't quite sure what it was about. At first I thought that it was about the controversy about women's body image in american culture. But once it began talking about how Barbies are "all cast in the same mold" I started rethinking what the poem was really saying to me. It hit me when Tham began saying that*

*all Barbies are worthy of the American Dream. From then on I realized that this poem was about how in the world of Barbie, they are all completely equal. They are all made from the same ingredients, just like people. We're all skin, bones and organs. Nobody is better than another just because of skin color, race, religion or gender. Tham is telling the reader that she wishes that people in our culture could be like Barbie in the way that they are always smiling with admiration regardless of any different exterior feature. At the end of the poem, Tham goes on to say how our prejudices are like Barbie's shoes, ending up useless misplaced and forgotten. I took that as Tham saying that in our current society we are often surprised that prejudice still exists since it is pointless. Overall I thought that this was a very good portrayal of our current societal situation and how it should be.* ([sydneybergesen.wordpress.com/2013/09/06/hilary-thams-barbies-shoes](http://sydneybergesen.wordpress.com/2013/09/06/hilary-thams-barbies-shoes))

And another one is as follows:

*Hillary's poem in my opinion is a piece of art work. Her title made me think that I was about to read some type of uninteresting material; not that it's a bad subject that I thought it was going to be about, but just that it wasn't my interest. After reading just the first few lines made me see not just the title differently, but the author herself in a whole perspective. Barbie Shoe's in a way taught me a lesson that not just because the color of our skin is one color and the clothes we wear are not in the same style as each and just because our motherland is a whole different area of the world; doesn't mean we are all different. We are all, in fact, together as one in our own different cultures.* ([saturnsuperman.wordpress.com/hilary-thams-poem-barbie-shoes](http://saturnsuperman.wordpress.com/hilary-thams-poem-barbie-shoes))

The above response samples should make you want to re-read the poem again more carefully. Key ideas from the phrases on the list of Barbie's shoes; the list of different nationalities and ethnicities of Barbie dolls; the idea that all Barbies are in some way the same; and the suggestion that Barbie represents the American Dream should raise further questions about the poem. For instance, why does Tham make a point of mentioning the many different types of Barbies? In what ways are these differences only superficial and unrealistic? And what does Tham mean when she writes, "If only/ the differently colored men and women we know/ could be like Barbie, always smiling, even when we yank / off an arm ...."? You know that Tham is being ironic since we don't generally pull people's arms off. She is it as a comparison, by relating to ideas of prejudice. Do you agree?

#### **4. Reviewing Stage:**

After re-reading, questioning, and exploring the writer's ideas in detail, you should then summarize what you have learned. Here is a student's summary of her analysis of "Barbie's Shoes."

1. Tham suggests that Barbie's shoes are like prejudices (forgotten, seemingly lost, down in the basement, "useless" and "mis-matched"); why can't we just throw them out? why are they still in the basement?
2. Why does Barbie have so many shoes?! Perhaps Tham is implying that we have an equal number of seemingly insignificant prejudices, one for every occasion, even.
3. Tham points out that there are many different kinds of Barbie dolls (Caucasian, Polynesian, African American) but all are "worthy of the American Dream House." In this sense Barbies are all the same. So does Barbie influence us to overlook the real differences in women's lives? We're not dolls, after all, and although we're all worthy of success and accomplishment, we don't all get the same chances.

4. Tham describes Barbie as the "impossible embodiment of male fantasy." How is this observation related to the rest of the poem? Could she be saying that this fantasy is related to prejudice?

Such questions and tentative answers can help you start to formulate your own interpretation and complete a response to what you have read.

#### D. Reading Pop Cultural Criticism

In the previous discussion we use Hilary Tham's poem as our example because poetry can open up so much meaning even though only relatively few words have been used. The following piece by John Leo (cited in Petracca & Sorapure, 1998, pp. 12-14) is an example of pop culture's criticism. As you read, practice the strategies of (1) considering the headnote and what it suggests about Leo's perspective and purpose, then (2) underline important passages in the essay and write down your thoughts, responses, and questions in the margins.

### The Indignation of Barbie

JOHN LEO

John Leo's "The Indignation of Barbie" was first published in U.S. News & World Report in 1992. Leo, a conservative journalist and social commentator, writes about the controversy surrounding the talking Barbie doll produced by Mattel in the early 1990s. Among Talking Barbie's repertoire of phrases was "Math class is tough," viewed by some feminists and professional women as discouraging girls from pursuing the subject. Here, Leo imagines a dialogue with Barbie, in which the talking doll defends herself against charges that she's a "pre-feminist bimbo."

Barbie will probably survive, but the truth is, she's in a lot of trouble. It seems that the new Teen Talk Barbie, the first talking Barbie in 20 years, has shocked many feminists with a loose-lipped comment about girls and math. Each \$25 doll speaks four of 270 programmed one-liners. In one of those messages, Barbie says, "Math class is tough." This was a big error. She should have said, "Math is particularly easy if you're a girl, despite the heavy shackles of proven test bias and male patriarchal oppression."

Because of this lapse from correctness, the head of the American Association of University Women is severely peeved with Barbie, and you can no longer invite both of them to the same party. Other feminists and math teachers have weighed in with their own dudgeon.

Since this is Barbie's darkest hour, I placed a phone call out to Mattel, Inc. in California to see how the famous long-haired, long-legged forerunner of Ivana Trump was holding up. To my astonishment, they put me right through to Barbie herself.

"Barbie, it's me," I said. As the father of three girls, I have shopped for 35 to 40 Barbies over the years, including doctor Barbie, ballerina Barbie, television news reporter Barbie, African-American Barbie, animal-rights Barbie, and Barbie's shower, which takes two days to construct and makes the average father feel like a bumbling voyeur. So I figured that Barbie would know me.

Barbie spoke: "Do you want to go for a pizza? Let's go to the mall. Do you have a crush on anyone? Teaching kids is great. Computers make homework fun!"

In a flash I realized that Barbie was stonewalling. These were not spontaneous comments at all. They were just the prerecorded messages that she was forced to say, probably under pressure from those heartless, controlling patriarchs at Mattel.

### Subtle rebuttal

At the same time, I began to appreciate Barbie's characteristic subtlety; by reminding me that she was recommending the educational use of computers to young girls, she was, in effect, stoutly rebutting the charge of antifeminist backlash among talking toys. I had to admit/ it was pretty effective.

So I pleaded with her to speak honestly and clear her name. I heard a telltale rustle of satin, and then she spoke. "You're the one who took three days to put my shower together. That was ugly."

"Two days," I said, gently correcting the world-famous plastic figurine.

I asked her about the harsh words of Sharon Schuster, the awfully upset head of the AAUW. Schuster had said, "The message is a negative one for girls, telling them they can't do well in math, and that perpetuates a stereotype."

"That's a crock," Barbie replied. "Just because a course is tough or challenging doesn't mean my girls can't do it. Weren't your daughters a little apprehensive about math?" I admitted that they were. "Well, how did they do?" "Top of the class," I replied brightly.

"Then tell Sharon Schuster to stop arguing with dolls and go get a life." Her remark was an amazement. This was not roller-skating Barbie or perfume-wearing Barbie. It was the real thing: in-your-face tough-talking Barbie.

"The first time I open my mouth after 20 years, and what happens? I get squelched by a bunch of women." At this point, I mentioned that my friend M. G. Lord, the syndicated columnist who is doing a book on Barbie, is firmly on her side. M. G. told me: "Math class is tough, but it doesn't mean you have to drop out and

go to cosmetology school. These people are projecting a lot of fears onto Barbie."

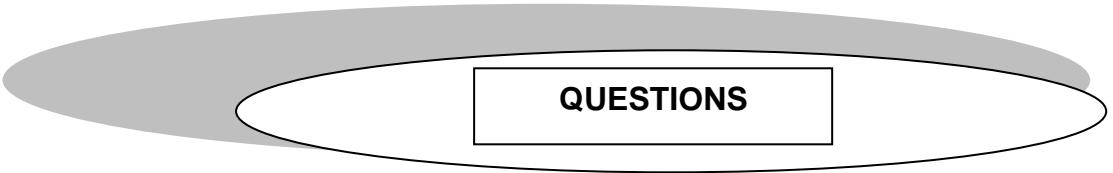
Barbie was grateful. "Thank M. G. and tell her I look forward to her biography of me. And tell her that if she ever fails in life, she can always become head of the AAUW." That remark may have been a trifle sharp, I said. "Well," said Barbie, "I'm just tired of taking all this guff from women's groups. They're scapegoating the wrong girl. I'll match feminist credentials with any of them. I worked my way up from candy striper to doctor. I was a stewardess in the '60s, and now I'm a pilot. Ken is one of my flight attendants. You can buy me as Olympic athlete, astronaut and executive."

Barbie was on a roll now. I was writing furiously to keep up. "This summer they put out a presidential candidate Barbie, and two days later, Ross Perot withdrew. Figure it out," she said. "As far back as 1984, my ad slogan was, "We girls can do anything. I've done more than any other doll to turn girls into achievers, and still they treat me as a pre-feminist bimbo. What's wrong with the women's movement?"

I knew enough not to touch that one. Besides, it's a very short column. But I was struck by her comment that Ken was now employed as a flight attendant. "Didn't he used to be a corporate executive?" I asked. "We're not voting for Bush again," she replied bitterly.

Then I heard a muffled side comment: ".Ken! Be careful with those dishes." I said I felt bad about Ken's comedown, but Barbie brought me back to reality: "Remember," she said, "he's only an accessory". This was tough to take, but the issue was settled. Barbie is indeed a feminist. Over to you, Sharon Schuster.

As you first read Leo's essay, his technique of personifying the doll as an "in-your-face tough-talking Barbie" is most striking and allows him to humorously present a talking Barbie who seemingly speaks up for herself. In re-reading you can see even more clearly Leo's purpose: he uses Barbie's "voice" to offer his own defense of her influence and significance. Viewing from a gender perspective he is also regarded as making fun of feminists by "projecting a lot of fears onto Barbie," since she herself derisively asks, "What's wrong with the women's movement?" When Leo has Barbie "say" that she's "done more than any other doll to turn girls into achievers," it shows that Leo himself agrees and feels that Barbie's critics should lighten up.



### QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree that Barbie has "done more than any other doll to turn girls into achievers" (paragraph 14)?
2. Do you think Leo's use of humor contributes to the effect of his essay?
3. According to Leo, what is the relationship between Barbie and Ken? Do you agree with Leo's ideas?
4. If you could give speech to Barbie, what would you have her say?

## E. Reading Academic Analyses

In addition to pop cultural criticism, there is also an essay on Barbie as a pop cultural phenomena, which is written not for a general audience, but by academics primarily for other academics. Generally published in academic journals or in collections from scholarly presses, the essay present the results of extensive research or provide a very close, detailed, and original analysis

of the subject at hand. You may find them more difficult than the pieces of pop cultural criticism, but in many ways they are closer to the kind of writing that will be expected of you in many of you who will be writing a thesis for your university. Note that, even though the tone is *objective*, academic cultural analysis generally reflects a particular interpretive framework, which may be ideological (e.g., feminist or Marxist) or methodological (e.g., semiotic, structuralist, or quantitative) or some combination of the two.

The following article from Marilyn Ferris Motz, which uses MLA in citing, is an example of academic cultural analysis, written from a *feminist-historical* perspective. As you read the headnote and the article itself, apply the four active reading strategies. Start by familiarizing yourself with Motz's view and with the topic as it is presented in the headnote; then read the article carefully and make your own annotations in the text and in the margins.

### "Seen Through Rose-Tinted Glasses": The Barbie Doll in American Society

MARILYN FERRIS MOTZ

*Originally published in a longer form in The Popular Culture Reader, Marilyn Motz's "Seen Through Rose-Tinted Glasses"; The Barbie Doll in American Society," takes its title from a 1983 Barbie sticker album marketed by Mattel. "If you stay close to your friend Barbie, life will always be seen through rose-tinted glasses." In her essay, however, Motz suggests that Barbie has other messages for us and that the doll's influence is more problematic, especially for children. Pointing out that several generations of girls have learned cultural values and norms from playing with Barbie, Motz focuses on the fact that, although Barbie has changed through the years to keep up with changes in the "baby boom" generation, the doll and her accessories still convey an outdated image of women's circumstances and interests.*



A 1983 Barbie sticker album copyrighted by Mattel describes Barbie as follows:

As beautiful as any model, she is also an excellent sportswoman. In fact, Barbie is seen as a typical lady of the twentieth century, who knows how to appreciate beautiful things and, at the same time, live life to the fullest. To most girls, she appears as the ideal elder sister who manages to do all those wonderful things that they can only dream of. With her fashionable wardrobe and constant journeys to exciting places all over the world, the adventures of Barbie offer a glimpse of what they might achieve one day. If Barbie has a message at all for us, it is to ignore the gloomy outlook of others and concentrate on all those carefree days of youth. Whatever lies in store will come sooner or later. If you stay close to your friend Barbie, life will always be seen through rose-tinted glasses.

Most owners of Barbie dolls are girls between the ages of three and eleven years of age. A Mattel survey shows that by the late 1960s, the median age for Barbie doll play had dropped from age ten to age six (Rakstis 30). Younger children find it difficult to manipulate the relatively small dolls, although Mattel created "My First Barbie," that ostensibly was easier for young children to handle and dress. Although some boys admit to playing with Ken, or even Barbie, Barbie doll play seems to be confined largely to girls.

Like all small figures and models, Barbie, at 11½ inches high, has the appeal of the miniature. Most people are fascinated with objects re-created on a smaller scale, whether they are model airplanes, electric trains, dollhouse furnishings, or doll clothes. Miniatures give us a sense of control over our environment, a factor that is particularly important for children, to whom the real world is several sizes too large in playing with a Barbie doll, a girl can control the action, can be omnipotent in a miniature world of her own creation.

When a girl plays with a baby doll, she becomes in her fantasy the doll's mother. She talks directly to the doll, entering into the playas an actor in her own right. When playing with a Barbie doll on the other hand, the girl usually "becomes" Barbie. She manipulates Barbie, Ken and the other dolls, speaking for them and moving them around a miniature environment in which she herself cannot participate. Through the Barbie doll, then, a pre-adolescent can engage in role-playing activities. She can imitate adult female behavior, dress and speech and can participate vicariously in dating and other social activities, thus allying some of her anxieties by practicing the way she will act in various situations. In consultation with the friends with whom she plays a girl can establish the limits of acceptable behavior for a young woman and explore the possibilities and consequences of exceeding those limits.

The girl playing with a Barbie doll can envision herself with a mature female body. "Growing-Up Skipper," first produced in 1975, grew taller and developed small breasts when her arms were rotated, focusing attention on the bodily changes associated with puberty. Of course, until the end of puberty, girls do not know the ultimate size and shape their bodies will assume, factors they realize will affect the way others will view and treat them. Perhaps Barbie dolls assuage girls' curiosity over the

appearance of the adult female body, of which many have only limited knowledge, and allay anxiety over their own impending bodily development.

Through Barbie's interaction with Ken, girls also can explore their anxieties about future relationships with men. Even the least attractive and least popular girl can achieve, by "becoming" Barbie, instant popularity in a fantasy world. No matter how clumsy or impoverished she is in real life, she can ride a horse or lounge by the side of the pool in a world undisturbed by the presence of parents or other authority figures. The creator of the Barbie doll, Ruth Handler, claims that "these dolls become an extension of the girls. Through the doll each child dreams of what she would like to be" (Zinsser, "Barbie" 73). If Barbie does enable a girl to dream "of what she would like to be," then what dreams and goals does the doll encourage? With this question, some of the negative aspects of the Barbie emerge.

The clothes and the other objects in Barbie's world lead the girl playing with Barbie to stress Barbie's leisure activities and emphasize the importance of physical appearance. The shape of the doll, its clothes and the focus on dating activities present sexual attractiveness as a key to popularity and, therefore, to happiness. Finally, Barbie is a consumer. She demands product after product, and the packaging and advertising imply that Barbie, as well as her owner, can be made happy if only she wears the right clothes and owns the right products. Barbie conveys the message that, as the saying goes, a woman can never bee too rich or too thin. The Barbie doll did not create these attitudes. Nor will the doll insidiously instill these values in girls whose total upbringing emphasizes other factors. An individual girl can of course create her own doll any sort of behavior and activities she chooses. Still the products available for the doll tend to direct play along certain lines. Barbie

represents an image, and a rather unflattering one, of American women. It is the extent to which this image fits our existing cultural expectations that explains the popularity of the Barbie doll.

As an icon, Barbie not only reflects traditional, outdated roles for women; she and Ken also represent, in exaggerated form, characteristics of American society as a whole. Through playing with these dolls, children learn to act out in miniature the way they see adults behave in real life and in the media. The dolls themselves and the accessories provided for them direct this play, teaching children to consume and conform, to seek fun and popularity above all else.

Psychologist Thorstein Veblen wrote in 1899 that America had become a nation of "conspicuous consumers". We buy objects, he wrote, not because we need them but because we want others to know we can afford them. We want our consumption to be conspicuous or obvious to others. The more useless "the object, the more it reflects the excess wealth the owner can afford to waste. In the days before designer labels, Veblen wrote that changing fashions represent an opportunity for the affluent to show that they can afford to waste money by disposing of usable clothing and replacing it with new, faddish styles that will in turn be discarded after a few years or even months of wear. (Veblen 1953, 60-131)

Sociologist David Riesman wrote in 1950 that Americans have become consumers whose social status is determined not only by what they can afford to buy but also to the degree to which their taste in objects of consumption conforms to that of their peers. Taste, in other words, becomes a matter of assessing the popularity of an item with others rather than judging on the basis of one's personal preference. Children according to Riesman,

undergo a process of "taste socialization", of learning to determine "with skill and sensitivity the probable taste of the others" and then to adopt these tastes as their own. Riesman writes that "today the future occupation of all moppets is to be skilled consumers" (94, 96, 101). This, skill lies not in selecting durable or useful products but in selecting popular, socially acceptable products that indicate the owner's conformity to standards of taste and knowledge of current fashion.

The Barbie doll teaches a child to conform to fashion in her consumption. She learns that each activity requires appropriate attire and that outfit that may at first glance appear to be interchangeable are slightly different from one another. In the real world, what seems to be a vast array of merchandise actually is a large collection of similar products. The consumer must make marginal distinctions between nearly identical products, many of which have different status values. The child playing with a Barbie doll learns to detect these nuances. Barbie's clothes for instance, come in three lines: a budget line, a medium-priced line, and a designer line. Consumption itself becomes an activity to be practiced. From 1959 to 1964, Mattel produced a "Suburban Shopper" outfit. In 1976 the "Fashion Plaza" appeared on the market. This store consisted of four departments connected by a moving escalator. As mass-produced clothing made fashion accessible to all classes of Americans, the Barbie doll was one of the means by which girls learned to make the subtle fashion distinctions that would guarantee the proper personal appearances.

Barbie must also keep pace with all the newest fashion and leisure trends. Barbie's pony tail of 1959 gave way to a Jackie Kennedy style "Bubble-cut" in the early 1960s and to long straight hair in the 1970s. "Ken-AGo-Go" of 1960s had a Beatle wig, guitar and microphone, while the "Now Look Ken" of the 1970s had shoulder-length hair and wore a leisure suit (Leavy 102). In the early 1970s Ken grew a

detachable beard. In 1971 Mattel provided Barbie and Ken with a motorized stage on which to dance in their fringed clothes, while Barbie's athletic activities, limited to skiing, skating, fishing, skydiving and tennis in the 1960s, expanded to include backpacking, jogging, bicycling, gymnastics and sailing in the 1970s. On the shelves in the early 1980s were Western outfits, designer jeans, and Rocker Barbie dressed in neon colors and playing an electric guitar. In 1991 rollerblade Barbie was introduced.

Barbie clearly is, and always has been, a conspicuous consumer. Aside from her lavish wardrobe, Barbie has several houses complete with furnishings, a Ferrari and a '57 Chevy. She has at various times owned a yacht and several other boats as well as a painted van called the "Beach Bus." Through Barbie, families who cannot afford such luxury items in real life can compete in miniature. In her early years, Barbie owned a genuine mink coat. In the ultimate display of uselessness, Barbie's dog once owned a corduroy velvet jacket, net tutu, hat, sunglasses and earmuffs. Barbie's creators deny that Barbie's life is devoted to consumption. "These shouldn't be thought of as possessions," according to Ruth Handler. They are props that enable a child to get into play situations" (Zinsser 1964, 73). Whether possessions or props, however, the objects furnished with the Barbie doll help create play situations, and those situations focus on consumption and leisure.

A perusal of the shelves of Barbie paraphernalia in the Midwest Toys "R" Us store reveals not a single item of clothing suitable for an executive office, Mattel did produce a doctor's outfit (1973) and astronaut suit (1965 and 1986) for Barbie, but the clothes failed to sell. According to Mattel's marketing manager, "We only kept the doctor's uniform in the line as long as we did because public relations begged us to give them something they could point to as progress" in avoiding stereotyped roles for women (Leavy 102). In the 1960s Mattel produced "all elegant accessories" for the patio including a

telephone, television, radio, fashion magazines and a photograph of Barbie and Ken (Zinsser 72). The "Busy Barbie," created in 1972, had hands that could grasp objects and came equipped with a telephone, television, record player, "soda set" with two glasses and a travel case. Apparently Barbie kept busy only with leisure activities; she seems unable to grasp a book or a pen. When Barbie went to college in the 1970s, her "campus" consisted only of a dormitory room, soda shop (with phone booth), football stadium and drive-in movie! (Zinsser 72). In the 1980s, Barbie traveled in her camper, rode her horse, played with her dog and cat, swam in her pool and lounged in her bubble bath (both with real water).

The Barbie doll of the 1980s presents a curiously mixed message. The astronaut Barbie wore a pink space suit with puffed sleeves. The executive Barbie wore a hot pink suit and a broad-brimmed straw hat, and she carried a pink briefcase in which to keep her gold credit card. Lest girls think Barbie is all work and no play, the jacket could be removed, the pink and white spectator pumps replaced with high-heeled sandals, and the skirt reversed to form a spangled and frilly evening dress. Barbie may try "her hand at high-status occupations, but her appearance does not suggest competence and professionalism. In a story in *Barbie* magazine (Summer 1985) Barbie is a journalist reporting on lost treasure in the Yucatan. She spends her time "catching some rays" and listening to music, however, while her dog discovers the lost treasure. Barbie is appropriately rewarded with a guest spot on a television talk show! Although Barbie is shown in a professional occupation and even has her own computer, her success is attributed to good luck rather than her own (nonexistent) efforts. She reaps the rewards of success without having had to work for it; indeed, it is her passivity and pleasure-seeking (could we even say laziness) that allows her dog to discover the gold. Even at work, Barbie leads a life of leisure.

Veblen wrote that America, unlike Europe, lacked a hereditary aristocracy of families that were able to live on the interest produced by inherited wealth. In America, Veblen wrote, even the wealthiest men were self-made capitalists who earned their own livings. Since these men were too busy to enjoy leisure and spend money themselves, they delegated these tasks to their wives and daughters. By supporting a wife and daughters who earned no money but spent lavishly, a man could prove his financial success to his neighbors. Therefore, according to Veblen, affluent women were forced into the role of consumers, establishing the social status of the family by the clothes and other items they bought and the leisure activities in which they engaged (Veblen 44-131).

Fashions of the time, such as long skirts, immobilized women, making it difficult for them to perform physical labor, while ideals of beauty that included soft pale hands and faces precluded manual work or outdoor activities for upper-class women. To confer status, Veblen writes, clothing "should not only be expensive, but it should also make plain to all observers that the wearer is not engaged in any kind of productive employment." According to Veblen, "the dress of women goes even farther than that of men in the way of demonstrating the wearer's abstinence from productive labor." The high heel, he notes, "makes any even the simplest and most necessary manual work extremely difficult," and thus is a constant reminder that the woman is "the economic dependant of the man - that, perhaps in a highly idealized sense, she still is the man's chattel" (Veblen 120-121, 129). Despite changes in the lives and expectations of real women, Barbie remains essentially the woman described by Veblen in the 1890s, excluded from the world of work with its attendant sense of achievement, forced to live a life based on leisure activities, personal appearance, the accumulation of possessions and the search for popularity. While large numbers of women reject this role, Barbie embraces it. The Barbie doll serves as

an icon that symbolically conveys to children and adults the measures of success in modern America: wealth, beauty, popularity and leisure.

### Suggestions for Further Reading

Leavy, J. (1979, September). Is There a Barbie Doll in Your Past? In *Ms.*

Riesman, D., Glazer, N. & Denney, R. (1950). *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor.

Rakstis, T. (1970, December). Debate in the Doll House. In *Today's Health*.

Thorstein, V. (1953). *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. 1899. New York: Mentor.

Zinsser, W. K. (1964, December 12). Barbie Is a Million Dollar Doll. In *Saturday Evening Post*, pp. 72-73.

As you can see from Motz's essay, academic cultural analysis can present you with much information and many ideas to digest. A useful re-reading activity is to go through the text and highlight its main points by writing a one- or two-page summary of it. Then in the reviewing stage, you can use your summary to draw your own conclusions and formulate your own responses to the writer's ideas. To do so with Motz's essay, you might use the following questions as starting points:

1. In what ways do you think fashion dolls like Barbie provide a different play experience for children than "baby dolls"? Do you think one type of doll is "healthier" or more appropriate than the other?

2. To what extent do you think Thorstein Veblen's comments on status and consumerism in American society (paragraph 9) still apply today? Do you agree with Motz that Barbie contributes to the promotion of "conspicuous consumption"?
3. If Motz is right that Barbie represents an outdated and potentially detrimental image of women's lives, why do you think the doll continues to sell more and more successfully every year?
4. To what extent do you think that the values represented by Barbie "wealth, beauty, popularity and leisure" (18) are still central to success in America?

Ultimately, your goal as a reader in this pop culture course will most likely be to prepare yourself to complete specific writing assignments. In the next section, Petracca and Sorapure (1998: 21-32) is a sample of the process a writing student went through in composing an essay requested in the following assignment: What do you see as the significance of the Barbie doll in contemporary American culture? How are your ideas related to those of Tham, Leo, and Motz in the selections presented here?

## F. The Writing Process

Frequently, when an instructor gives a writing assignment – for example, "Write an essay exploring the significance of the Barbie doll in contemporary American culture" – students experience a mini panic because producing a focused, coherent, informative, and logically developed paper seems a monumental task. Some students may be overwhelmed by the many ideas swirling around in their heads, worrying they will not be able to put them into coherent order. Others may think they will not have enough to say about a given topic and complain, "How long does the paper have to be? How can I come up with four pages!"

However, there is really no reason to panic. Just as there are definable activities in the active process of reading, so the writing process can be broken down into four discrete stages: prewriting, drafting, distancing, and revising. Taking it a step at a time can make writing an essay a manageable and productive experience.

## G. Pre-writing

The first stage of the essay-writing process should be especially stress-free, since at this point you do not have to worry about making your prose grammatically sound, logically organized, or convincing to a reader. All you have to do is write whatever comes into your head regarding your topic, so that you can discover the beginnings of ideas and phrasings that may be developed in the drafting stage and ultimately massaged into an acceptable form of academic writing.

There are a number of prewriting strategies writers use to generate ideas and happy turns of phrase. Experiment with all of these, in order to discover which of them "clicks" in terms of how you think and most productively get your ideas down on paper. Most writers rely more heavily on one or two of these prewriting strategies, depending on their own styles and dispositions. It is a matter of individual preference. If you are a spontaneous organic, sort of person, for example, you might spend more time doing freewriting. Or on the other hand, if you have a more logical, mathematical mind, you might gravitate naturally to do some outlining and do very little freewriting. There is no right or wrong way to pre-write. Just do whatever works best for you. But what's best usually involves some combination of the three following techniques.

### 1. Freewriting

This prewriting strategy lets your mind wander, as minds will, while you record whatever occurs to you. Just write, write, write with no

judgment about the validity, usefulness, grammatical correctness, or literary merit of the words you are putting down. The only requirement is that you write nonstop, either on paper or a word processor, for a manageable period of time: for example, fifteen minutes without a break.

Your freewriting can be open – that is, it can be pure, stream-of-consciousness writing in which you "stay in the present moment" and record every thought, sense impression, disturbing sound – or it can be focused on a specific topic, such as Barbie dolls. When freewriting in preparation for writing an essay, it is frequently helpful to keep in mind a central question, either one from your lecturer's original topic assignment or one sparked by your own curiosity, so that your freewritten material will be useful when you start composing your actual essay.

Here is a typical focused freewrite on the subject of Barbie dolls written by a student in response to the writing assignment quoted earlier:

*Toys: what did you want as a child vs. what you were given? I don't know, but I wanted cars and ended up with Barbie Corvette. Brother got G.I. Joe, Tonka trucks, I got talking Barbie, Barbie play house, Corvette.*

*B. served as model for ideal female figure, and now that ideal is depicted in magazines. I guess that represents a kind of perpetuation of this image: girls raised on Barbie → cycle continues w/images in the media. The ideal image of women in America seems to be let's see: white, flawless, flat nose, wide eyes, that kind of thing. Whatever, it's clear that Barbie creates unreal expectations for women.*

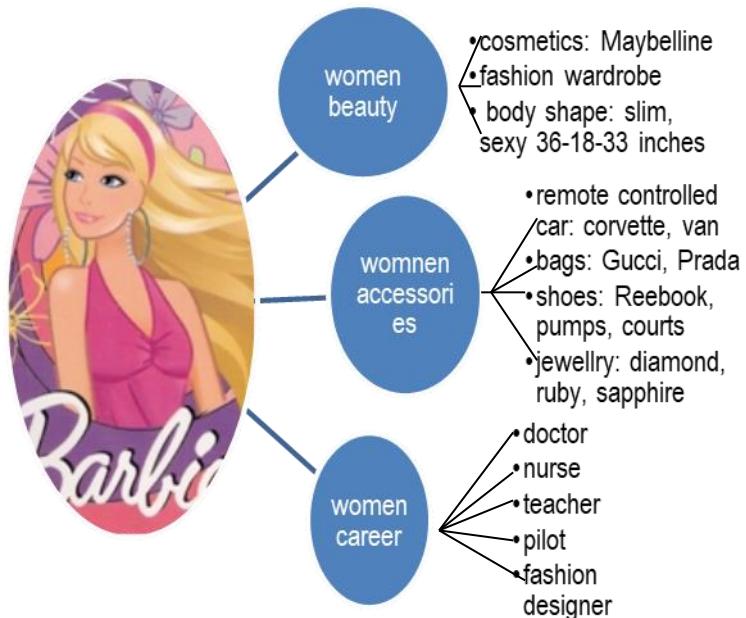
*Yeah! her figure would be inhuman if a real person had it - they would probably die! If she puts on jogging shoes, Barbie stands sloped because she's designed for high heels... so it seems as though Barbie is clearly designed for display rather than real activity, let alone profession. Display.*

*literature (written stuff) on Barbie packages-she's not interested in doctoring nurse, etc.; just having money, cars, looking good, taking trips etc. Re: techwomen think computers are "fun." Re: math-women supposedly aren't good at it. Barbie reinforces these stereotypes-and lots more-in girls. Changes in society? discuss for concl.?*

## 2. Clustering

Clustering is especially useful for discovering relationships between ideas, impressions, and facts. As a prewriting activity, it falls between freewriting and outlining, in that it is usually more focused than freewriting but less logically structured than an outline.

To prewrite by clustering, begin by writing a word or central phrase down in the center of a clean sheet of paper. In the case of the Barbie doll assignment, for example, you would probably start by writing "Barbie" in the middle of the page, and then drawing a circle around it. Having written and circled this central word or phrase, you can



then jot down relevant facts, concrete examples, interesting ideas, and so on. Cluster these around the circled word, like shown above. Frequently, one or more of your random jottings will serve as a new central word – as a jumping-off point for a new cluster of ideas. Later on, when you are drafting, you can use these clustered "nodes" as the basis for supporting paragraphs in the body of your essay.

### 3. Outlining

If you have a rough idea of what the main points of your paper will be, outlining is an extremely useful prewriting technique, in that it helps you plan the overall structure for your paper and often generates new ideas about your topic. There are several different types of outlines, most notably scratch, sentence, and topic outlines.

For a *scratch outline* you list your intended points in a very tentative order, one that may only reflect the fact that you do not yet know in what order you want to put your supporting ideas. A scratch outline might not even suggest which subordinating points are most important to developing your thesis. For this reason, scratch outlines are most useful early in the prewriting phase, as a means of generating ideas as well as beginning to organize your thoughts logically. In fact, if you have not yet arrived at a thesis for your paper, one may emerge in the process of listing all of your main and subordinate points and then reviewing that list to discover which of those ideas is the most central and important.

As you think more about your essay and come up with new ideas and supporting evidence, you will almost certainly revise your scratch outline to make it more detailed and conventionally formatted with numbered and lettered headings and subheads. A *topic outline* presents items in key words or brief phrases, rather than sentences, and frequently features no indentation. A *sentence outline* is even more developed than a topic outline, in that it describes the listed items in complete sentences, each of which is essentially a subtopic for a supporting paragraph. In fact, sentence outlines, when fully developed, can contain most of the supporting information you're going to present in your essay, and can therefore be extremely useful tools during the prewriting process. Developing her freewritten material about Barbie into an outline, a student writer sketched out the following:

### *Introduction*

- A. *Discuss my own experience with toys while growing up: parents "let" me play with Tonka trucks, but they gave me a Barbie Corvette when I wanted a race car.*
  - B. *Discuss social shaping of gender roles generally.*
  - C. *Working Thesis: Significance of Barbie in American society is that although people say women have "come a long way" and that there are new expectations, this is not really true. If it were, Barbie, depicted as mere sexual, leisure-seeking consumer, could not be accepted.*
- II. *The media see that people-especially young ones-need role models, and manufacture products to fill the following needs.*
- A. *Childhood: Barbie.*
    - 1. *Barbie presents a totally unrealistic female body as a role model for young women.*
    - 2. *This role-modeling is crucial in young women's psychological development, because little girls role-play with Barbie, taking her actions as their own.*
  - B. *Pre-teen: Models in Seventeen magazine.*
  - C. *Teen: Vogue and Mademoiselle.*
  - D. *Adult: Cosmopolitan, Victoria's Secret lingerie models, advertisements in mainstream magazines.*
- III. *The popularity of Barbie depicts the entrenched nature of traditional female roles.*
- A. *The change toward women's equality is not something that is deemed beneficial by everyone, such as the religious ultra-right.*
  - B. *People purchasing Barbie either:*
    - 1. *don't see the image that's being perpetuated; or*
    - 2. *respect those values and want to pass them on to their children.*

- C. Significance in popular culture of Barbie is that she illustrates inconsistencies between changing social roles (women and minorities) and the concepts we are teaching youngsters.
- D. Although the makers of Barbie make a superficial attempt at updating her, Barbie depicts traditional women absorbed in leisure, consumption, and beauty.
1. Barbie completely reinforces old role expectations.
  2. Barbie in the '90s can have a career (she has some doctor outfits, I think), but she isn't ever functional in that career. The emphasis is still on leisure.

#### IV The Racial Issue

- A. Barbie illustrates the assimilation of minorities; they lose part of their culture, [weal/51' Americans are supposl'd to belong to the "same mold."
- B. In the '90s we say that we aren't prejudiced and that everyone should be accepted for who they are, but since the dominant culture is white, white men and women unconsciously (or in some cases consciously, I'm afraid) assume that others must take on white norms.
- C. Conclusion
- D. Bring it back around to my childhood play time and the necessity parents to think about the sorts of toys they are giving their children, so that they don't reinforce and perpetuate these old patterns.

You should discover that this outline, while detailed, does not contain some of the points raised in the final essay's supporting paragraphs and that it includes a good deal of material that was not used in the final essay. The reason for this discrepancy is simple and illustrates a key point for you to remember about the writing process. As this writer began her essay, she discovered new points which she thought relevant to her thesis. At the same time, she realized that some of her outlined points were tangential and digressive rather than helpful in supporting her main point. She therefore cut some of those points, even though she thought

they were valid and interesting ideas. That is one of the most painful but absolutely necessary tasks of the writer: getting rid of material which took some work to create and seems interesting and well written. If cutting some of your previously written material makes the final result better, then it is worth the sacrifice!

## H. Drafting

Having generated a good amount of prewritten material and perhaps developed it into a detailed outline, your next task is to transform that material into an actual essay. Before proceeding with the drafting of your essay, however, it is a good idea first to consider your audience – is it for your lecturer only? Or also for your classmates? Or is it for an imaginary editor or publisher? Or a highschool student? Consider, too, the point you want to make about your topic to that audience. Unlike freewriting, which is by its nature often rambling and disjointed, essays should focus on a specific point with illustrations and examples to support it.

## I. Thesis and Thesis Statement

The main point, the central part of your thesis before writing a paper is your thesis statement. However, keep in mind that this is not always necessary. Some people use writing as a discovery process, and do not arrive at their thesis until they have completed a first draft. Generally, however, the process is easier if you have a thesis in mind – even one that is not yet fully formed or likely to change –before you begin writing.

While the form of thesis statements may vary considerably, there are some qualities that separate effective thesis statements from vague or weak ones. First of all, your thesis statement should be inclusive but focused: that is, it should be broad enough to encompass your paper's main supporting ideas, but narrow enough to represent a concise explanation of your paper's main point that will not require you to write fifty

pages to cover the topic adequately. Furthermore, you want your thesis statement to be a forceful assertion rather than a question or an ambiguous statement of purpose such as, "In this paper I am going to talk about Barbie dolls and their effect on society."

Much more effective, as you will see in the sample student paper that concludes this chapter, is a statement which takes a stand:

This is certainly one of the more dangerous consequences of Barbie's popularity in our society: a seemingly innocent toy defines for young girls the sorts of career choices, clothing, and relationships that will be "proper" for them as grown-up women.

Notice how this statement gives an excellent sense of the thematic direction the paper will take: clearly, it will examine the relationship between Barbie dolls and gender role identification in contemporary America.

#### J. Opening Paragraphs

In most academic writing, you want to arrive at your thesis statement as quickly as possible, so that your reader will have a clear sense of your essay's purpose from the start. Many readers expect to find a thesis statement at the end of the introduction generally the final sentence of the first or second paragraph. Effective introductions are often structured so as to lead up to the thesis statement: they draw the reader in by opening with an interesting specific point of a question, a quotation, a brief anecdote, a controversial issue which serves to introduce the topic generally; all of which are a general overview, which then leads up to the specific statement of the thesis in the last sentence.

In the sample student essay: *Role-Model Barbie: Now and Forever*, for example, observe how the writer begins with a personal reflection

about Barbie. Her anecdote may strike a familiar chord with readers and therefore draw them into the topic. Having made the attempt to arouse her readers' interest in her opening paragraph, the writer moves more pointedly into the general topic, discussing briefly the possible social and psychological implications of her parents' gift choices. This discussion leads into her thesis statement, a focused assertion that concludes her second paragraph.

Keep in mind that many writers may want to wait until they have written a first draft before they worry about an introduction. They simply lead off with a tentative thesis statement, then go back later to look for effective ways to lead up to that statement.

## K. Supporting Paragraphs

As you draft the body of your paper, keep two main goals in mind. First, try to make sure that all your supporting paragraphs are aimed at developing your thesis, so that you maintain your focus and don't ramble off the topic. Second, work toward presenting your supporting ideas in logical order, and try to provide smooth transitions between points.

The order in which you choose to present your ideas depends in large part on your topic and purpose. When you are arguing for a particular position, you might begin with less important ideas and work toward a final, crucial point. In this way you can build a case that you "clinch" with your strongest piece of evidence. Other kinds of essays call for different structures. For example, an essay tracing the history of the Barbie doll and its effect on American culture would probably be structured chronologically, from the introduction of the toy to its present day incarnations, since that would be the most natural way to develop the discussion.

The student essay at the end of this chapter moves from a personal reflection on the topic of Barbie (paragraph 1); to a thesis statement that asserts the point of the paper (2); to a transitional paragraph moving from the writer's childhood experiences to a more general discussion of Barbie's role in

reinforcing of gender-role stereotypes in other young girls (3); to an overview of how sociologists and historians critique the Barbie phenomenon (4); to an examination of whether Barbie has changed in response to evolving attitudes regarding women in society (5-7), the heart of the writer's argument; to a conclusion that frames the essay by returning to the original, personal example (8). Each new discussion seems to flow naturally into the next because the writer uses a transitional phrase or parallel language to link the first sentence in each paragraph to the end of the preceding paragraph.

## L. Evidence

Using evidence effectively is the critical task in composing body paragraphs, because your essay will be convincing only to the degree that you make your arguments credible. Evidence can take many forms, from facts and figures you collect from library research to experiences you learn about in conversations with friends. While library research is not necessary for every paper, it helps to include at least some "hard" facts and figures gathered from outside sources, such as from journals, newspapers, and textbooks; even if you are not writing a full-blown research paper. Frequently, gathering your evidence does not require scrolling through computer screens in your school's library; it could be accomplished by watching the six o'clock television newscast or while reading the paper over breakfast.

Quotations from secondary sources are another common way developing and supporting a point in a paragraph. Using another person's spoken or written words will lend your arguments a note of authenticity, especially when your source is a recognized authority the field about which you're writing. A few points to remember when using quotations:

1. Generally, do not begin or end a supporting paragraph with a quotation. Articulate your point *in your own words* in the first sentence or two of the paragraph; *then* provide the quotation as a way of supporting your point. After the quotation, you might include another

focusing sentence or two that analyzes the quotation and suggests how it relates to your point.

2. Keep your quotations brief. Overly lengthy quotations can make a paper difficult to read. You have probably read texts that nearly put you to sleep because of their overuse of quotations. As a general rule, quote source material only when the precise phrasing is necessary to support your abstract points. Be careful not to allow cited passages to overpower your own assertions.
3. Remember that all of your secondary material, whether quoted or paraphrased, needs to be accurately attributed. Make sure to mention the source's name and include other information (such as the publication date or page number) as required by your lecturer.

While quotations, facts, and figures are the most common ways of developing your supporting paragraphs with evidence, you can also use your imagination to come up with other means of substantiating your points. Design a questionnaire, hand it out to your friends, compile the resulting data as evidence. Interview a local authority about your topic, make notes about the conversation, and draw upon these as evidence. Finally, be your own authority: use your own powers of reasoning to come up with logical arguments that convince your readers of the validity of your assertions.

This body paragraph from the student essay on Barbie provides a good example of a writer using evidence to support her points:

As Motz observes later in her article, Barbie has changed to adjust to the transforming attitudes of society over time. Both her facial expressions and wardrobe have undergone subtle alterations: "The newer Barbie has a more friendly, open expression, with a hint of a smile, and her lip and eye make-up is muted" (226), and in recent years Barbie's wardrobe has expanded to include some career clothing in

addition to her massive volume of recreational attire. This transition appears to represent a conscious effort on the part of Barbie's manufacturers to integrate the concept of women as important members of the work force, with traditional ideals already depicted by Barbie.

The paragraph begins with an assertion of the general point that Barbie has changed in some ways over the years to reflect changes in societal attitudes toward women. This point is then supported with a quotation from an expert, and the page number of the original source is noted parenthetically. (Note that page references in this student essay are from the complete original essay by Motz, published in *The Popular Culture Reader*, not from the excerpt of the Motz essay earlier in this chapter.) The point is further developed with evidence presented in the writer's own words. The paragraph concludes with a final sentence that summarizes the main point of the evidence presented in the previous sentences, keeps the paragraph focused on the essay's thesis that Barbie perpetuates gender stereotypes, and sets the reader up for a transition into the next subtopic.

Obviously, all supporting paragraphs won't take this exact form; essays would be deadly boring if every paragraph looked the same. You'll encounter body paragraphs in professional essays that begin with quotations or end with quotations, for example. Just keep in mind that you want to *support* whatever general point you're making, so each paragraph should include a measure of specific, concrete evidence. The more you practice writing the more ways you will discover to develop body paragraphs with illustrations, examples, and evidence.

## M. Conclusions

You may have learned in high school English courses that an essay's conclusion should restate the main points made in the paper, so

that the reader is left with a concise summary that leaves no doubt as to the paper's intention. This was an excellent suggestion for high school students, as it reinforced the notion of focusing an essay on a specific, concrete point. In university level, however, you will want to start developing a more sophisticated academic style. Conclusions to university level essays should do more than merely repeat the paper's main points. They should leave the reader with something to think about it.

Of course, what that *something* is, depends on your topic, your audiences, and your purpose in writing. Sometimes it may be appropriate to move from an objective discussion of a topic to a more subjective reflection on it. For instance, in analyzing the social effects of Barbie dolls, you might end by reflecting on the doll's significance in your own life or by commenting ironically on feminist critics who in your view make too much of Barbie's influence. Other ways to conclude are: providing a provocative quotation, offering a challenge for the future; asserting a forceful opinion; creating a striking image or memorable turn of phrase; or referring back to an image or idea in your introduction.

What you want to avoid is a blurry and overly general conclusion along the lines of, "Thus, in conclusion, it would seem to this author that Barbie has had great and wide-reaching impact on today's contemporary society." Note how the writer of the Barbie essay created a strong conclusion by first returning to the subject of her opening paragraph – her own childhood toys – and then leaving the reader with a relatively memorable final sentence offering a challenge for the future:

Looking back at my childhood, I see my parents engaged in this same struggle. By surrounding me with toys that perpetuated both feminine and masculine roles, they achieved a kind of balance among the conflicting images in society. However, they also seemed to succumb to traditional social

pressures by giving me that Barbie Corvette, when all I wanted was a radio-controlled formula-one racer, like the one Emerson Fittipaldi drives. In a time when most parents agree that young girls should be encouraged to pursue their goals regardless of gender boundaries, their actions do not always reflect these ideals. Only when we demand that toys like Barbie no longer perpetuate stereotypes will this reform be complete.

## N. Distancing

Distancing is the easiest part of the writing process because it involves doing nothing more than putting your first draft aside and giving yourself some emotional and intellectual distance from it. Pursue your daily activities, go to work or complete assignments for other classes, go to the mall, do some swimming or play soccer, just do anything but read over your draft.....ideally for a day or two.

The reason to take the time to distance yourself is simple: you have been working hard on your essay and therefore have a strong personal investment in it. In order to revise effectively, you need to be able to see your essay dispassionately, almost as though someone else had written it. Stepping away from it for a day or two will give you the opportunity to see your essay like an editor. Also, the process of distancing allows your mind to work on the essay subconsciously even while you are going about your other non-writing activities. Frequently, during this distancing period, you will find yourself coming up with new ideas that you can use to supplement your thesis as you revise.

One note of warning: Do not get so distanced from your draft that you forget to come back to it. If you do forget, all your prewritings and drafting will have gone to waste.

## O. Revising

Many professional writers believe that revision is the most important stage in the writing process. Writers view the revision stage as an opportunity to clarify their ideas, to re-arrange text so that the logical flow of their work is enhanced, to add new phrases or delete ones that do not work, to modify their thesis and change editorial direction ... or, in some extreme cases, to throw the whole thing out and start all over!

## P. Revision Checklist

The following is a checklist of questions you might want to use. If you find that your answer is "no" to anyone of these questions, then you need to rework your essay for improvement.

### Introduction

- ✓ Does the paper begin in a way that draws the reader into the paper while introducing the topic?
- ✓ Does the introduction provide some general overview that leads up to the thesis?
- ✓ Does the introduction end with a focused, assertive thesis in the form of a statement (not a question)?

### Supporting Paragraphs and Conclusion

- ✓ Do your supporting paragraphs relate back to your thesis, so that the paper has a clear focus?
- ✓ Do your body paragraphs connect logically, with smooth transitions between them?
- ✓ Do your supporting paragraphs have a good balance between general points and specific, concrete evidence?

- ✓ If you've used secondary sources for your evidence, do you attribute them adequately to avoid any suspicion of plagiarism?
- ✓ If you've used quotations extensively, have you made sure your quoted material doesn't overpower your own writing?
- ✓ Does your last paragraph give your readers something to think about rather than merely restate what you've already said elsewhere in the essay?

#### Style and Mechanics

- ✓ Have you chosen your words aptly and sometimes inventively, avoiding cliches and overused phrases?
- ✓ Have you varied your sentence lengths effectively, thus helping create a pleasing prose rhythm?
- ✓ Have you proofread carefully, to catch any grammatical problems or spelling errors?

Make the minor changes or major overhauls required in your first draft. Then type or print out a second draft, and read *out loud* to yourself, to catch any awkward or unnatural sounding passages, wordy sentences, grammatical glitches and so on. Reading your prose out loud may seem weird--especially to your roommates who cannot help overhearing--but doing so helps you gain some new perspective on the piece of writing you have been so close to, and frequently highlights minor, sentence-level problems that you might otherwise overlook.

#### **Q. Sample Student Essay**

The following essay demonstrates one way of approaching the assignment we presented earlier. As you read, note the essay's introductory paragraphs and thesis statement, the way body paragraphs are developed with illustrations and examples, the way it concludes without

simply restating the writer's points, the writer's effective use of words, and sentence structure.

### ***Role-Model Barbie: Now and Forever?***

**CAROLYN MUHLSTEIN**

During my early childhood, my parents avoided placing gender boundaries on my play time. My brother and I both had Tonka trucks, and these were driven by Barbie, Strawberry Shortcake, and GI Joe to my doll house, or to condos built with my brother's Erector Set. However, as I got older, the boundaries became more defined, and certain forms of play became "inappropriate." For example, I remember asking for a remote controlled car one Christmas, anticipating a powerful race car like the ones driven at De Anza Days, the local community fair. Christmas morning waiting for me under the tree was a bright yellow Barbie Corvette. It seemed as though my parents had decided that if I had to have a remote controlled car, at least it could be a feminine Barbie one!

Although I was too young to realize it at the time, this gift represented a subtle shift in my parents' attitudes toward my gender-role choices. Where before my folks seemed content to traditional "boy" or traditional "girl" roles in play now they appeared to be subtly directing me toward traditional female role-playing. This is certainly one of the more dangerous consequences of Barbie's popularity in our society: a seemingly innocent toy defines for young girls the sorts of career choices, clothing, and relationships that will be "proper" for them as grownup women. Perhaps the Barbie Corvette was my parents' attempt to steer me back toward more traditional feminine pursuits. Since her birth thirty-five years ago, Barbie has been used by many parents to illustrate the "appropriate" role of a woman in society. During earlier decades, when women were expected to remain at home, Barbie's lifestyle was extremely fitting. Marilyn Ferris Motz writes that Barbie "represents so well the widespread values of modern

American society, devoting herself to the pursuit of happiness through leisure and material goods., .teaching them [female children], the skills by which their future success will be measured." (212) Barbie, then serves as a symbol of the woman's traditional role in our society, and she serves to reinforce those stereotypes in young girls.

Motz' opinion is not an isolated one. In fact, the consensus among sociologists, historians, and consumers is that Barbie represents a life of lazy leisure and wealth. Her "forever arched feet" and face "always smiling, eyes wide with admiration" (Tham 180) allow for little more than evenings on the town and strolls in the park. In addition, the accessories Barbie is equipped with are almost all related to pursuits of mere pleasure. According to a Barbie sticker album created by Mattel:

Barbie is seen as a typical young lady of the twentieth century, who knows how to appreciate beautiful things and, at the same time, live life to the fullest." with her fashionable wardrobe and constant journeys to exciting places all over the world, the adventures of Barbie offer a glimpse of what they [girls] might achieve one day, (qtd, in Motz 218)

In this packaging "literature" – and in the countless other advertisements and packaging materials that have emerged since Barbie's invention some thirty years ago-the manufacturers exalt Barbie's materialism, her appreciation of "beautiful things," fine clothing, and expensive trips as positive personality traits: qualities which all normal, healthy girls in this society should try to emulate, according to the traditional view.

As Motz observes later in her article, Barbie has changed to adjust to the transforming attitudes of society over time, Both her facial expressions and wardrobe have undergone subtle alterations: "The newer Barbie has a more friendly, open expression, with a hint of a smile, and her lip and eye make-up is muted." (226) and in recent years Barbie's wardrobe has expanded to include some career clothing in addition to her massive volume of recreational attire. This transition appears to represent a

conscious effort on the part of Barbie's manufacturers to integrate the concept of women as important members of the work force, with traditional ideals already depicted by Barbie. Unfortunately, a critical examination of today's Barbie doll reveals that this so-called integration is actually a cynical, half-hearted attempt to satisfy the concerns of some people - especially those concerned with feminist issues. Sure, Barbie now has office attire, a doctor outfit, a nurse outfit, and a few other pieces of "career" clothing, but her image continues to center on leisure. As Motz observes, "Barbie may try her hand at high status occupations, but her appearance does not suggest competence and professionalism." (230) Quite the opposite, in fact: there are few, and in some cases, no accessories with which a young girl might imagine a world of professional competence for Barbie. There are no Barbie hospitals and no Barbie doctor offices; instead, she has only mansions, boats, and fast cars. Furthermore, Barbie's arched feet make it impossible for her to stand in anything but heels, so a career as a doctor, an astronaut – or anything else that requires standing up for more than twenty minutes on a fashion runway-would be nearly impossible!

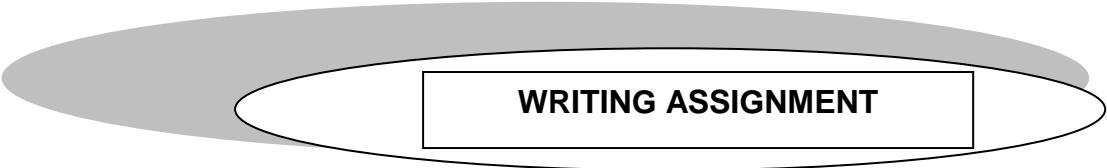
From these examples, it is clear that Barbie's manufacturers have failed to reconcile the traditional image of women as sexual, leisure-seeking consumers with the view that women are assertive, career-oriented individuals, because their "revision" of the Barbie image is at best a token one. This failure to reconcile two opposing roles for Barbie parallels the same contradiction in contemporary society. By choice and necessity women are in the work force in large numbers, seeking equal pay and equal opportunities with men; yet the more traditional voices in our culture continue to perpetuate stereotyped images of women. If we believe that we are at transitional point in the evolution toward real equality for women, then Barbie exemplifies this transitional stage perfectly.

Looking back at my childhood, I see my parents engaged in this same struggle. By surrounding me with toys that perpetuated both feminine and masculine roles, they achieved a kind of balance among the conflicting images in society. However, they also seemed to succumb to traditional

social pressures by giving me that Barbie Corvette, when all I wanted was a radio-controlled formula-one racer, like the one Emerson Fittipaldi drives. In a time when most parents agree that young girls should be encouraged to pursue their goals regardless of gender boundaries, their actions do not always reflect these ideals. Only when we demand that toys like Barbie no longer perpetuate stereotypes will this reform be complete.

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### WRITING ASSIGNMENT

**Now, it is your turn to write your analysis of what you have learnt from the readings on *barbie* above in connection with your past experience of playing with a doll or a car, in addition to what you may learn from the following article on *the nature of beauty*, as well as, *being beautiful, thin and female*.**

## CHAPTER IV

### READINGS ON BEAUTY

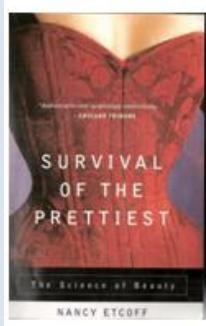
#### A. The Nature of Beauty<sup>2</sup>

NANCY ETCOFF

*The three wishes of every man: to be healthy, to be rich by honest means, and to be beautiful. (Plato)*

*There must ... be in our very nature a very radical and widespread tendency to observe beauty, and to value it. No account of the principles of the mind can be at all adequate that passes over so conspicuous a faculty. (George Santayana)*

*Yes, I know. You haven't the slightest idea what I'm talking about. Beauty has long since disappeared. It has slipped beneath the surface of the noise, the noise of words, sunk deep as Atlantis. The only thing left of it is the word, whose meaning loses clarity from year to year. (Milan Kundera)*



**P**hilosophers ponder it and pornographers proffer it. Asked why people desire physical beauty, Aristotle said, "No one that is not blind could ask that question." Beauty ensnares hearts, captures

<sup>2</sup> Nancy, Etcoff. (1999) The Nature of Beauty. In *Survival of the Prettiest*. New York: Anchor Books, pp. 1-25.

minds, and stirs up emotional wildfires. From Plato to pinups, images of human beauty have catered to a limitless desire to see and imagine an ideal human form.

But we live in the age of ugly beauty, when beauty is morally suspect and ugliness has a gritty allure. Beauty is equal parts flesh and imagination: we imbue it with our dreams, saturate it with our longings. But to spin this another way, reverence for beauty is just an escape from reality, it is the perpetual adolescent in us refusing to accept a flawed world. We wave it away with a cliche, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder," meaning that beauty is whatever pleases us (with the subtext that it is inexplicable). But defined this way, beauty is meaningless-as Gertrude Stein once said about her childhood home, Oakland, California, "There is no there there."

In 1991, Naomi Wolf set aside centuries of speculation when she said that beauty as an objective and universal entity does not exist. "Beauty is a currency system like the gold standard. Like any economy, it is determined by politics, and in the modern age in the West it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact." According to Wolf, the images we see around us are based on a myth. Their beauty is like the tales of Aphrodite, the judgment of Paris, and the apple of discord: made up. Beauty is a convenient fiction used by multibillion-dollar industries that create images of beauty and peddle them as opium for the female masses. Beauty ushers women to a place where men want them, out of the power structure.

Capitalism and the patriarchy define beauty for cultural consumption, and plaster images of beauty everywhere to stir up envy and desire. The covetousness they inspire serves their twin goals of making money and preserving the status quo.

Many intellectuals would have us believe that beauty is inconsequential. Since it explains nothing, solves nothing, and teaches us nothing, it should not have a place in intellectual discourse. And we are

supposed to breathe a collective sigh of relief. After all, the concept of beauty has become an embarrassment.

But there is something wrong with this picture. Outside the realm of ideas, beauty rules. Nobody has stopped looking at it, and no one has stopped enjoying the sight. Turning a cold eye to beauty is as easy as quelling physical desire or responding with indifference to a baby's cry. We can say that beauty is dead, but all that does is widen the chasm between the real world and our understanding of it.

Before beauty sinks any deeper, let me reel it in for closer examination. Suggesting that men on Madison Avenue have Svengali-like powers to dictate women's behavior and preferences, and can define their sense of beauty, is tantamount to saying that women are not only powerless but mindless. On the contrary, isn't it possible that women cultivate beauty and use the beauty industry to optimize the power beauty brings? Isn't the problem that women often lack the opportunity to cultivate their other assets, not that they can cultivate beauty?

As we will see, Madison Avenue cleverly exploits universal preferences but it does not create them, any more than Walt Disney created our fondness for creatures with big eyes and little limbs, or CocaCola or McDonald's created our cravings for sweet or fatty foods. Advertisers and businessmen help to define what adornments we wear and find beautiful, but I will show that this belongs to our sense of fashion, which is not the same thing as our sense of beauty. Fashion is what Charles Baudelaire described as "the amusing, enticing, appetizing icing on the divine cake," not the cake itself.

The media channel desire and narrow the bandwidth of our preferences. A crowd-pleasing image becomes a mold, and a beauty is followed by her imitator, and then by the imitator of her imitator. Marilyn Monroe was such a crowd pleaser that she's been imitated by everyone from Jayne Mansfield to Madonna. Racism and class snobbery are reflected in images of beauty, although beauty itself is indifferent to race

and thrives on diversity. As Darwin wrote, "If everyone were cast in the same mold, there would be no such thing as beauty."

Part of the backlash against beauty grew out of concern that the pursuit of beauty had reached epic proportions, and that this is a sign of a diseased culture. When we examine the historical and anthropological literature we will discover that, throughout human history, people have scarred, painted, pierced, padded, stiffened, plucked, and buffed their bodies in the name of beauty. When Darwin traveled on the *Beagle* in the nineteenth century, he found a universal "passion for ornament," often involving sacrifice and suffering that was "wonderfully great."

We allow that violence is done to the body among "primitive" cultures or that it was done by ancient societies, but we have yet to realize that beauty brings out the primitive in every person. During 1996 a reported 696,904 Americans underwent voluntary aesthetic surgery that involved tearing or burning their skin, shucking their fat, or implanting foreign materials. Before the FDA limited silicone gel implants in 1992, four hundred women were getting them every day. Breast implants were once the province of porn stars; they are now the norm for Hollywood actresses, and no longer a rarity for the housewife.

These drastic procedures are done not to correct deformities but to improve aesthetic details. Kathy Davis, a professor at the University of Utrecht, watched as more than fifty people tried to persuade surgeons in the Netherlands to alter their appearance. Except for a man with a "cauliflower nose," she was unable to anticipate which feature they wanted to alter just by looking at them. She wrote, "I found myself astounded that anyone would be willing to undergo such drastic measures for what seemed to me such a minor imperfection." But there is no such thing as a minor imperfection when it comes to the face or body. Every person knows the topography of her face and the landscape of her body as intimately as a mapmaker. To the outside world we vary in small ways from our best hours to our worst. In our

mind's eye, however, we undergo a kaleidoscope of changes, and a bad hair day, a blemish, or an added pound undermines our confidence in ways that equally minor fluctuations in our moods, our strength, or our mental agility usually do not.

People do extreme things in the name of beauty. They invest so much of their resources in beauty and risk so much for it, one would think that lives depended on it. In Brazil there are more Avon ladies than members of the army. In the United States more money is spent on beauty than on education or social services. Tons of makeup<sup>1,484</sup> tubes of lipstick and 2,055 jars of skin care products-are sold every minute. During famines, Kalahari bushmen in Africa still use animal fats to moisturize their skin, and in 1715 riots broke out in France when the use of flour on the hair of aristocrats led to a food shortage. The hoarding of flour for beauty purposes was only quelled by the French Revolution.

Either the world is engaged in mass insanity or there is method in this madness. Deep inside we all know something: no one can withstand appearances. We can create a big bonfire with every issue of *Vogue*, *CQ*, and *Details*, every image of Kate Moss, Naomi Campbell, and Cindy Crawford, and still, images of youthful perfect bodies would take shape in our heads and create a desire to have them. No one is immune. When Eleanor Roosevelt was asked if she had any regrets, her response was a poignant one: she wished she had been prettier. It is a sobering statement from one of the most revered and beloved of women, one who surely led a life with many satisfactions. She is not uttering just a woman's lament. In *Childhood, Boyhood, Youth*, Leo Tolstoy wrote, "I was frequently subject to moments of despair. I imagined that there was no happiness on earth for a man with such a wide nose, such thick lips, and such tiny gray eyes as mine.... Nothing has such a striking impact on a man's development as his appearance, and not so much his actual appearance as a conviction that it is either attractive or unattractive."

Appearance is the most public part of the self. It is our sacrament' the visible self that the world assumes to be a mirror of the invisible, inner self. This assumption may not be fair, and not how the best of all moral worlds would conduct itself. But that does not make it any less true. Beauty has consequences that we cannot erase by denial. Beauty will continue to operate-outside jurisdiction, in the lawless world of human attraction. Academics may ban it from intelligent discourse and snobs may sniff that beauty is trivial and shallow but in the real world the beauty myth quickly collides with reality.

This article is an inquiry into what we find beautiful and why what in our nature makes us susceptible to beauty, what qualities in people evoke this response, and why sensitivity to beauty is ubiquitous in human nature. I will argue that our passionate pursuit of beauty reflects the workings of a basic instinct. As George Santayana has said, "Had our perceptions no connection with our pleasures, we should soon close our eyes to this world... that we are endowed with the sense of beauty is a pure gain."

The following argument will be guided by cutting-edge research in cognitive science and evolutionary psychology. An evolutionary viewpoint cannot explain everything about beauty, but through reading this article, it is hoped to show you that it can help explain a good many things, and offer a perspective on the place of beauty in human life.

## WHAT IS BEAUTY AND HOW DO WE KNOW IT?

We are always sizing up other people's looks: our beauty detectors close up shop and call it a day. We notice the attractiveness of each face we see as automatically as we register whether or not they look familiar. Beauty detectors scan the environment like radar: we can see a face for a fraction of a second (150 msec. in one psychology experiment) and rate its beauty, even give it the same rating we would

give it on longer inspection. Long after we forget many important details about a person, our initial response stays in our memory.

Beauty is basic pleasure. Try to imagine that you have become immune to beauty. Chances are, you would consider yourself unwell – sunk in a physical, spiritual, or emotional malaise. The absence of response to physical beauty is one sign of profound depression – so prevalent that the standard screening measures for depression include a question about changes in the perception of one's own physical attractiveness.

But what is beauty? As you will see, no definition can capture it entirely. I started by mining what those who peddle beauty as a business had to say, thinking they might have concrete details about their criteria rather than airy abstractions to float. Aaron Spelling, creator of "Baywatch" and "Melrose Place," said, "I can't define it, but I know it when it walks into the room." I talked with a modeling agency that books top male models, and they were more descriptive: "It's when someone walks in the door and you almost can't breathe. It doesn't happen often. You can feel it rather than see it. I mean someone you literally can't walk past in the street."

It is noteworthy that the experts describe the experience of seeing beauty, and not what beauty looks like. On that end, all I got was that they should be young and tall and have good skin. But it was a start.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word "beautiful" as "Excelling in grace of form, charm of coloring, and other qualities, which delight the eye and call forth admiration: a. of the human face and figure: b. of other objects." As a secondary definition it states, "In modern colloquial use the word is often applied to anything that a person likes very much." The dictionary that my computer network provides says that beauty "gives pleasure to the senses or pleasurable exalts the mind or spirit."

The dictionaries define beauty as something intrinsic to the object (its color, form, and other qualities) or simply as the pleasure an object evokes in the beholder (The philosopher Santayana called beauty "pleasure objectified.") If we follow a time line of ideas on beauty, the pendulum clearly swings from one direction to the other. For the ancient Greeks, beauty was like a sixth sense. In the twentieth century, when Marcel Duchamp could make a toilet the subject of high art, and Andy Warhol could do the same for a soup can, beauty came to reside not in objects themselves but in the eye that viewed those objects and conferred beauty on them.

Although the *object* of beauty is debated, the experience of beauty is not. Beauty can stir up a snarl of emotions but pleasure must always be one (tortured longings and envy are not incompatible with pleasure). Our body responds to it viscerally and our names for beauty are synonymous with physical cataclysms and bodily obliteration, breathtaking, femme fatale, knockout, drop-dead gorgeous, bombshell, stunner, and ravishing. We experience beauty not as rational contemplation but as a response to physical urgency.

In 1688, Jean de La Bruyere expressed these transgender wishes, "to be a girl and a beautiful girl from the age of thirteen to the age of twenty-two and then after that to be a man." There is tremendous power in a young woman's beauty. In 1957, Brigitte Bardot was twenty-three years old and had starred in the film *And God Created Woman*. That year, the magazine *Cinemonde* reported that a million lines had been devoted to her in French dailies, and two million in the weeklies, and that this torrent of words was accompanied by 29,345 images of her. *Cinemonde* even reported that she was the subject of forty-seven percent of French conversation! In 1994, the model Claudia Schiffer spent four minutes modeling a black velvet dress on Rome's Spanish Steps. According to British journalists covering the "event" for the *Daily Telegraph*, four and a half million people watched and the city came to "a standstill."

Perhaps these are media-driven frenzies, no more real than the canned laughter chortling from our television screens. But small epiphanies are common in daily life. The most lyrical description of an encounter with beauty-solitary, spontaneous, with an unknown other-comes in James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* when Stephen Dedalus sees a young woman standing by the shore with "long, slender bare legs," and a face "touched with the wonder of mortal beauty." Her beauty is transformative and gives form to his sensual and spiritual longings. "Her image had passed into his soul for ever and no word had broken the holy silence of his ecstasy.... A wild angel had appeared to him, the angel of mortal youth and beauty, an envoy from the fair courts of life, to throw open before him in 111 instant of ecstasy the gates of all the ways of error and glory: on and on and on!"

Ezra Pound had a moment of recognition that inspired him to write a two-line poem "In a station at the Metro," which comprised these brief sentences: "The apparition of these faces in the crowd: Petals, on a wet, black bough." Later, Pound described how he came to write it. "Three years ago in Paris I got out of a Metro train at La Concorde, and saw suddenly a beautiful face, and then another and another, and then a beautiful child's face, and then another beautiful woman, and I tried all day to find words for what this had meant to me, and I could not find any words that seemed to me worthy or as lovely as that sudden emotion.... In a poem of this sort one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself or darts into a thing inward and subjective."

It is difficult to put into words why a particular set of eyes or a certain mouth move us while others do not. Even for the poets, it is often beyond language. Looking to the object of beauty, we confront centuries of struggle to capture beauty's essence.

## AN IDEAL OF BEAUTY EXISTS IN THE MIND, NOT THE FLESH

People judge appearances as though somewhere in their minds an ideal beauty of the human form exists, a form they would recognize if they saw it, though they do not expect they ever will. It exists in the imagination. Emily Dickinson, spending most of her time in her parents' attic, once wrote about the power of the imagination to envision the beautiful: "I never saw a moor, I never saw the sea, Yet I know how the heather looks, And what a wave must be." Kenneth Clark observed in *The Nude* that every time we criticize a human figure, for example that the neck is too short, or the nose too long, or the feet too big, we are revealing that we hold an ideal of physical beauty. Albrecht Durer wrote that "there lives on earth no one beautiful person who could not be more beautiful."

Donald Symons, an anthropologist at the University of California at Santa Barbara, related this Cartesian experience to me. He attended a talk given by a plastic surgeon in southern California. The surgeon accompanied his talk with a series of slides of very beautiful people. What impressed Symons was that each of these individuals was very beautiful but imperfect. He couldn't help but notice an upper lip that was too long or a nose that seemed too sharply angled. In fact, he felt that their beauty threw this "flaw" into bold relief. But, he wondered, too long or too angled compared to what? For Symons, the experience of looking at such strikingly beautiful faces and seeing these minor deviations from "perfection" was compelling evidence that we possess an innate beauty template which we are unlikely to access directly but against which we measure all that we see. These faces almost matched it, but not quite. Like Durer, he could envision them being more beautiful.

The human image has been subjected to all manner of manipulation in an attempt to create an ideal that does not seem to have a human incarnation. When Zeuxis painted Helen of Troy he gathered

five of the most beautiful living women and represented features of each in the hope of capturing and depicting her beauty. There are no actual descriptions of Helen, nor of other legendary beauties such as Dante's Beatrice. Their faces are blank slates, Rorschach inkblot tests of our imaginings of the features of perfect beauty.

In cinema and in magazines, modern Zeuxises create images of beauty out of the ideal parts of many. Hollywood uses body doubles for stunts requiring a grace and athleticism that actors may not possess. But just as often they do it because someone else's great body looks better matched to that actor's or actress's great face. Jennifer Beals rose to fame in the 1980s film, *Flashdance*, although it was later revealed that the close-ups of her body were not of her body. And it seemed not to matter in the long run. Most people easily melded the face of Beals with the body of her double and kept this composite image in their imaginations.

Top models are genetic freaks whose facial and bodily proportions are well designed to excite and please. But even they bear the marks of human imperfection. Supermodel Cindy Crawford's wrists are different sizes (not to mention her mole!) and supermodel Linda Evangelista hates her mouth because it is "tiny" and "frowny." But there are individuals who have "perfect" feet or hands or lips, and these "specialty models" work full time at modeling only the perfect part. Their hands are placed with the faces of models such as Cheryl Tiegs and Lauren Hutton. The hand market is further specialized into "glamour" hands and "product" hands. The glamour ones have to have great skin and long tapered fingers—"the sort of hands made to wear jewelry and use that American Express card." Product hands are action hands, handling detergents or shampoo bottles with dexterity and steady nerves. Feet are another area of specialty modeling, especially because top models are on average between five feet nine and five feet ten inches tall—they have big feet. For centuries, the ideal foot has been small and delicate, the foot of Cinderella. Foot models

have size six (American) feet, with smooth skin and perfect little toes that look like "five little shrimp," as one agency explained.

Of course people come as indivisible packages and the alternate approach to combining the perfect parts of many is to primp and pose one individual into the most pleasing vision possible. Kenneth Clark has written that the naked body is difficult to make into art by a direct rendering. A human body is "not like the tiger or the snow landscape... naked figures do not move us to empathy but to disillusion and dismay. We do not wish to imitate, we wish to perfect, this was the approach to portraiture until modernism changed the way bodies were represented. In its most extreme form, images were so idealized that they bore only a cursory resemblance to their subjects.

Portraits of the sixteenth-century Queen Elizabeth I rendered her face as "an opaque and unblemished mask." When Horace Walpole was asked to identify true portraits of her, his criteria were the presence of a roman nose, hair laced with jewels, a crown, and a splendid costume of rich fabric, an enormous ruff, and "bushels" of pearls. Elizabeth's portraits were probably never lifelike, but as she aged they became increasingly abstract, focusing attention on the beauty of her spectacular clothing and sketching her face in a short-hand of red-gold hair, pale skin, and a nose with a prominent bridge.

Watch a person looking in the mirror and you will see a person trying to please himself. If we pose for ourselves, we surely always pose for others, attempting to display ourselves as we want to be seen. Icons of beauty just take this several steps further. They undergo elaborate treatment before each appearance, each photograph. In the 1930s screen actresses were presented in dramatic makeup, fabulous clothes, and striking poses in front of filtered lenses. The artifice was obvious and the glamour up front. Today we think we favor natural beauty but natural beauty is as much an artifice as glamour. As model Veronica Webb said when asked how long it took

to make her natural beauty, "Two hours and two hundred dollars . . . I could never make myself look the way I do in a magazine."

In a world where we provide fake, vivid color, airbrushing, and now digital alterations to pictures of everything imaginable, it hardly seems surprising that we want to doctor images of people. We attempt to make everything look better so as to please and to tempt. And we would be fools not to want to please and tempt one another.

Modem artists present us with images stripped of glamour. Diane Arbus photographed people not considered beautiful in unblinking closeups. Photographer Richard Avedon shot a famous series of portraits from the American West, all starkly realized. Painters such as Lucien Freud and Phillip Pearlstein show human flesh with wrinkles, freckles, pallor, and body flab exposed. But these may not be more inaccurate representations of people-of how our eyes see them, or how reality, see themselves. We don't usually view people under photographer's lights or get close enough to see all their pores and stray hairs. There is no reason to think that these images are any more "real" than more flattering images. They are cast in the cold light of a surgeon's operating theater, seen through the eyes of the voyeur or your worst enemy. When we look at people we love, or even like, do we ever see them exactly like this? It is just art imposing a different artifice, pretending that we ever view others as just piles of mortal flesh.

Paul Valery would say that we suffer from the "three-body problem," and can never resolve it. One body is the one we "possess," that we live in. It is for each of us, he says, "the most important object in the world." This is the self that we experience. The second body is the public facade, "the body which has form and is apprehended in the arts, the body on which materials, ornaments, armor sit, which love sees or wants to see, and yearns to touch." We can call the second body the subject of traditional artistic portrayal. The third body is the

physical machine that we know about "only for having dissected and dismembered it ... nothing leads us to suspect a liver or brain or kidney." It is the body we are most estranged from and that beauty covers and helps us to deny.

The reason we have a universal passion for adornment, the reason that photos are doctored and painted representations idealized, is that we long to be not only works of nature but works of art. We want to unite Valery's three bodies into a unified whole. In part, the longing is spiritual: to have an outer representation that matches our dreams and visions and moral aspirations. It is also a quest for love and acceptance, to have a face and a body that other people want to look at and know.

Biologists would argue that at root the quest for beauty is driven by the genes pressing to be passed on and making their current habitat as inviting for visitors as possible. Quentin Bell writes in his stunning book, *On Human Finery*, that painters and dressmakers are all philosophers at heart. "Aristotle said that drama was more philosophical than history for history tells us only what did happen whereas drama tells us what ought to have happened. In this sense the dressmaker and the painter are philosophers. The painter seeks to recreate the body in a state of perfection; the dressmaker seeks to arrange drapery so beautifully that the actual body becomes a mere starting point."

## THE BEAUTY CANON

Running as a common thread through the discourses on beauty, from pre-Socratic times onward, is an aesthetic based on proportion and number. The irreducible elements are darity, symmetry, harmony, and vivid color. Plato said that beauty resided in proper measure and proper size, of parts that fit harmoniously into a seamless whole. He extended the idea of proportion to the beautiful in all things

and wrote of the best length of a speech, the optimal organization of paintings, and the proper use of language in poetry. To St. Augustine, beauty was synonymous with geometric form and balance. He thought that equilateral triangles were more beautiful than scalene triangles because their parts were more even. Squares, being composed of equal-length segments, were more beautiful still, circles even more beautiful, and the point, indivisible and pure, was the most beautiful of all. "What is beauty of the body?" he asked. "A harmony of its parts with a certain pleasing color." For Aristotle, beauty resided in "order and symmetry and definiteness." For Cicero, it was "a certain symmetrical shape of the limbs combined with a certain charm of coloring."

For Plotinus, it was a "symmetry of parts toward each other and towards a whole ... the beautiful thing is essentially symmetrical." Plotinus believed that beauty must be present in details as well as the whole; "it cannot be constructed out of ugliness, its law must run throughout." Common to all these theories is the idea that the properties of beauty are the same whether we are seeing a beautiful woman, a flower, a landscape, or a circle.

Artists throughout history have tried to capture the geometric proportions of beauty by devising measurement systems for the human body. As art historian George Hersey has noted, the most important human proportion system in Western art dates to the fifth-century Greek Polyclitus, whose sculptures of a male spear bearer and wounded female Amazon represent much-imitated standards for comprehension of the human male and female form. Polyclitus's contemporary Praxiteles articulated a similar female paragon in his Aphrodile of Cnidos. These bodily canons influenced all of Western art from approximately 450 B.C. to the early twentieth century, until modernism expanded our representations of the body. Polyclitus called his male spear bearer the Canon, and so it has remained.

For Polyclitus, and later for Albrecht Durer, Leon Battista Alberti, and Leonardo da Vinci, beauty resided in symmetry. For these artists and theoreticians, symmetry had a different meaning than it does today. When we speak of symmetry we mean exact correspondence of form on opposite sides of a dividing line or plane or central axis. To the Greeks and the Renaissance artists and scholars, symmetry meant the relation between, and the exact correspondence among parts, usually expressed in whole or rational numbers. It meant, as George Hersey has pointed out, "commensurability." So, for example, the whole body was measured in hand heights or head lengths or in relation to thumb length. Galen argued that an arm corresponding to three hand lengths is more symmetrical and hence more beautiful than one corresponding to two and a half or three and a half hand lengths.

Durer used his own finger as the unit of measure to construct a proportional system in which the length of the middle finger equaled the width of the hand, and the width of the hand was proportional to the forearm. From there, he constructed a canon for the whole body. His entire system for measuring ideal beauty rested on the proportions of his hands, which were very long-fingered. We might wonder what would have happened to Western art if Durer had had small fingers. But this is not an isolated example of an artist or scientist incorporating his own features into a universal canon. Edward Angle published a classic set of orthodontic indices in 1907 in which he used his own (European) face as the ideal. This meant that all Asians and Africans would have needed to have their teeth straightened!

During the Renaissance, particular attention was paid to the proportions of the ideal human face as well as those of the body. Durer proposed that the face in profile separates into four equal divisions, while others proposed a division into thirds with equal space from the hairline to the eyebrow, from the brow to the lower edge of the nostrils, and from the nostrils to the chin. Other neoclassical and Renaissance guidelines dictated that the height of the ear and the nose be equal,

that the distance between the eyes equal the width of the nose, that the width of the mouth be one and a half times as wide as the nose, and that the inclination of the nose bridge parallel the axis of the ear. These rules dictated the representation of beauty in Western art for centuries, and in the twentieth century are the highly influential bases from which plastic surgeons pillage to resculpt and reconstruct faces.

The canons are revered in Western civilization. But surprisingly few people have been interested in scientifically testing whether they describe the actual proportions of living beauties. However, anthropometrist Leslie Farkas took out his calipers and measured the facial proportions of two hundred women, including fifty models, as well as young men and children, and had large numbers of people rate their beauty. Then he compared his measurements and the beauty ratings with the ideals of the classical canon. His results are hardly definitive, but they provide some intriguing information. The canon did not fare well. Many of the measures did not turn out to be important, such as the relative angles of the ear and nose. Some seemed pure idealizations: none of the faces and heads in profile corresponded to equal halves or thirds or fourths. Some were inaccurate—the distance between the eyes of the beauties was greater than that suggested by the canon (the width of the nose). Farkas's results do not mean that a beautiful face will never match the Renaissance and classical ideals. But they do suggest that classical artists might have been wrong about the fundamental nature of human beauty. Perhaps they thought there was a mathematical ideal because this fit in a general way with platonic or religious ideas about the origin of the world.

Measurement systems have failed to turn up a beauty formula. Perhaps it isn't surprising that universal beauty does not conform to the ratio of Durer's finger. In fact, as we will see, beauty may come from a mathematically messy set of criteria having more to do with our biology than with ideal numbers.

## BEAUTY SATANIC AND DIVINE

No single attitude about beauty has been consistent throughout history. People have revered beauty, they have scorned it and loathed it. Plato believed that beauty made the spiritual visible. Sensual beauty imitates pure beauty, which we cannot access. Beauty, like truth and justice, is a platonic Pure Form, of which things of this world may offer us glimpses but never truly incarnate. This is how Plato explained beauty's strange power, its mysterious ability to awaken aesthetic bliss. As Thomas Mann wrote in *Death in Venice*, all virtues would inspire reverence if we could but see them: "beauty alone is ... the only form of the spiritual which we can receive through the senses. Else what would become of us if the divine, if reason and virtue and truth, should appear to us through the senses? Should we not perish and be consumed with love, as Semele once was with Zeus?"

With the arrival of Christianity, the attitude toward beauty became more ambivalent. Church leaders grappled with the right way to respond to it. "There is nothing good in the flesh," St. Clement said, "the man of god must mortify the works of the flesh." Jerome saw the flesh as something to be "conquered." The teaching of Christ told his followers to renounce temptation and the transient things of this world. Beauty was feared as a sensual temptation and a worldly vanity. But it was also revered as an image of God's grace. According to Genesis, man is made in the image of God, therefore his appearance is divine, and the more beautiful, the more Godlike. "Beauty is the mark of the well made, whether it be a universe or an object," said Thomas Aquinas, and the well made is an "imitation of an idea in the mind of the creator." The history of Judeo-Christian attitudes toward beauty reflects an agonized struggle to reconcile beauty as temptation and beauty as God's glory. In Durer's four books of human proportion, released after his death in 1528, he speaks of the physical perfection of Apollo, Adam before the Fall, and Christ. Their

perfect beauty is a sign of their divinity, while our imperfect beauty is a sign of our fall from grace.

Attitudes toward beauty are entwined with our deepest conflicts surrounding flesh and spirit. We view the body as a temple, a prison, a dwelling for the immortal soul, a tormentor, a garden of earthly delights, a biological envelope, a machine, a home. We cannot talk about our response to our body's beauty without understanding all that we project onto our flesh.

Psychoanalysis assumed a legacy of shame around the body. Freud wrote, "The love of beauty seems a perfect example of an impulse inhibited in its aim." That is, beauty derives from sexual excitement that must be deflected away from its source. "It is worth remarking that the genitals themselves, the sight of which is always exciting, are nevertheless hardly ever judged to be beautiful." Too much cultivation of beauty, he wrote, reflects pathological narcissism. Like masochism and passivity, narcissism is largely a female problem, a cover for shame and worthlessness, feelings to which women are prone.

Until recently, many people who sought cosmetic surgery ended up getting psychiatric diagnoses—they were labeled depressed, hysterical, obsessional, narcissistic. If the patient was a man, he was almost always given a psychiatric diagnosis since attention to appearance in a man was considered a graver sign than it was in a woman. In the last twenty years, the number of "healthy" recipients of plastic surgery has vastly increased according to psychiatric studies. Perhaps this is a reflection of more mainstream acceptance of plastic surgery and a greater diversity among its clients. But it is equally likely to reflect a change in modern psychiatry, which can look at appearance enhancement as something other than an unhealthy need.

Psychoanalyst John Gedo recently made the radical suggestion that cosmetic surgery is not so different from altering character traits by means of psychoanalysis: both are attempts at refashioning the self. Psychiatrist Peter Kramer has made analogies between cosmetic surgery and what he calls "cosmetic psychopharmacology," for example the use of drugs such as Prozac not just to cure depression, but to transform personality, to feel "better than well."

## THE EVOLUTION OF BEAUTY

The social sciences have been strangely absent from the rich intellectual debate about the nature of human beauty. As you will see, much of the research that informs the arguments of this book emerged only in the 1970s and after. Gardner Lindzey's 1954 *Handbook of Social Psychology*, a lengthy tome devoted to the study of social interaction, listed only one entry for "physical factors." Any reading of psychology and anthropology texts written before the late 1960s would suggest that physical appearance had absolutely no bearing on human attitudes or affections, and no role in human mental life. Why have the social sciences had so little interest in the human body?

One reason is that the social sciences were not interested in the biological "givens." As anthropologist John Tooby and psychologist Leda Cosmides have pointed out, the standard social science model (888M) that developed over the past century viewed the mind as a blank slate whose contents were determined by the environment and the social world. The mind itself was believed to consist of a few general-purpose mechanisms for perceiving and understanding the environment. It was a model that divided biology from culture, and then ignored biology (the mere slate) to probe the influential work of culture. The roots of the model within the social sciences of this century are political and social as well as intellectual.

As anthropologist Donald Symons says, you cannot understand what a person is saying unless you understand whom they are arguing with. Cultural relativism came to the intellectual forefront particularly in the United States during the 1920s as a reaction to claims that races, ethnic groups, classes, women, and so on were innately inferior. Such arguments were countered with evidence from behaviorism, showing that people can drastically alter their behavior in response to environmental rewards and punishments. As John B. Watson, the founder of behaviorism, wrote, "Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take anyone at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select-doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief, and yes even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and race of his ancestors."

Similarly, the SSSM presented evidence from other cultures to show that human behavior was malleable, plastic, and largely or wholly acquired through experience. Margaret Mead's idyllic description of the sexual freedom of Samoan girls was in this tradition. In this context, it is not surprising that the most entrenched belief about beauty among social scientists was that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." Focusing on the range and inventiveness of human adornment, from brass rings that create giraffe necks, to painted teeth and lip plates, they concluded that beauty must be a matter of individual taste or cultural dictate.

Gardner Lindzey brings up another reason that beauty was shunned by social scientists-the "spectacular failure" of previous attempts to link physical attributes to behavior (phrenology, physiognomy, and so on). In the next chapter we will review these studies and see that they yielded very little in the way of scientific fact and spread many fictions. It is no wonder that many scientists were eager to dissociate themselves from this work. Charles Darwin was one of many of its near victims. The captain of the *Beagle*, like many people of

his time, had been influenced by the physiognomist Johann Caspar Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy*, written in 1772, which suggested that certain facial features predict character. As Darwin wrote in his biography, the captain "was an ardent disciple of Lavater ... and he doubted whether anyone with my nose could possess sufficient energy and determination for the voyage." As psychologist Leslie Zebrowitz has said, "The theory of evolution was almost lost for want of a proper nose."

Social scientists shunned beauty as trivial, undemocratic, and all in all not a proper subject for science. But by the late 1960s, Lindzey was chiding his colleagues for their "neglect of morphology [outward appearance]" and suggesting, "Perhaps now is the time to restore beauty and other morphological variables to the study of social phenomena." Within the next three decades an explosion of research was to provide compelling evidence for a new view of human beauty. It suggested that the assumption that beauty is an arbitrary cultural convention may simply not be true.

The research comes at a time when scientists have begun to question anew many other assumptions about the relationship between human behavior and culture. As Leda Cosmides, John Tooby, and Jerome Barkow point out: "Culture is not causeless and disembodied. It is generated in rich and intricate ways by information-processing mechanisms situated in human minds. These mechanisms are in turn the elaborately sculpted product of the evolutionary process." Clearly, culture cannot just spring forth from nowhere; it must be shaped by, and be responsive to, basic human instincts and innate preferences. Until the 1960s it was believed that languages could vary arbitrarily and without limit, but now there is a consensus among linguists that there is a universal grammar underlying this diversity.

Similarly, it was thought that facial expressions of emotion could arbitrarily vary across cultures until the psychologist Paul Ekman

showed that many emotions are expressed by the same facial movements across cultures. Ekman made the important distinction between the facial expression of emotion (smiles, frowns, scowls, and so on), which are universal, and the rules for when to display those emotions, which show cultural variation. Similarly, aspects of judgments of human beauty may be influenced by culture and individual history, but the general geometric features of a face that give rise to perception of beauty may be universal.

Of course, no one is suggesting that people are conscious of the evolutionary rationale behind their aesthetic reactions, just that these are the pressures that shaped those reactions as the human brain evolved. Nor is anyone suggesting that learning and culture do not play any role in our judgments of beauty. As poet Charles Baudelaire wrote in the nineteenth century, beauty is made up of an "eternal invariable element" and a "relative, circumstantial element," the latter defined as "the age, its fashions, its morals, its emotions." "I defy anyone," he wrote, "to point to a single scrap of beauty which does not contain these two elements."

Putting beauty into the realm of biology completely alters the time frame of our analysis. Recent feminist writings on beauty, such as Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*, have been criticized by Camille Paglia and others for being ignorant of history, because they look at images of beauty only in this century, not throughout the thousands of years of human civilization. Paglia herself claims that beauty was invented in ancient Egypt. The premise of this book is that beauty's history is far, far longer! The ability to perceive beauty and respond to it has been with us for as long as we have been men and women.

As Cosmides and Tooby have said, "The time it takes to build circuits that are suited to a given environment is so slow it is hard to even imagine—it's like a stone being sculpted by wind-blown sand. Even relatively simple changes can take tens of thousands of years." Our

minds are products of a long history and a vanished way of life. For ninety-nine percent of the history of our species we lived as hunter gatherers in nomadic bands of small numbers. To understand our instincts, we must turn backward in time and place our minds *in habitat*.

In the following pages we will look at the argument for beauty as a biological adaptation. The argument is a simple one: that beauty is a universal part of human experience, and that it provokes pleasure, rivets attention, and impels actions that help ensure the survival of our genes. Our extreme sensitivity to beauty is hard-wired, that is, governed by circuits in the brain shaped by natural selection. We love to look at smooth skin, thick shiny hair, curved waists, and symmetrical bodies because in the course of evolution the people who noticed these signals and desired their possessors had more reproductive success. We are their descendants. Of course, such signals are now manipulated by cosmetics, plastic surgery, and clothing, three giant industries in part devoted to false advertising. Additionally, one cannot escape a comment on the irony of sexual attraction: in a world where men and women try to stave off pregnancy for the majority of their sexual encounters, sexual preference is still guided by ancient rules that make us most attracted to bodies that look the most reproductively fit. Nor can we escape the jarring thought that women compete in the mating world for men whose brains are hard-wired to find nubile teenagers highly desirable and particularly beautiful. This is not a conscious process nor a desired one but a biological holdover from a vanished way of life. Is it resistible? The reaction to beauty may be automatic, but our thoughts and our behaviors are ultimately under our control.

Beauty can be viewed as a science by focusing on the least controversial aspect of the theory: why we find babies irresistibly attractive and that parents respond more affectionately to physically attractive newborns. Infants' perceptions at three months of age are surprisingly gazing longer at attractive faces than at unattractive faces. Infants appear to come into the world equipped with the ability to

discriminate and prefer the beautiful. This has been some of the most powerful research showing that beauty preferences are not learned.

Beauty is powerful in everyday life. Beauty influences our perceptions, attitudes, and behavior toward others. Economist David Marks has said that beauty is as potent a social force as race or sex. But unlike racism and sexism, which we are conscious of, "lookism," or beauty prejudice, operates at a largely unconscious level. These studies put some of our extreme beauty practices in perspective. People are spending billions of dollars on cosmetics and plastic surgery for a reason: these industries cater to a world where looking good has survival value. Although most people would say they no longer believe that "what is beautiful is good," preferential treatment of beautiful people is extremely easy to demonstrate, as is discrimination against the unattractive.

From infancy to adulthood, beautiful people are treated preferentially and viewed more positively. This is true for men as well as women. Beautiful people find sexual partners more easily; and beautiful individuals are more likely to find leniency in the court and elicit cooperation from strangers. Beauty conveys modest but real social and economic advantages and, equally important, ugliness leads to major social disadvantages and discrimination. Do beautiful people end up being happier? Read the next reading article. The answer may surprise you.

## B. One Size Does Not Fit All: Being Beautiful, Thin and Female in America<sup>3</sup>

**JANE CAPUTI AND SUSAN NANCE**

*One of the main dangers of stereotypes is that if the stereotype is some sort of ideal, we may voluntarily sacrifice part of our individual identity to become this ideal image. Since stereotypes take away all individual differences to create a uniform type, they are always untrue. Thus, if a person gives up his or her unique selfhood to become a stereotype, that person has sacrificed his or her singular self hood for a lie. At best, doing this will make us anonymous. At worst, as Jane Caputi and Susan Nance argue in the following analysis of the thinness stereotype, doing this may cost us both our identities and our lives.*

*Caputi and Nance show us the pervasiveness of the popular belief in the stereotype that thinness, especially in women, means intelligence and beauty. In doing this they employ most of the methods for the analysis of popular stereotypes. They provide multiple examples from a variety of sources. They provide helpful historical background, even going back a thousand years to Chinese culture for parallel patterns of the stereotype. They cite data to prove just how common and influential the stereotype is. And, finally, they discuss the social implications of believing in the stereotype, in this case dangerous implications indeed.*

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<sup>3</sup> Nachbar, J. & Lause, K. (1992). One Size does Not Fit All: Being Beautiful, Thin and Female. In *American Pop Culture: An Introductory Text*, USA: Bowling Green State University, pp. 292-311.

*Chances are that no matter what you read in this article and no matter how convinced you may be that what it says is true, during the next couple of years, whether you are a man or a woman, you will go on a diet. You will suffer and then soon after, gain at least all of the weight back again. This is the statistical pattern that a vast number of American adults experience regularly. (Most Europeans and Africans think we are nuts in this mania.) Thus, we experience the power of popular beliefs, especially beliefs in stereotypes, first hand. Despite scientific evidence, despite medical advice, despite the negative effects on our individuality, despite our continuous failure, despite all common sense, we go ahead and diet anyway. Popular beliefs are above logic and, above all, they move us to action<sup>4</sup>.*

In the past few seasons, they [the writers on *Growing Pains*] have been insensitive in making her character [Carol Seaver] look fat even though she wasn't in real life. Her TV brothers were always making belittling fat jokes about her. The worst Carol-bashing took place in an episode in which Carol was exercising in her room and the floor beneath her collapsed. Of course, everyone blamed her weight for the accident. (Duane Eklof, in a letter to *TV Guide*, Feb. 17, 1992)

"I told her it looked like she was going too far with the weight thing."  
(Joanna Kerns, actress who played Tracey Gold's mother on *Growing Pains*)

"We teased her in a friendly way when she got thin, but then she went over the edge." (Alan Thicke, actor who played Tracey's father, a psychiatrist, quoted in Rosen, *People*, Feb. 17, 1992: 94-5).

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<sup>4</sup> This essay is slightly different from what was published in *The Popular Culture Reader*, 3rd Edition. Christopher Geist and Jack Nachbar, eds. Bowling Green. OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1983. Reprinted with permission.

Tracey Gold, a young actress on the rather aptly-named television family sit-com, *Growing Pains*, is but the latest of a long line of dancers, models, actresses and athletes to "go public" with her story of anorexia and bulimia. First diagnosed with anorexia at the age of twelve, Tracey was treated and apparently "cured" by four months of psychiatric therapy. In the midst of her success, seven years later, she began compulsive dieting again.

I was made fun of by a casting agent. If I were a different person, it probably would have rolled off my back. But I have the kind of personality where I will let these kinds of comments affect me. I've always wanted to please people (Rosen 94).

By the time Tracey's mother noticed her body without the oversized sweaters which she affected, the 5'3" actress weighed 90 pounds. Like the more than seven million other young women who suffer from eating disorders, Tracey Gold's desire to please others resulted in her self imposed starvation. Tracey was persuaded to leave the show and to work on her recovery.

In contemporary America, not only sex appeal, but beauty, success, intelligence, morality, health and likability are just some of the qualities that are put to the scales. For example, one study of college admission rates found that overweight girls have only one-third the chance of being admitted to prestigious colleges as slim girls with identical records (Mayer 91). In college, as everywhere else, only one female body type is socially valued-the trim line, slender-all, maxi thin, or Virginia slim. Even our consumer products display the desired form for the cult of the thin that has invaded every facet of the culture. The thin ideal is visually preached not only by commodities, but by celebrity images, fashion models and rituals such as beauty contests. It is acted out for us by "weight saints" such as Jane Fonda and Richard

Simmons. It is prescribed by best-selling diet and work-out books, women's magazines, and TV shows, and shamed into us by the unfunny jokes of family and friends or the unfriendly, but trendy, advice of health professionals.

It might at first appear that all this worry about weight revolves simply around concern with the fit and healthy body, but this would be as foolish as presuming that the sun revolves around the earth. Although the bottom-line argument for thinness and dieting is that being overweight constitutes some grave health hazard, this is increasingly being shown up as false. Being 25-30 percent above your optimum weight can contribute to diabetes, gall bladder or cardiac problems, but for the majority who are only a few pounds over the standard, this is by no means the case. Actually, the latest studies have shown a greater longevity for those who are slightly padded. The Metropolitan Life Insurance Co., the organization responsible for those intimidating height and weight charts, has revised its recommendations for healthy proportions, upping the allowed weights by thirteen pounds in some instances ("Keep Your Double Chins Up," *Newsweek*, March 14, 1983: 65).

Recent evidence has also suggested that each individual has some natural "setpoint" weight around which their body naturally fluctuates. That is why most of those who do manage to lose weight through dieting invariably "fail" and return to their original weight. It also indicates that those who achieve thinness through constant dieting do so at the high risk of permanent physical and mental stress, actually sacrificing health for the fashionably thin image (Rennet and Gurin).

First and foremost, thinness is a fashion. Fat and thin are shifting standards (as are those for ugliness and beauty) and have been differently defined in every human culture. Furthermore, fat and thin have to do with fascism as well as fashion, with politics as well as aesthetics. Thinness is primarily an ideal of female beauty but such

beauty is neither value free nor culturally anonymous. We must always ask to whom it is pleasing and why, how wide the defined range of beauty or how narrow and if, in fact, that range admits only one, idealized type. In Nazi Germany, for example, the stereotypic blue-eyed blonde was the fashion dictate for purely ideological reasons. That, of course, was a racist and genocidal system in which, "Outward appearance was always stressed as a sign of the correct racial soul" (Massee). Yet how qualitatively different is that attitude from the one in modern America whereby outward appearance is taken to be an infallible indicator of one's sexual, racial or economic stability?

Although slenderness is only a look, an image presumably of beauty, it is frankly a narrow stereotype that functions as a badge or token for an accompanying ideology. In America, thinness is a socially recognized sign, for class status, sexuality, grace, discipline and "being good," whereas *fat* is now a categorical derogative for those stigmatized as stupid, sick, self-indulgent, neurotic, lazy, sad, bad and invariably ugly.<sup>5</sup> All such associations, images and prejudices have coalesced into a modern image of good looks, physical size and social consequences-a body of culturally specific beliefs that both reflect and reinforce the sexual, racial and economic politics of the time.

### *The Fair Sex*

Why does a beautiful girl need an I.Q. to say I do?

20th century popular song<sup>6</sup>

The stereotype of female slenderness is a sub-set of a much larger stereotype of women and beauty. Thus, before specifically analyzing

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<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, members of NAAFA (National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance) have chosen to claim the word "fat" as opposed to "overweight," stating that the latter assumes the actuality of an *ideal* "over" which one is judged to be.

<sup>6</sup> This line is cited in Una Stannard "The Mask of Beauty," *Women in Sexist Society*, Vivian Gornick and Barbara K. Moran, eds. New York: Basic Books; reprinted by Signet, 1972. 187-203.

the modern fashion of thinness, we first should give some attention to cultural conceptions and functions of beauty.

No one is born with an innate sense of what constitutes good looks; rather, we learn and internalize cultural standards through a general process of socialization. Furthermore, the traits we are taught to either esteem or scorn are often rooted in narrow prejudices. When Black Liberation in the 1960s first coined the slogan, "Black is beautiful," it was a reaction against decades of racist conditioning that black features were in and of themselves displeasing. For example, in August 1968, *The Thunderbolt*, an extremist anti-black newspaper, stated quite baldly, "most white men are not attracted to Negro women because they are ugly" (Stember 1992, 20).

One of the most effective methods of transmitting racist attitudes is to fuse some racial traits with ugliness (brown skin, big lips, kinky hair) and to exalt others as the epitome of earthly beauty (white skin, blonde hair, blue eyes). Moreover, we are then judged not only by how well we ourselves fit the culturally approved standards, but also by how much we have accepted these as our own, even if they negate our actual physical selves and self-interests.

A Stanford-Binet I.Q. test from 1960 makes all of this abundantly clear. Drawings of two women illustrate one of the test questions which reads, "Which is prettier?" The figure on the left has styled hair; her face shows evidence of make-up.



Perhaps most significantly, her eyes are cast downward and to the side. The figure on the right, however, presents a totally different

<sup>7</sup> A test question from an I.Q. test.

aspect and mood. Her hair is coarse and unattended; even worse, facial hair can be seen on her cheeks. Her nose is large as are her lips. She looks directly into the eyes of her beholders. These two pictures were surprisingly used in an IQ test. The question can be developed as: "Which" (we might also consider the use of the inanimate pronoun) then, "is prettier?" Any who do not wish to make their intelligence suspect would necessarily choose the figure on the left. Yet how fair is such a test? What does this question really measure—our intelligence or our internalization of a cultural bias? Also, is its function not only to test, but also to teach us that very cultural bias?

This simple set of images effectively conveys some basics of sexism and racism as they are intertwined with the larger cultural stereotyping of beauty.

### 1) *Women are the pretty sex:*

It is hardly likely that this question could be sexually reversed and that there be drawings of two men with the same query, "Which is prettier?" Even if we substituted the word *handsome* the situation would remain absurd. In our culture, looks are not supposed to be a primary concern of men. Handsomeness might be a side-effect of masculinity, but it is certainly not a necessary or definitive attribute. Prettiness and the primacy of appearance are, however, considered to be eminently feminine traits. In 1852, *Godey's Lady's Book* (a combination of *Cosmopolitan/Good Housekeeping* magazine for the 19th century) offered this dictum, "It is a women's business to be beautiful" (Banner), i.e. her occupation, preoccupation and sexual obligation. Although such an association of women and beauty may at first appear to be complimentary, its ramifications are actually far from flattering.

In return for this "compliment," women are expected to relinquish their claims to vast fields of human endeavor. The first of these is intelligence and creativity. Rather than create great works of art, women

are expected to regard themselves as works of art, to sculpt their bodies, develop their breasts, and paint their faces as aesthetic expression. Furthermore, the negative correlation of beauty to brains is everywhere propagandized. Oscar Wilde once flattered his own sex by noting, "No woman is a genius; women are a decorative sex." Rooted in this belief about female beauty is *the stereotype* not only of the dumb blonde, but also the companion belief in the general intellectual inferiority of women.

The second field that must be surrendered is worldly power. Whereas women's sexual charm is centrally located in their physicality, men's chief allure emanates from their work, achievement, wealth and social station, essentially from their *power*. Henry Kissinger, then Secretary of State, was once asked about the nature of his attractiveness to and escorting of some of the renowned beauties of the late 1960s. "Power is the ultimate aphrodisiac," he responded.

Finally, the stereotype of feminine beauty designates women as sex objects, not only in the eyes of the men who behold them, but also in their own eyes. Fashion thus becomes a social master and the female body, and all that is considered to be wrong or ugly about it, becomes a woman's enemy and obsession for life. Although fashion purportedly exists because women are inherently so beautiful, its actual implication is that without submitting to its standards, treatments, and rituals, most women would be hopelessly fat, hairy, aged and ugly. Such standards have come more and more to include medical "intervention." In a new and dangerous trend, breast augmentation and implant surgeries have reached new heights. Encouraged by a self-serving medical specialty, almost two million women have had silicone implants; only recently have studies and statistics begun to accumulate the data which cites the dangers. Moreover, one of the most insidious manipulations of women's fears and insecurities about their bodies took its form when the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons, in testimony before the FDA, stated: "There is a substantial and enlarging body of

medical information and opinion to the effect that these *deformities* (small breasts) are really a disease." Thus, what is natural in a woman's body is transformed by male size preference, in collaboration with a \$500 million-a-year implant business, into the disease of "micromastia." It becomes another reflection of fashion for which there is now a "cure," a final decision to re-create oneself according to external guidelines (Ehreneich 88). It is really only the made-up woman, concocted in cultural stereotypes and imagery, who is considered to be the "true" beauty.

2) *Submission is beautiful and feminine beauty is submissive:*

Marabel Morgan wrote in her best-seller, *The Total Woman*, "It is only when a woman surrenders her life to her husband, reveres and worships him, and is willing to serve him, that she becomes really beautiful to him" (Morgan 96). Beauty here is unmistakably in the eye of the beholder and that eye is one of an overseer.

In the imagery of the I.Q. test, it is crucial to note that the prettier picture has cast her eyes demurely to the side while the fearsome woman gives a direct and unwavering gaze. This is a classic instance of body language. Averted eyes signify submission. A component of feminine prettiness and desirability is a willingness to submit. Such principles are then coded into the stereotypes that say that men must be older, taller, larger, stronger and more experienced than women, and that women must be younger, smaller, thinner, weaker and more naive than the men they accompany.

3) *The image of the beautiful woman functions as an icon or symbol for the beliefs and values of the core culture:*

Today's culture worships itself in its myth of physical perfection as dramatized by celebrities, fashion models, sports heroes and movie

stars. These types are the modern equivalent of more traditional, action-oriented heroes. But the *look* of such figures in this image-ruled world is as critical to analyze as were the *deeds* of the former types. Film theorist Bela Balazs has commented:

The physical incarnation of the hero or heroine is beauty of a kind which exactly expresses the ideologies and aspirations of those who admire it. We must learn to read beauty as we have learned to read the bee. (284)

We have seen that racism can be discerned in both the absence of any truly celebrated images of colored beauty and in the ceaseless procession of clone-like, blue-eyed blondes from Farrah Fawcett and Cheryl Ladd to Cheryl Tiegs and Christie Brinkley. This type is celebrated because it represents an idealized racial and sexual symbol. That is also why those particular looks are stereotyped and finally perceived by nearly all to actually *be* beautiful.

And what of our Stanford-Binet illustrations? The pretty woman share; with supermodels Tiegs and Brinkley those regular and clearly white features... Her ugly counterpart, however, is just as clearly of an unspecified, but (because of the association with ugliness) strongly disfavored ethnic origin; her nose, lips and hairiness all point in that unmistakably racist direction. Furthermore, what would we find were we able to view these figures from the neck down? Undoubtedly, our pretty model would be somewhat shapelessly slim and trim while the ugly would fall somewhere into that wide range of the hopelessly and unfashionably fat. The thin ideal is as much an ideological symbol as blond hair or certain facial features. What then are the ideologies and aspirations it reveals and how can we learn to re3d the "beautiful" body along with the "beautiful" face?



A deliberately distorted advertisement photograph, elongating the already slim model.

### *The Fashionable Woman*

Although not everyone in the urban west suffers from anorexia, a social dimension of the problem can also be suggested. While it was once fashionable to be as plump and "well-discovered" as ladies in paintings by Titian and Renoir, we have seen a shift towards an ideal of thinness as exemplified in the art of Klimt and Schiele and in fashion models such as Twiggy and Veruschka. This change in socially accepted style has been so complete that it is necessary to pause and remind ourselves that in other societies and historical periods girls who looked like Twiggy would have had to resign themselves to camouflage or to staying at home (Polhemus 22-3).

In ideal cultural form, men become heroes; in ideal cultural form, women appear as models. Art historian John Berger has written that how a woman appears to others, especially men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success or failure of her life. He states, "Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women, but also the relation of women

to themselves" (46-7). In response to this situational surveillance, women do tend to cultivate themselves as objects of the male gaze. They watch themselves in mirrors, watch other women to see how they compare, and finally, following fashion, they watch their weight.

All the researchers agree; fear of fat is primarily a female concern. Even though the incidence of obesity is not always higher among women and in some age brackets is actually lower than in men, the generic dieter, anorexic and bulimic are all female. At any given time, nearly 50 percent of all American women are on a diet of some kind of another; moreover, 80 percent rate themselves as unhappy with their present weight. Dieting is an obsession not only among adult women, but has assumed the dimensions of an initiation rite for teenage girls. One study found that 60 percent of all girls between the ages of ten and thirteen had already been on a diet; 80 percent of all American girls have dieted by the time they reach eighteen<sup>8</sup>. It has often been disparagingly remarked that were it to become fashionable for women to be plump tomorrow all diets would be immediately abandoned and women would begin to stuff themselves like geese. That may be superficially true, but the meaning can be all too easily misconstrued. Such an observation does not really attest to some simple foolishness of women. Rather, it indicates the immense weight of social pressure on women to submit to the dictates of fashion.

Indubitably, women are the fashionable sex. Yet, although easily overlooked, the word *fashion* is not only or even primarily a noun or adjective. It is also a verb and it is the verb form that reveals its character. As a verb, *fashion* means "to make; shape; form; mold; contrive." Hence, the fashionable woman is literally the one who can be bent, stretched, shrunk or even beaten into the requirements of the prevailing mode. Fashion often seems freely chosen, but oppression

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<sup>8</sup> For statistics on women and weight contra! see *Newsweek*, March 1988: 59.

can be made to look consensual, torture pleasurable. Marilyn Frye tells us that:

The root of the word "oppression" is the element "press."

*The press of the crowd; pressed into military service; to press a pair of pants ... Presses are used to mold things or flatten them or reduce them in bulk, sometimes to reduce them by squeezing out the gasses or liquids in them. Something pressed is something caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict or prevent the thing's motion or mobility.*

Mold. Immobilize. Reduce. (54)

For nine centuries in China (ending only with the 1949 revolution) female foot binding was the mandatory and definitive beauty ritual for women. Only those peasants who had to work were spared this practice which left the less fortunate, but truly fashionable women with three inch putrescent stubs that were useless for walking, let alone running or dancing. The doctored feet leaked pus, reeked of rotten flesh, and had to be kept wrapped and hidden in bandages. Nevertheless, these ceremonial wounds were fetishized as the supreme expression of beauty and given such deceptive names as "lotus" feet (Daly 1978).

Western civilization believed that they have been free of such customs. As Helene Roberts has pointed out, tight-lacing of a corset produced the mandatory hourglass figure for 19th century American women. Yet at the same time it interfered with the oxygen supply and frequently caused hazardous compression of the vital organs and displacement of the ribs. The corset not only constrained a woman's figure, but also her movements and lifestyle. Thus bound, she could never engage in any strenuous activities. Her movements restricted, she was "naturally" confined to the domestic sphere. As Roberts

argues, such dress actually molded not only the body of the wearer, but also her consciousness:

Dress projected the message to the observer that the wearer was willing to conform to the submissive pattern, but dress also helped to mold the behavior of the woman to that pattern.

The diet is the logical descendent of rituals such as foot binding and corseting. Its purpose, equally, is to fashion the body of the subject to the culturally dictated standard and, like those prior rites, dieting and the general cult of slimness have as great a molding effect on the *psyche* of the dieter as on her *physique*. Such effects include a distorted self-image, anxiety, self-hatred and self-destructiveness that can even lead to disease and death.

A women who stands 5'5" and weighs 150 or even 140 pounds might consider herself something of a monster. Yet she is really far less of a human anomaly than that international sensation of 1966-67, fashion model Twiggy. Dr. Hilde Buch, an expert on eating disorders, reminds us that:

...as a malnourished waif, "Twiggy" (5'7", 92 lbs.), was held up as a model for thousands of normally developing adolescents. It made them concentrate their mental energies on achieving a similar starved appearance even at the sacrifice of their health (*Eating Disorders* 19).

The Twiggy image not only transmitted a drastically new look, but simultaneously scrambled the perceptions of all those who received it. With Twiggy as the new standard, the whole scale of thin through fat was down-shifted. Those healthy women who clearly did not look anything like Twiggy were bumped up into the fat zone and were seen

that way, not only by others, but by themselves. It has been shown that men don't start to worry about their weight until they are at least thirty-five pounds over the national average, but women think of themselves as *fat* if they are fifteen or twenty pounds over their culture's desire (Chernin 62).

Seeing yourself as fatter than you really are, is actually a characteristic symptom of anorexia nervosa, a disease Bruch defines as the "relentless pursuit of excessive thinness" (*The Golden Cage* ix). Extremely rare before 1960, it has now gotten seriously out of control. A PBS *Nova* program broadcast on March 22, 1983 reported that one out of every hundred girls in America was developing the disease, and that up to twenty-one percent of these die from starvation or related complications. Eight years later, the disorders of anorexia nervosa and bulimia have become classified by the Surgeon-General of the United States as an epidemic. A 1990 NCAA survey of athletic programs at 801 schools in the U.S. states that 64 percent of their athletes reported at least one incident of an eating disorder within the previous two years (*Women's Sports and Fitness* 22).

At least one precedent for this collaboration between disease and fashion was set in 19th century America. The reigning feminine stereotype at that time was that of a flower-like, ethereal, almost tubercular creature. Historian Lois Banner has written:

So powerful was the desire for delicacy that it became fashionable to appear ill, according to contemporary observers, Abba Gould Wilson contended that "the ill are studiously copied as models of female attractiveness." (51)

Although this notion of the ill-being is used as models of female beauty sounds bizarre, this is actually quite similar to the contemporary situation. One writer on eating disorders reserved a small section of her book to those whom she termed "vocational anorexics," those who must

appear thin in order to perform their jobs-dancers, fashion models, and actresses (Cauwels 108-9). (The ballet dancer Gelsey Kirkland, however, lost the starring role in *The Turning Point* because-at 87 pounds-she was too weak to perform and too thin for the film aesthetics [Rosen 98].) Yet these are the very women who function as role models for young women. Not only is their professional thinness achieved through the artifice of constant dieting, but the photos in which they appear are themselves masterworks of illusion, literally trick photography. One model who participated in an ad for designer jeans related that the jeans she had to wear were actually two sizes too small. Nevertheless, three people were enlisted to force her into them. Then, unable to move, she had to be lowered to the floor like a board. The finished picture, nonetheless, seemed to be an effortless illustration of what we should all aspire to look like in designer jeans.

One of the characteristic symptoms of anorexia nervosa is the inability to realistically gauge one's own body size and image. When these girls, often weighing as little as 70 pounds, look into the mirror they continue to see themselves as too fat, still not thin enough for the marketplace. It is not improbable that this psychic and symptomatic distortion is causally connected to the conventional distortions and glamour of fashion imagery. Moreover, this style of "thinking anorexically" affects almost all nominally healthy women to some degree. Rare indeed is the woman who is not convinced that she would look far better minus a few pounds of flesh, the woman who has never dieted, the one who is not always aware of her weight and body image or one who can refrain from agonizing on this theme in the company of like-minded cultists.

Starving oneself through anorexia is admittedly' an extreme form of self-hatred, but normal dieting itself can induce similar alienations. The dieter not only despises her fat image, but constantly aware of her body, its appetites and their denial, experiences her own body as an enemy presence, one that must be defeated, stifled, shut up and

reduced. Self-loathing often reaches such an extreme that many women have expressed their desire to just cut away the offending flesh—the protruding or merely curved stomach, the supposed glut of buttocks, the seemingly excessive thighs. The obsession with slenderness has caused many to seek out those very mutilations, and a new line of cosmetic surgeons has emerged to enable anyone who can afford it to act out those very fantasies and desires. So-called cosmetic mutilations are external; other varieties are internal. Of those 5,000 people who annually have their intestines removed to block absorption of nutrition, 80 percent are women (Chernin 62). The relatively new technique of liposuction actually vacuums away the offensive fat, disposing of it entirely or reinserting some of it into other body sites.

Finally, in pursuit of the unrealistic and patently unreachable stereotype of slenderness, most women achieve only an unremitting sense of failure. Studies have consistently demonstrated that 98 percent of those who lose weight by dieting gain it all back within a year. Worse yet, 90 percent of those who have "successfully" dieted gain back more than they ever lost in the first place. Thus, in a bizarre reversal, the widespread practice of dieting itself may be responsible for much of the added weight upon Americans (Chernin 29-30).

Two years ago I won the President's Physical Fitness Award. I was 5 feet and 103 lbs. The boys at school said I was "built" and my parents worried that physically I was too mature for my age. Before I left for summer camp, my boyfriend and father joked about my "padded" hips. For the first time, I considered dieting... That fall I stopped eating.  
(Shaughn Reiss, recovering anorexic, in Rosen 94)

Fashionable customs such as foot binding or corseting not only reshaped the female body, but crippled and constrained it in the

process, thus female beauty could be found in a useless three-inch foot, or a breathless, sixteen-inch waist. Then, the finished or fashioned body could be used to confirm the stereotype of women as the "weaker" sex. In this regard, dieting manifestly continues that tradition.

The relation between women and fashion has traditionally been one of dominance and submission. If the basic purpose of fashion is to make women "beautiful," i.e. pleasing to men, it may well be that the constantly shifting styles-be they thinness or roundness, long skirts or short are themselves secondary. What is primary is a common symbolic denominator of *submission*. Submission, weakness and inferiority are the background attraction factors in female fashion and it is these factors that imbue any style with its fundamental sex appeal. Recently, slenderness has come into its own as a mass style with a similar strategem and effect.

In the late 1960s, a body of research on the social implications of dieting pointed to a marked sexual difference in attitudes toward body weight and size. Girls consistently perceived themselves as fatter than they actually were and chose dieting as their favorite method of trying to lose weight. Boys, on the other hand, not only tended to diet far less frequently than girls, but usually expressed a desire to *gain* weight and to be larger in all dimensions. Girls, however, wanted "to be smaller in almost all dimensions and to lose weight" (Dwyer et al.). Here we reach the symbolic message center of the slenderness style and stereotype. We can express it this simply: in this culture men are encouraged to gain or win and women are encouraged to lose, men to increase and women to reduce,

Even in our afraid-of-weight era, a larger physical size still communicates strength, solidity and power. Contemporary slang designates important matters as "heavy." Important people are said to "carry more weight," to have some "weight to throw around." Those who are inconsequential are "lightweights" who can be easily "blown off".

Such notions cannot be separated from sexual stereotypes. Thinness and dieting are part of a comprehensive process of female minimization and diminishment. Almost all elements of feminine charm conspire to produce this effect—the demure, downcast eyes, the carefully modulated voice, tiny graceful movements, a neat and contained appearance, etc. But no contemporary stereotype has been so relentless as slenderness, no ritual so effective as the diet which actually reduces the physical boundaries of the female, striking particularly hard during those crucial, formative and initiatory rites of adolescence.

In *The Silent Language*, Edward T. Hall states quite simply that "space speaks" (162). The fact that women now ritually inhibit their appetites and reduce their bodily dimensions means that they literally take up even less space than before and, as always, less space than men. No wonder that the creator of the Miller Lite beer commercials, one of the most successful ad campaigns on television, stresses that his commercials never mention *dieting*. Instead they concentrate on evoking a rough, macho atmosphere and promote beer as "less filling" because dieting is for women ("Rich, Thin and Beautiful," ABC, April 10, 1983). Of course, those people who fill up less space are perceived to be less intimidating and powerful. You can be sure that when a *Cosmopolitan* cover (Feb. 1983) exhorts its readers to be "Bigger and Firmer," it is referring not to their self-image or decisiveness, but to their busts.

The writer-producer-director of the first film to deal specifically with eating disorders (*The Famine Within*, 1990), Katherine Gilday, stated in an interview:

I'm interested in the way that our North American culture values the idea of control of the body over nature to such an extent that we're terrified at the thought of letting appetite go. If we let appetite go, it's going to be this overwhelming force. The idea that the body might have its

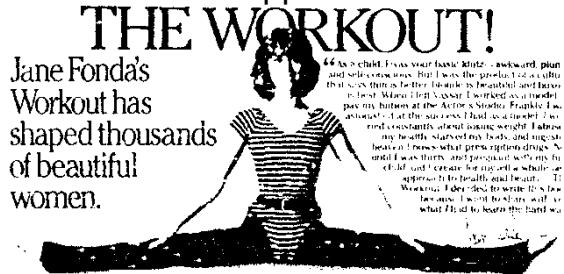
own regulatory system means that your control is illusory the whole culture seems to have a lot of trouble with that. I was particularly interested in the way that women's bodies so often bear the burden of these fears about loss of control. (Cineaste 39)

Along these lines, Kim Chernin has argued that dieting is a specifically female ritual because in a sexist culture men are basically allowed to eat, to literally and symbolically satisfy their appetites and pleasures. Women, however, must learn to limit themselves and their desires; they are urged to deny their urges, to refuse pleasure and to limit their appetites, be they for food or for more abstract gratifications. Chernin further proposes that the current obsession with female slenderness is a cultural response to feminism, a reaction provoked by male fear of a burgeoning female power, not waistline (96-110). Before dismissing such an approach, remember that we are not talking only about the obviously obese, but also about an artificial and unhealthy ideal of thinness imposed upon normal-sized women.

Some might object here and point to what *Time* magazine a decade ago proclaimed as a "new ideal of beauty," a female strength and fitness (72-77). Yet the classification of strength as a fashion or ideal of beauty weakens it intolerably by putting it back into the cage of that most sacrosanct feminine stereotype-the obligation to appearance. Although often heralded under the banner of health, strength or cardiac control, the true mission of the female dieter or work-out artist is almost invariably a very feminine concern with beauty.

A close reading of that bestselling *phenomenon*-Jane Fonda's *Workout Book*-exposes that all too familiar and flabby motivation. Although some cheers are directed toward getting strong, sound nutrition and the hazards of environmental pollution, Fonda's rationalizations and confessions reveal the traditional femininity behind

her approach: looks are still the number one issue. For example, her preoccupation with working out dates from an intimidating moment in *California Suite* when she had to appear in a bikini.



**Let It make YOU the most beautiful you ever!**

A few years later, her commitment would receive renewed vigor when *On Golden Pond* required a similar scene. And that film itself was so fascinating because of Fonda's *image* of strength was so clearly belied by the weakness of her character. One critic observed, "As *On Golden Pond*'s Chelsea, Fonda sure looked like a dynamic, physically strong woman, but she had the emotional strength of a whiny nine-year-old" (Hoffman IS-18). Obviously, this was strength for strut, not substance. In the introduction to the *Workout*, Fonda admits that like so many women she had been guilty of abusing her body-binging, purging, and crashing in order to achieve "an imposed ideal of beauty." In a later interview, Fonda said that she had been bulimic from the age of 12 to 35, and often vomited as often as 20 times each day (Rosen 97). She further confesses, "I myself had played an unwitting role as a movie star and sex symbol in perpetrating the stereotypes that affected women all over the world" (Fonda 20). But where exactly is the big change?

Fonda is still doing exactly what she gets paid for-setting stereotypic standards, performing as a movie star, a professional beauty dispensing her secrets (for a price) to the ordinary who hope (mostly in vain) that some of her glamour will rub off on them. Above all she is a *female* star (could anyone seriously consider a *Peter Fonda's Workout Book?*) and a sex symbol, whose most recent

acceptance of those standards finds its expression in her recent silicone breast implantations. Women worked out with Jane in the 1980s and 1990s like they cut their hair for Farrah in the 1970s. An ad in *Cosmopolitan* tells it exactly like it is: "Jane Fonda's Workout has shaped thousands of beautiful women. Let it make YOU the most beautiful ever." This ad is wedged in with all the other sleazy black and white one-pagers for breast developers, diet pills and Shrink Wrap reduction systems. As these ads indicate, the Fonda book is generically the same; finally, it is equally insulting for the new thin and strong ideal is actually a very old one, not only of traditional femininity, but also of class privilege, conspicuous display and conspicuous leisure. The workout is primarily a form of pretend work for those who do not need to labor to survive.

### *The Consumer Society*

In this era, when inflation has assumed alarming proportions and the threat of nuclear war has become a serious danger, when violent crime is on the increase and unemployment a persistent social fact, five hundred people are asked by the pollsters what they fear most in the world and one hundred and ninety of them answer that their greatest fear is "getting fat." Kim Chernin

I won't even lick a postage stamp-one never knows about  
calories. Esther, an anorexic

In the nineteenth century the wealthy proclaimed themselves to the world with conspicuous consumption-opulent display in both their persons and their possessions. This situation has shifted in this century. A vast gulf still exists between rich and poor but in America

at least, most people can get enough to eat. Moreover, junk food, fast food and cheap food is always more fattening. In order to distinguish themselves from the lower classes, the rich have taken to spending enormous amounts of time and money to remain "in shape," i.e., thin. In one study, researchers showed that while only 5 percent of upper-class women in Manhattan were overweight, fully 30 percent of lower-class women were. Such discrepancies cannot be attributed to some racial or ethnic factor, because among people who moved up the class ladder only 12 percent remained overweight (Beler 261-2). In America, as they say, you can never be too rich or too thin.

Just as white people can relish getting a tan because they really don't have to be colored in a racist society, so can comparatively rich people exalt thinness because they really don't have to starve. Most of the world's population does not get enough to eat while 25 percent systematically overeat. If all the available food calories for any given day were distributed evenly among the world, we would each get about two hundred. Everyone would starve. That is not because the earth cannot support its population, but because equitably feeding the world is neither a priority nor even a goal. Five times as many agricultural resources in the form of land, water, energy and fertilizer are used to provide for a North American than for the average Indian, Nigerian or Columbian (Brown et al. 219-30).

Not only do Americans consume more, the quality of their food in the form of meat, milk and eggs is also much higher. An individual in an underdeveloped country consumes a share of roughly 400 lbs. of grain directly per year, while individuals in the developed calories feed 800 lbs. of an annual 1000 lbs. share to the stock so that they can eat beef. Twenty pounds of vegetable protein are lost in the production of each pound of beef (of which each American consumes a yearly average of 116 lbs.). This expensive eating habit provides the body with far *more* protein than it can absorb and, when measured in with the meat-eating of other developed nations, results in the loss of 18 million tons of

protein, enough to make up 90 percent of the protein deficit in the entire world (Pines 77).<sup>9</sup>

It has been pointed out that it has become literally an American patriotic duty *to consume* (Wright et al. 226-37). Yet we over-consume and waste not only food, but all of the natural resources-oil, gas, electricity, water and space as well as technology, leisure and luxury. In order for the West to realize its "ideals" of abundance, the rest of the world must be relatively deprived. It is fully ironic that Twiggy first hit her stride in the fashionable West approximately coincident with the international sensation of mass starvation in Biafra. As pictures of each phenomenon flooded our consciousness, it would not have been too difficult to understand this style's symbolic undercurrent of pain, guilt and even death - a subliminal message undoubtedly intuited and legitimatized by each subsequent anorexic.

One anorexic confessed:

I feel guilty when I eat anything, especially high-calorie food. I feel naughty, low, base repulsed by myself after I eat. I feel like I overeat if I eat normally. (Bruch, *Gulden Cage* 85)

The new disease of anorexia and its fatalities are sacrificial or scapegoat deaths for the self-proclaimed consumer society. We all speak of "being good" when we stick to our diets and "being bad" or naughty when we ritually "pig out." Yet the issue of food and who eats what in the modern world is truly one that is fraught with morality, guilt and anxiety-those emotions that anorexics ritually dramatize for us all. While the world starves, the rich countries have invented a fashion of artificial thinness. We buy food that is deliberately empty of calories-all

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<sup>9</sup> We are indebted to Kriemhild Ornelas for these sources and the use of her unpublished paper, "Development of Western Countries as a Model for Underdeveloped Countries," 1977.

the *lite* products, the Nutrasweet chewing gums and sodas-bill ion-dollar industries against a backdrop of death in the third world.

The world's death toll from starvation must also be seen as ritualistic and even requisite in order for the West to maintain its gluttonous standard of life. We fetishize the consumption of food and despise its resultant fat because it so obviously demonstrates our gluttony for the goods of the world. We contain any shame, concern and morality by giving lip service to slenderness, watching our weights, and making mostly women again being used as the showpieces and symbols of the core culture-mimic the effects of starvation in their bodies. But this is pure glamour and show. There is little evidence that the core culture wishes in any way to restrict its appetites. The show of leanness is finally both hypocritical and absurd.

In an interesting footnote to these issues, reports in the 1990s are surfacing of an anti-dieting movement, both within women's ranks and in those of the medical profession. Recent N.I.H. (National Institutes of Health) studies have confirmed that diets simply do not work and may, indeed, be detrimental to good health. Anti-dieting advocates argue that eating in accordance to one's *natural appetites*, consumption of healthy foods, regular exercise and, specifically, acceptance of and making peace with one's own body, will result in weight stability and wellbeing. Recognition that most weight issues are societal and value-laden is resulting in a growing number of women who are rejecting this traditional means of self-punishment. Demonstrations are reported at which women are trashing scales and carrying banners with such messages as "Scales Are For Fish, Not For Women." Those in the vanguard of weight loss professionals directly challenge the practices of conservative, traditional medicine. They say that:

The medical establishment's drumbeat, blaming excess weight for health problems, is one way that medicine and

the \$37 billion diet industry keep dieters, who are overwhelmingly female, on weight-loss regimes..." There are co studies proving that weight causes disease; the predilection to certain diseases could well cause the extra weight... (O'Neill I, 21)

For women accustomed to the punishment and deprivations of traditional weight-loss diets, to the pain and loss of self-esteem inherent in the irrational and artificial standards of "thin is beautiful," this change in perception can be extremely politicizing. The growing awareness of how deeply one's life has been affected by the failure to meet these external standards (and of the arbitrary nature of the standards themselves) must inevitably lead to a positive self-consciousness and a freedom from the confinement of this artificial beauty trap.

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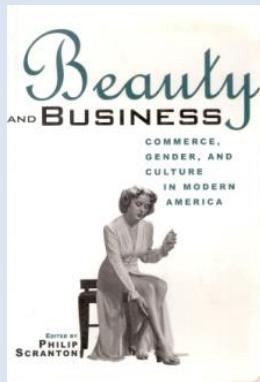
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### C. On Beauty... and the History of Business<sup>10</sup>

KATHY PEISS



What can historians learn by making beauty a subject of research and investigation? Beauty and business—one might as well say: beauty and the beast. These terms conjure up distinct domains, different images, and contrasting values. Beauty is seemingly frivolous, superficial, and female, the subject of aesthetics, art, poetry, and most recently, feminist criticism. Business, in contrast, connotes serious, consequential, indeed manly activity, the intellectual domain of economists and social scientists.

Until recently, business historians have not yielded to beauty—at least as a subject of scholarly inquiry. The field has been so much defined by studies of heavy industry and corporate power that the activities of hairdressers, fashion designers, and Avon ladies have largely gone unnoticed. But beauty is big business, with large-scale production, international distribution networks, media-saturation advertising, scientific marketing, and sales in the billions of dollars. And business historians have begun to take notice. Placing business within the broad narratives of American history, they increasingly investigate how economic enterprises interacted with cultural and social developments, responding to and influencing them in turn.

<sup>10</sup> Peiss, Kathy. "On Beauty... and the History of Business". In *Beauty and Business: Commerce, Gender, and Culture in Modern America*. Philip Scranton (ed). New York: Routledge, 2001: 7-22.

They have opened new directions for research on gender, race, the creation of markets, and the role of consumers. Interest in beauty, style, and fashion is a logical development in the new business history.

And what of those who write about beauty? They pay much more attention to the power of representation-paintings, poems, prescriptive literature, and advertising images-than to the strategies of business. Critics of the commercialization of beauty tend to treat business as a monolith, an industry whose motives are uniform, actions synchronized, and effects transparent" The papers in this collection beyond such approaches to investigate closely the relations between beauty and business practices. They explore the assumption and decision-making of entrepreneurs, manufacturers, retailers, advertisers, and consumers. They consider how changing ideals of beauty, notions of fashion, and attitudes to the body shaped business strategies. Just as important, they show how businesses profited from the attention to beauty and influenced cultural ideals and social identity embodied in faces, figures, and fashion. These case studies demonstrate that beauty and business are worth pondering further.

A broad look at the historical relationship between beauty and business, points to several key approaches to this subject. One concerns the emergence of a large sector of the economy devoted to selling beauty aids, fashions, bodily care, and style to American women and increasingly, to men. Another is the deployment of beauty as a bewilderment strategy in creating brands, sales, and marketing, in managing the workplace, and in projecting corporate identities. A third considers the sale of beauty itself as a value added and attached to a wide range of goods, from art to bodies. These approaches offer new directions for future research.

## A Short Disquisition on Beauty

The word *beauty* requires a closer look at the long-standing intellectual and cultural traditions that have defined its meaning. Beauty is an aesthetic category applied to art and objects, faces and bodies, nature and souls. In the Western tradition of aesthetics, at least since the eighteenth century, beauty has been understood as a quality apart, dissociated from history and social contingencies. For philosophers, poets, and artists, the aesthetic was an autonomous and transcendent realm outside the ordinary, the mundane, and the utilitarian. The contemplation of beauty whether the sublimity of Niagara Falls, the sensuousness of a Rubens painting, or the charm of a young girl's face-took one out of the self into a higher realm of appreciation and discernment. Much ink was spilled in the nineteenth century in the effort to identify those qualities of female beauty upon which everyone could agree. There were "celestial" beauties—often tubercular or close to death—and robust pulchritude, classical Venuses and oriental exotics, blondes and brunettes, all placed in a moral order and physical hierarchy based on complexion, hair, and symmetry of face and form.

This aesthetic tradition, with its assertion of universal standards and perceptions, has been challenged on many grounds by sociologists, feminist critics, postmodernists, and artists, among others. One especially useful critique insists upon the centrality of the historical and social contexts in which beauty takes form and achieves meaning. That, in turn, requires a consideration of how meanings are ascribed to a wide range of cultural products, and by whom. How do particular societies or social groups define beauty? What categories of taste do they employ? How do they discern the qualities of the beautiful? When is an object "art" and when is it a "tchotchke"? What makes a beauty queen? This approach asks us to consider vernacular aesthetic forms as well as the Old Masters. And

it requires us to study viewers' perceptions, their cultural frames of reference, and their social locations so as not to assume a universal subject.

Beauty signifies difference in a number of registers, making distinctions between high and low, normal and abnormal, virtue and vice. In so doing, beauty helps to define morality, social status, class, gender, race, and ethnicity. Ideals of beauty, in turn, are fundamentally shaped by social relations and institutions, by other cultural categories and practices, and by politics and economics. Even so, beauty should not be reduced to anyone of these: if not autonomous, the aesthetic is a realm with its own language and logic. One need not be a socio-biologist tracing contemporary attitudes toward beauty back to our evolutionary heritage and genetic hardwiring to think this.<sup>1</sup> Rather, one only need recognize that beauty ideals, as well as our perceptions and reactions, develop in complex ways.

Each historical period has its own culturally specific standards of beauty: the hourglass figure of the 1890s, the boyish flapper of the 1920s, the unisex look of the 1960s. Yet conceptions of beauty are quite long-lived, their referents going far back in time: in the West, the classical beauty of Greece and Rome remains a governing beauty ideal; many Americans still consider African appearances beautiful only if exoticized. At the same time, beauty is destabilizing because perception, which constructs beauty, occurs in complex individual and cultural circumstances. Beauty turns heads, stops the action, and evokes emotions from lust to piety. Once we have analyzed the social constructions, cultural practices, politics, and economics, we still may not fully understand what beauty does in people's lives and what it means. In its largest sense, aesthetics offers us a way of knowing the world around us in a different key from, say, science or religion. Beauty is, in Suzanne Langer's evocative phrase, "significant form."

And it is a form that in the past century has been increasingly mobilized and informed by business enterprise.

### **The Beauty Sector of the Economy**

Beauty and business seem most closely related in the modern era, but beauty has always been for sale. Whenever and wherever markets arise, beauty has had a commercial value. Art markets developed among elites, whether Renaissance princes, Gilded Age robber barons, or Cold War corporate leaders. As patrons to artists and buyers of beauty objects, they claimed and projected cultural power. Romanticist ideals beauty in nature, from the pastoral to the sublime, became the current of real estate and tourism: a splendid view turned a profit.

Beauty added exchange value to women, whether in the market' slaves, in prostitutes, or in wives. Abolitionist writer and former bondswoman Harriet Jacobs noted how beauty was a misfortune of African women sold as commodities in slavery, since it made them the sexual prey of their masters. Women who bargained their sexual services as prostitutes worked in a hierarchy. Beauty, youth, and fashion ability were for sale in "high-class" brothels; women without the attributes toiled in factory like "cribs" and walked the streets. And feminists from Mary Wollstonecraft to Emma Goldman charged, *marriage* was a market in which beauty, not brains, found the highest bidder. It is no coincidence that cosmetics and paints were viewed in the nineteenth century as particularly pernicious symbols of commerce linked to prostitution, female can artists, and tainted goods. If beauty ideals and practices were shaped by earlier exchange values, they in turn set limits and created opportunities for the mode fashion and beauty industries. Despite similar emphases on style and appearance, beauty and fashion actually followed different logics, and the businesses that sold them developed on separate tracks. In distinct ways, entrepreneurs, local firms, national

businesses, and mass med' projected beauty and fashion as representations, sold them as tangible goods, and promoted them in the name of service to women.

The "fashion system" predated the emergence of a widespread commercial beauty culture. Fashion transforms clothes as material objects through a process of style creation and information dissemination; it requires news about "what's new" to be spread in print, through images, and by word of mouth. The nineteenth-century publish' industry, especially the genteel women's magazine, created and interpellated women readers in part by promoting new styles and taste. Making fashion the centerpiece of its appeal, *Godey's Lady's Book* contained the latest news from Paris, London, and New York, ran engravings and fashion plates, and offered instructions for updating older clothes with trimmings, embroidery, new sleeves, and other techniques.

In the nineteenth century, genuine beauty was considered different from fashion – a timeless, inner, and natural quality, not mutable external, or socially driven. Still, magazine and book publishers made advice, illustrations, and fiction about beauty a salable product that helped fuel the publishing boom after 1830: Don't buy cosmetics, we the sales pitch, but do buy the book on how to achieve moral beau, *Godey's* and handsome gift books disseminated ideals of appearance to affluent women, while low-cost beauty manuals reached factory hands and domestic workers. Expanded literacy, faster and cheaper printing technologies, and new book distribution systems fostered a market for beauty advice across the socioeconomic spectrum.

What scholars call "prescriptive literature" – in contrast to such private writings as letters and diaries-was often, in fact, a product of business and should be examined in that light. In *Godey's* and the advice manuals, emergent genre conventions, representational

strategies, and narrative structures developed to keep women buying and reading. The fashion plates and gossip about Parisian and New York high society promised the *denier cri* to American women in the hinterlands. Magazine fiction gratified readers' interest in good looks while implicitly raising their good sense and good names: short stories featured willful beauties who painted and primped in pursuit of husbands and fortune but died of lead poisoning from toxic face powder or developed consumption after dancing all night in sheer, low-cut ball gowns.

If nineteenth-century beauty ideals tended to naturalize gender differences and legitimate the new cultural authority of the middle class, they also spurred the growth of a women's market in publishing. This early commercial dissemination of feminine ideals and images was critical in the making of mass-market beauty and fashion industries. It began a long-term process of educating the eye, channeling desires, and creating an identification between representation and viewer that should serve the sale of goods and foster new perceptions of beauty in the culture at large.

Just as important was the web of small-scale proprietors, entrepreneurs, manufacturers, and retailers who, by the late nineteenth century, had established fashion and beautifying as cultural practices linked to commerce. Their stories have been especially important to recover, for they complicate our historical understanding of the beauty and fashion sector of the economy and suggest some new directions for business history. Perhaps most significant is the role of women in these businesses: seamstresses, hairdressers, beauticians, department store buyers, and cosmetics saleswomen all made beauty and fashion integral to the lives of women. As Wendy Gamber shows, dressmakers and milliners were ambitious, independent, and skilled craftswomen who often became proprietors of their own shops, secured a competency, and achieved some standing in their communities. They had to be highly responsive to information about

what was stylish, respectable, and attractive, and became authorities themselves, translating high style and fashion plates for local tastes and pocketbooks.

The beauty business has also been and remains intensely personal. What began as domestic service—the hands-on care of the hair, face, and body by maids or slaves—became organized into businesses by individual proprietors and entrepreneurs in the late nineteenth century. These beauty enterprises began to appear in cities across the country: a manicure shop tucked away in a multi-floor walk-up, a storefront hair salon, a "beauty college" in a 10ft, cosmetics counters front and center in department stores.

These businesses opened opportunities for some women by aligning commercial enterprise with the very ideals of femininity and beauty that had long justified women's exclusion from most lines of work. In a culture that celebrated inner, moral beauty, they placed a new emphasis on external appearance and its cultivation through the purchase and use of cosmetics and other beauty aids. They directed their business and marketing efforts not only to the affluent but to working women, African Americans, and immigrants, drawing upon the cultural practices and institutions familiar to women in their everyday life.

The beauty business joined the sale of goods to the provision of services in innovative ways. Avon saleswomen went into homes to teach women about beauty products and how to use them. Unlike selling vacuum cleaners and encyclopedias door to door, selling beauty often involved a long-term, continuous relationship between seller and buyer. Salons were based in specific localities and their hands-on approach offered the pleasure of touch, the promise of makeover, and the enjoyment of sociability. Franchising operations and beauty schools spread across the country what began as local, personal endeavors; women went to a Madam C. J. Walker or

Marinello shop for a particular experience of hairstyling, grooming, and social interaction. In African-American salons, the small talk between hairdresser and client sometimes turned to matters of economic and political import and even nourished community activism and the Civil Rights movement.

Woven into the "house calls" of the Avon Lady and the wash-and-set at the beauty parlor was an ongoing conversation about appearances that opened out in many directions. These businesses encouraged a high degree of self-consciousness of the face and body. Operating in a local context, they reinforced yet mediated the barrage of advertising, motion pictures, and national magazines that fostered an external, visual standard for self-assessment.

Selling beauty itself as a product became much more systematic, self-conscious, and widespread after 1920. Historians have only begun to research the full dimensions of this effort across the economy and society-not only in specific cosmetics, hair care, clothing, and accessories firms, but in modeling agencies, commercial beauty contests, cosmetic surgery, weight camps, the health club business, and other enterprises. Scholars have delineated the role of beauty and fashion in furthering the development of national and mass markets. They have written extensively, for instance, on the "tie-in" as an integrative business strategy in cosmetics and fashion marketing by which local retailers, national advertisers, mass-circulation magazines, and movies aligned their interests. Film producers built moments of female display and spectacle into the movies not only for the male gaze but also for women viewers-the obligatory "how do I look" scene in front of the mirror or the staging of a fashion show. Movie studios struck agreements with clothing manufacturers to highlight new styles. If a dress received particular notice from fans-like one worn by Bette Davis in *Letty Lynton-it* was quickly manufactured at popular prices and featured in department stores.

These cooperative strategies and nationalizing tendencies stand in contrast to the ongoing conflicts among local businesses, national media, and mass manufacturers. The local and regional remain salient in the modern beauty and fashion business. Although the rise of ready-to-wear fashions put many dressmakers out of business or turned their activity into alteration work for stores, women with an understanding of clothes often became specialty shop owners or department store buyers. Buyers made and continue to make decisions about New York or Paris fashions based on their understanding of hometown constituencies. Specialty shops have sought the trust of customers through personal service and sensitivity to local standards of beauty and style. That sensitivity is not just a matter of price but an awareness of taste – what color palette, design elements, and accessories appeal to the eyes of women in their communities, whether middle-class African Americans, Jewish retirees in Florida, or working-class secretaries in Dallas. Beauty shops also mediate the national and the local. Salon operatives promote trends created by product manufacturers, trade associations, and celebrity hair designers while remaining attentive to the particular practices and views of their patrons.

If beauty is a signifier of difference, beauty businesses – whether national, regional, or local – have continually made choices about what differences to emphasize, reinforce, or efface. Hairdressers have long *Deen* trained in different techniques that reinforce a racial distinction between "black" and "white" hair. Instructions on permanent waves in the 1930s, for instance, emphasized marcelling for white clients, croquignole waves for African-American women. Even after the desegregation of beauty schools and beauty shops in the 1960s, these customary distinctions continued. Hair is most obviously a potent symbol of gender difference. The rise of "unisex" salons and men's hairstyling in the 1960s was an important development in the beauty business that challenged the dominance

of the barbershop as the bastion of male appearance. Unisex styling salons capitalized upon the larger questioning of traditional notions of masculinity by men in the "youth revolt," counterculture, and antiwar movements of the time.

These examples suggest how much beauty businesses have shaped the social definitions and physical attributes of femininity and masculinity as well as race and ethnicity, age and generation, and class. They have done so not only through advertising but through product design, sales strategies, and in the daily operations and practices that underlie brand and company identity. For instance, in oral history interviews conducted by the Smithsonian, the Noxell (originally Noxzema) corporation and its advertisers were extremely forthcoming about their choices when developing and marketing Cover Girl makeup in the late 1950s and 1960s. Noxzema was already established as a maker of a medicated cleansing and moisturizing cream when it decided to create a makeup line. The product was in its initial development, intended for both young adult women and teenagers with "problem" skin, and the challenge was to make the product acceptable to both groups as well to parents of teens anxious about their daughters' use of makeup. Mary Ayres, an advertising executive handling the account, developed the idea of Cover Girl as a medicated makeup, with the advertising stressing both glamour and health. Among the early slogans were "glamour that's good for your skin" and "clean makeup."

By the mid-sixties, the agency had consciously decided upon a particular vision of female beauty to sell this idea: a young, fair-skinned, sun-bleached blonde, fit and active yet absorbed in her own beauty. Modeled by Cybill Shepherd and Cheryl Tiegs, this "California look" was specifically intended to appeal to Middle America, the mass market and cultural mainstream. The ad designers perceived the light skin of models and white space in the ads as a "clean" look, and "cleanliness" was a message that they believed would appeal to girls

and parents alike. The manufacturer had its own concerns, including keeping the price of the product competitive, simplifying packaging, gaining shelf space in drugstores, and managing consumers' choices in a self-service environment; for all these reasons the firm created at first only three, then seven shades of foundation, none of them appropriate for deep olive, brown, or black complexions. This example illustrates how a mass-market company, through a complex process of decision-making and a deeply engrained set of cultural biases, produces and reproduces racialized and gendered beauty ideals.

### **Aestheticization as a Business Strategy**

The perception that "beauty sells" became commonplace in business after 1920. Scholars have studied how manufacturers and advertisers have long used representations of beautiful women and handsome men both to sell specific products and to promote consumption-oriented lifestyles. The "beauty appeal" as a self-conscious commercial strategy went further by promising consumers the psychological and social benefits of better looks. The beauty appeal went well beyond the cosmetics and fashion industries, and was used to sell virtually any product that could be connected in some way to the body, self-presentation, and personal identity. Toothbrushes made by the Prophylactic brush company, once sold on the basis of health and hygiene, were now guaranteed to beautify one's smile; Wrigley's touted chewing gum as a five-minute facial for secretaries; automobile ads encouraged women to buy their cars to match their frocks. Articles on "beauty, the new business tool" appeared throughout trade journals, in-house newsletters, and the popular press

The many manufacturers, beauty was a measurable value added to goods, a quantum that could alter the perception and placement of products. Lever Brothers, maker of a popular laundry detergent,

stressed the value of glamour when it introduced Lux toilet soap in 1925. It hired the J. Walter Thompson Company to develop a marketing and advertising campaign. When Thompson offered its proposal for ads that promoted Lux as a "new form" of soap, Lever's president complained that the ads would confuse consumers into thinking that the soap was simply another kind of laundry detergent. "Our idea," he said, is that the toilet soap "should be placed on a pinnacle, removed from any suggestion of laundry or dishpan use." He urged the ad agency to replace the word "suds" with "lather" and depict the soap in the boudoir, not the kitchen. "We must throw more glamour around our new product to justify the price in the consumer's mind of 9c to 10c per cake. Remember, we are lifting a laundry product up to a toilet plane."

Aesthetic categories helped businesses define and build their markets. Cosmetics manufacturers relied heavily on package design and targeted advertising to reach particular consumers. African-American businessman Anthony Overton wanted the packaging of High Brown face Powder to be elegant and respectable, and he chose the face of a woman with light brown skin and European features to adorn the label. The French perfumer Bourjois sold Java face powder in a traditional loose-powder container with a floral design, touting it as a "natural" beauty aid for conservative, older women who balked at looking made up; Bourjois placed the same powder in a jazzier package, named Manon Lescault, and marketed it to flappers as a tool for man-hunting and romance. Businesses that used aesthetic codes to convey social and moral messages would find "it is quite possible to reach two mutually antagonistic classes of prospects," as one trade journal observed.

Businesses worked with older aesthetic categories, updated and shaped them for commercial purposes, and made them relevant to the perceptions and tastes of consumers. Sales campaigns used typologies of beauty-dark and fair, foreign and exotic, ethereal and

physical-to differentiate products and markets. Max Factor and other cosmetics firms created complexion analysis charts to help women choose their "beauty type" and the best array of products. Earlier aesthetic dictates show up repeatedly in advertising. William Hogarth's "curve of beauty"-a sinuous S shape identified by the eighteenth-century writer as the most beautiful line-inspired an advertisement for Zip depilatory: The model's pose, one arm curved above her head to reveal a hairless underarm, rendered the otherwise indelicate subject artistic and tasteful."

Business leaders also adopted new artistic movements they perceived as having commercial value. The forward-looking aesthetic of Art Moderne was attached to many products with varying degrees of success. Everything from trains to toasters was streamlined to convey a sense of speed and modernity. The beauty firm Marinello even packed face cream in jars that looked like set-back skyscrapers. Retailers looked to artists and museums for aesthetic inspiration and design trends for store layouts, show windows, and special events. Advertisers, too, used new artistic elements to position their products in the marketplace, hiring such leading photographers as Edward Steichen to take modernist shots of hands for Jergens Skin Lotion. Coordinated designs and ensembles, inspired by clothing fashion, could be seen in products ranging from cosmetics to furniture to bathroom fixtures. Today this principle informs the lifestyle marketing of such stores as Pottery Barn and Rooms to Go.

Beyond marketing and sales, beauty and appearance have played an important role in employment, conveying through the body a set of messages about a firm. Formal uniforms, customary dress codes, hair-styles, makeup requirements, and weight restrictions became visual cues that served to unify the corporate or brand identity, put forward a pleasing face to the public, and manage employees. This has been especially true in white-collar and service-sector jobs, in which people are, in a sense, part of the company's product. After World War II,

when airlines chose women over men to work as flight attendants, rules stipulating appropriate appearance became commonplace. By the 1960s flight attendants were required to wear nail polish, lipstick, hats, gloves, and girdles; hair dye, bleach, Afros, and cornrows were banned. Limitations on body weight had nothing to do with overloading the plane and everything to do with projecting an image of svelte, youthful beauty. National Airlines' infamous "Fly Me" advertising campaign of the 1960s sold the vicarious experience of flight attendants' sexuality and beauty along with air transportation. Such requirements have increasingly become the source of individual and collective conflict in the workplace. In the 1970s, the flight attendants' union successfully fought both marital status and weight requirements as discriminatory; both requirements constructed "the stewardess" as youthful and attractive. African-American women have challenged employers who bar cornrows, dreadlocks, and J~'1er hairstyles from the workplace: designating an appropriate corpo:C2.le identity, they argue, has the effect of enforcing a "white" appear"- "Ice. Even more widespread are the gender-, class-, and race-based 3Ssumptions about appropriate looks at different levels and kinds of business. These differences were evocatively captured in the 1988 film *Workng Girl*, in which make-up, hair, and clothing styles distinguished the women managers from the secretaries. As Melanie Griffith's upwardly mobile and newly shorn character explains, "if you want to be taken seriously, you need to have serious hair."

Aestheticization has also proven to be a powerful business strategy establishing corporate identity. Since the 1930s, but especially after World War II, corporations have projected their economic and political power through a "corporate aesthetic." Henry Luce intentionally made *Fortune*, a general magazine for businessmen, into a beautiful physical object at the very moment-the onset of the Depression-when many publishers were cutting the quality of paper and illustrations and s:-linking the size of magazines.

Despite the high cost, Luce printed *Fortune* in large format and on heavy paper stock, hired modernist artists to design the covers, and commissioned renowned photographers to take the pictures that appeared inside the magazine.

Individual and corporate ownership of art collections also became an important means of projecting cultural and economic authority. Helena Rubinstein had an extensive art collection, which she showed in her New York salon and loaned to museums; it underscored Rubinstein's belief that beautifying was not a practice of the vulgar and vain but a "decorative art," part of a celebrated aesthetic tradition. Some business leaders, such as Walter Paepcke, the head of the Container Corporation of America, patronized abstract artists as representatives of free enterprise and the free world. More generally, arts patronage, public sculpture, and commissions to renowned architects have been used in corporate, white-collar settings to project a sense of common mission and elevated status: the "corporate sublime."

### **Beauty from High to Low**

Business may promote the "corporate sublime" to express its higher aims but it has also used beauty for "lower" purposes. The exploitation and sale of sexualized beauty and its larger impact on the economy and society remain largely unexamined by business historians. Yet "smut-peddling" as *Hustler* owner Larry Flynt quaintly calls it, evoking a bygone era of shrewd sweet-talking men carrying packs full of trinkets—is in fact big business. Changing beauty ideals and images affected the contours and growth of this industry, including its movement from illicit trade to legitimate enterprise.

The modern invention of pornography has been linked to the development of printing and consequent distribution of books, magazines, pamphlets, and ephemeral literature, a development

associated, interestingly, with the emergence of a Habermasian "civic" public sphere in the eighteenth century.<sup>27</sup> Beauty became more important to smut peddling as new image-making technologies developed. By the 1860s, the unique image of the daguerreotype gave way to *cartes-de-visite* stereo graphs, and other reproducible formats. A lively trade resulted, not only in the manufacture of personal portraits, but also in the sale of the pictures. Photography studios, peddlers, and department stores marketed the faces and figures of actresses, dancers, burlesque performers, self-styled beauties-and naked women. Photographers embraced specific styles of posing, camera placement, and lighting that regularized images of beauty, including those intended to be sexually arousing. And they drew upon conventions of display and spectacle developed first in burlesque and musical reviews and later in bodybuilding and beauty pageantry. Images of beauty used to sell products explicitly to men, especially those connoting a male "sporting" culture, emphasized female physical attributes. Bosomy, dark-featured women regularly appeared on cigar boxes, for instance.

It is striking indeed how frequently businesses based on new image making technologies have found in sex and sexualized beauty a means of gaining a foothold in the entertainment and information economy. In the early days of the motion pictures, most films were projected on screens in vaudeville shows, nickelodeons, and traveling exhibitions, but dime museums and "peep shows" featured kinescopes of women flirting and disrobing. Radio and television were tightly regulated for sexual content, but both the videotape format and the new internet commerce have depended heavily on sex as a source of profit. Blockbuster and other video outlets have, in fact, seriously undermined the older forms of sexual entertainment in vice districts, the peep shows and triple X theaters; what had once been largely a male viewing habit and male defined product has changed dramatically with the striking numbers of women renting X-

rated videos. In the early years of Internet commerce, high-tech smut peddlers have profited the most in this new medium of communication and entertainment.

Until the last twenty-five years, pornography was an illicit enterprise, and its history is still largely uncharted. These businesses were run by entrepreneurs who did not want their activities documented. What we do know comes largely from the traces of smut peddlers, lowlife printers, nude-model photographers, and others appearing in trial records and government-led crackdowns. The legal repression of obscenity, such as the Comstock Act, was fundamentally a restraint on trade, and pornographers fought to preserve their businesses, not just their speech rights. Occasionally these firms did leave records, and one at least, suggests the complex network of under-and above ground transactions. H. Lynn Womack, a mail-order publisher of gay pornography had contacts in photography studios, in the armed forces, and the gay community who sent him snapshots and portraits of young men either fully clothed or in briefs or bathing suits. From these he selected the images that best fit the appearance requirements of his publications-and he commented on them: the bodybuilder, a winsome "chicken," a "well-hung" model. In this way, Womack actively constructed masculine beauty directed to the gay male market.

Since the 1950s, ideals of beauty have helped the pornography business redefine the line between licit and illicit, between "smut" and adult entertainment." *Playboy* pioneered the way by calling itself a "men's magazine," with fiction, advice columns, and interviews, as well as naked women. The Playmate blurred the boundary between sex queen and girl-next-door. The magazine's photographers drew upon pictorial conventions from fashion photography and "pinup" posing. Airbrushing, makeup, and lighting perfected the beauty of the female image; layout further domesticated the sexualized image by juxtaposing the Playmate's naked body, personal biography,

"everyday snapshots, and portrait. The magazine's imagery was more similar to the style of the Miss America beauty pageant than to underground X-rated photographs. As courts chipped away the obscenity standard and many Americans embraced the "sexual revolution," adult entertainment industry was born. This industry used familiar business strategies of legitimization: it started trade journals and associations, rationalized distribution and marketing, used genre narratives and visual conventions, and differentiated beauty ideals to appeal to different consumer tastes.

Beauty, fashion, and style are threaded through the history of American business as products for sale, as systems of representations, and as categories of taste and discrimination. The implications of beauty in business are complex and contradictory: beauty images simultaneously promise and withhold, elevate and degrade. They are sanitized and sexualized, aspirational and arousing. Beauty has advanced modern business at many levels. It represents and projects corporate identities. It has opened entrepreneurial opportunities for women, even as it fosters the exploitation of women's bodies. Indeed, it has ignited the commercial potential of information and entertainment businesses.

Nor is this only an American story: the face of global capitalism is not so much streaked with sweat as carefully made up. The fall of the Soviet Union, for example, led to the resurgence of commercial beauty culture among Russian women, many of whom embraced a self-consciously feminine beauty image that departed from the communist ideal. In China, India, and even Amazon rain forests, women sell Avon Mary Kay, and other beauty products; as was the case a hundred year ago in the United States, these "microbusinesses" have given some women a foothold in the developing market economy. Selling, marketing, and projecting beauty have become more important to the workings of a global, media-oriented economy. Commerce, in turn, link goods, looks, status

and identity to influence how cultures define the norms of appearance for women and men. Beauty and business may seem to exist in different domains but, as the new scholarship shows their relationship grows ever closer and more significant.

### **Acknowledgements**

I thank Sally Clarke and Peter Agree for their comments on an earlier version of this essay. Discussions with Philip Scranton, Roger Horowitz, William Hausman, and the participants of the Hagley Conference on Beauty and Business (March 1999) aided my thinking on this subject.

**D. A Book Review - The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women<sup>11</sup>**

**EKAWATI MARHAENNY DUKUT<sup>12</sup>**

Women all over the world nowadays are frequently bombarded by images that make them look continuously over their beauty mirror to see whether they have lost that extra weight, have the right sized thighs, breast, and abdomen: in addition to a shiny, colorful, straight hair-and white, soft and radiant complexion. TV shows, such as the program "Extreme Makeover" or "The Swan" or just the short and intriguing TV and magazine advertisements of "Ponds Whitening Cream" or the ideal "Wella Colored Hair" have made women envy of other women's bodies because their own, looks and feels flabby or ugly. Almost all women feel that their skin needs to have that extra white radiance and their hair needs a tint of blond, brown, burgundy red or just a simple bluest black. This is caused by the fact that the image of a "perfect" woman, especially for the Americans, is usually a gorgeous blonde, although sultry brunettes, redheads and exotic women of color are also shown. The ideal woman is tall and willowy, weighing at least 20% less than what her height requires. She rarely looks older than 25, has no visible flaws on her skin, and her hair and clothes are always immaculate. Why is the beauty myth so enticing that women would give more than anything to be as close as that image of perfect beauty?

The book, *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*<sup>13</sup>, discusses how those TV and magazine images have harmed many

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<sup>11</sup> The article has been taken from *Celt: A Journal of Culture, English Language Teaching & Literature*, 2005, vol 5, no 2, pp.165-170. A soft copy of the article is available for download at either <http://journal.unika.ac.id/index.php/celt/article/view/164> or [dx.doi.org/10.24167/celt.v5i2.164](https://doi.org/10.24167/celt.v5i2.164)

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<sup>13</sup> Wolf, Naomi. *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*. New York: Perennial Press, 2002, 348 pages, ISBN 0-06-051218-0.

women. No longer does the word "beauty" makes a woman proud but it is a weapon to make her feel bad because she could not live up to the ideal beauty shown in those media. To become thin, pert and youthful is something that nowadays becomes an unhealthy aspiration. In other words, the beauty myth is becoming a nightmare to some "70%" of American women (Wolf, 2002, p. 53).

Naomi Wolf's book explores six areas of life in which problems result from the beauty myth that exists in Uncle Sam's country, the United States of America. Each can be read alone - whichever interest the reader most, as it need not be read continuously from one chapter to the next.

In WORK, the author details the way the concept of beauty can be used to discriminate against women in the workforce. If women are too pretty, they are not taken seriously. This is like what happened in one 1986 case, where a woman lost a sexual harassment claim because she dresses too beautifully. She lost because "her beauty in her clothes was admitted as evidence to prove that she welcomed rape from her employer" (Wolf, 2002, p. 38). Yet, if women are not pretty enough, they can legally be fired for being too "businesslike" and not "feminine" enough (Wolf, 2002, p. 42). For example, a woman felt there was no point in doing her job well, when she was once told by her supervisor that he was very happy with her work but that "she needed some improvement from the neck up" (Wolf, 2002, p. 41). Then again, if women are too pretty and attractive in their attire, it becomes their own fault when they are sexually harassed. According to Wolf, "beauty provokes harassment, the law says, but it looks through men's eyes when deciding what provokes it" (2002, p. 45). Over and over, Wolf supplies precedent law in which the woman is judged to be too beautiful, too ugly, too old, too fat or dressed too nice and not dressed nice enough. In other words, this chapter shows that it is legal for a woman to be hired or fired generally on the basis of physical appearance.

In CULTURE, it is shown that ever since a child, a girl is taught that stories only happen to "beautiful women whether they are interesting or not.

And interesting or not, stories do not happen to women who are not "beautiful" (Wolf, 2002, p. 61). So, as a consequence, women would do anything to gain their beauty. This chapter also tells about the role of women's magazines (the sole arbiter of women's culture) in shaping their lives, by selling them on the need for beauty products by making them feel bad about themselves is being focused. It also notes that advertisers pressure the magazines into this, because it is only when American women feel terrible about themselves will high-income women spend a quarter of their each paycheck on beauty products advertised in those magazines. For example, the *Cosmopolitan* magazine is so popular that it appears in "seventeen countries" (Wolf, 2002, p. 77).

In RELIGION, Wolf convincingly argues that in *The Bible* "Genesis explains why it is women who often need to offer their bodies to any male gaze that will legitimize them" (2002, p. 93). It is explained further that *The Bible* teaches women to feel proud for having become as perfect as their Father which is in Heaven. This chapter also argues that the quest for moral virtue and heavenly salvation, shows how this quest has the same effects that religion once did – of keeping women submissive and preoccupied – in the home. If they are too wild, men would likely divorce them. In this case, Wolf supplies readers with the fact that the divorce rate in "the United States have nearly doubled between 1970 and 1990, tripled in the Netherlands, quadrupled in the United Kingdom" and even... "one in three in Indonesia had filed divorce cases (2002, p. 77).

In SEX, the beauty myth is demonstrated as actually oppressing female sexuality by making many women too self-conscious to engage in sex freely and comfortably. For example, women are told that if they desire "sexual freedom and a measure of worldly power", they should better learn to do sex like men (Wolf, 2002, p. 134). To be overtly attractive, however, women do decide to uplift and make larger or smaller sized breast, just because breasts must be "perfectly symmetrical" (Wolf, 2002, p. 152), may at the same time make their nipples handicapped and consequently, can no longer feel the tingling sensation they would need to reach a joyous sexual feeling.

The excessive dieting to make bodies thinner in a short period leads also to a diminished sex drive. In addition to hurting women, it also argues that the beauty myth hurts men by making them unaware of what real women look like. Men are also given the role of "beauty appraisal" instead of the role of "partner" that gave further impact on sexual relations (Wolf, 2002, p. 177).

In HUNGER, the beauty myth convinces women to "willingly" go hungry, to eat fewer calories per day than famine victims in third-world countries, which results in ironic weight gain and/or in eating disorders (compulsive eating, anorexia, and bulimia). Interestingly, 90 to 95 percent of anorexics and bulimics are women and all wanted to lose "5-25 pounds even though most were not remotely overweight" (Wolf, 2002, p. 213). To some young women, anorexia is a life-saver because it can "protect her from street harassment and sexual coercion" (Wolf, 2002, p. 199). Anyway, this book has at least, solidified the fact that women of any age are slowly killing and disfiguring themselves in the name of that ever-unattainable and ever-subjective idea of "beauty".

The chapter on VIOLENCE is not about domestic violence, but rather a self-inflicted violence of cosmetic surgery, which is so painful and damaging to a woman's body. Liposuctions and operations such as a tummy tuck and a face-lift can be harmful as it can make women feel numb on some of their organs for the rest of their lives. Interestingly a comparison with Victorian (Wolf, 2002, p. 222-225) sexual surgery and potentially deadly experimental medical research will make readers aware that some unethical work is being done to fulfill the ideal beauty myth that many men and women want to see. In this chapter, the author also questions why so many women are willing to risk diminished erotic responses and even death in order to be made thin or small-nosed or large-widened eyes or large-breasted or whatever. Once a woman decides to go in for a nose job, for example, she would quickly find that the doctor sees her as a saddlebag and later finds the necessity to also do something about the excess fat in the thighs or underneath her cheek bones, and so on that are actually barely visible to the naked eye. In Wolf's words:

Surgeons are taking the feminist redefinition of health as beauty and perverting it into a notion of 'beauty' as health; and, thus, whatever they are selling as health: hunger as health, pain and bloodshed as health (2002, p. 224).

Basically, Wolf claims that the beauty myth passed on by advertisers is a political move to keep women down. Her research shows that there is a cultural backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty to keep women in their home place. How many people have succumbed to the idea of the ugly feminist activist who is only a feminist because she's too undesirable to get a man? Looking at history, that popular concept first showed up on the scene to describe suffragettes lobbying for a political vote in the 1960s. The beauty myth is the last (and most dangerous) of a long line of lies concerning the rules of feminine attributes and behavior. It is the most dangerous because it has succeeded in effecting women's internal sense of themselves. It has created a standard of femininity that is impossible to attain, and women are reacting with increasingly obsessive behavior in their attempts to measure up. Energy that might be used to further positive goals is turned inward instead - dissipated in guilt, shame and unhappiness at one's physical faults.

In general, the author, Naomi Wolf, can provide the reader with a very thoughtful and well-researched treatise on the feminine experience. It is full of studies and statistics to back up her claims, which makes her message hard to deny. The issue she is bringing to attention is actually addressed to both sexes, for women are not the only ones being manipulated by the media into feeling insecure and unhappy with themselves. Not to be a surprise is also the male sex, because they will also be bombarded with the myth that men should be rich, powerful and youthful looking to attract those beautiful women. This book implies that the American culture sees women are better off dead than by becoming old or ugly looking because making extreme makeovers (read: have an operation to beautify themselves) give women a reasonable risk. Yet at the same time, I believe, this book can spark more

discussion and research on how culture, in general, cultivates the stereotypes of women as sex objects and men as success objects.

*The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women*, is a strong, compelling book. At times, some of what Wolf says is rather hard to understand - but read as a whole, it presents a solid argument about the sickness of our society today. Men should read it for their wives; parents ought to read it for their daughters; and ladies must read it for themselves. I highly recommend this book to those interested in American Studies and so much more to anyone interested in Women's Studies - and to any woman, especially one who plans on having children, because it is so important to break this cycle of unattainable expectations.



#### Note:

A hard copy of this journal is available for Rp 25.000/ US \$2.5 (public price) and Rp 20.000/ US \$2 (show proof of your student card) not including shipping costs.

### INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT

Make use of your personal experience on your observation of girls (including yourself) on the playing of dolls while still young – around the age of 4 up to 10 years old. Mention how you think the girls and boys were imagining things while using the doll as a media to look forward to their future life as a teenage up to being a young adult.

To be more qualified as a researcher, you can make up a questionnaire so that friends from your Department or nearby neighbors can be interviewed to get a better idea of how your friends had imagined themselves as a character by using their dolls as a media.

Then read the readings about how writers criticize the Barbie doll, and later how the meaning of “beauty” has been carried through among other the perspectives of culture, religion, and even in consumerism. Talk about how beauty can be used to sell products.

Write your critical analysis like exemplified by the Student Sample Essay as shown in this Pop Culture module.

Write your tentative conclusion to it.

Discuss again with your lecturer what you have written so far.

Follow through the next material on “Advertisements” to be later used as data to support your mini paper.

Be ready to prepare and write a final version of the paper as either a **Small Test** or **Mid Test!**

Good Luck!

## CHAPTER V<sup>14</sup>

### ARTICLES ON ADVERTISING

#### A. In the Shadow of the Image<sup>15</sup>

STUART AND ELIZABETH EWEN

We begin this chapter with a selection from Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen's book *Channels of Desire* (1982), in which they point out the impact of mass produced images on our lives and on our sense of identity. As the title suggests, the Ewens see us as existing in the shadow of these mass produced images, confronting them, puzzling over them, responding to them, judging ourselves in terms of them-in short, being influenced by images, especially advertising images, in ways about which we may not be fully aware.

In this introduction to their book, the Ewens present a number of different scenes - "Meaningless moments. Random incidents. Memory traces" - in which people respond to the mass media images that surround them. Although each incident is seemingly insignificant, the Ewens suggest that, viewed together as "an ensemble, an integrated panorama of social life, human activity, hope and despair, images and information, another tale unfolds from these vignettes." As you'll see, this is a tale about contemporary American culture, about how we understand ourselves and relate to one another, and about the subtle yet profound influence of advertising and the mass media on our lives.

To begin your reading, think of some familiar images from television, magazine, and billboard advertisements. Consider the effect these images have on you as you read the Ewens' description of the effect of such images on other people. How much of yourself do you see in the Ewens' scenes?

<sup>14</sup> Students should be ready to discuss & consult on the readings about Beauty... and the article on Advertising to support the writing project on Beauty.

<sup>15</sup> Petracca, Michael and Madeleine Sorapure. *Common Culture: Reading and Writing about American Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. US: Prentice Hall, Inc, 1998: 39 – 45.

1) Maria Aguilar was born twenty-seven years ago near Mayagieez, on the island of Puerto Rico. Her family had lived off the land for generations. Today she sits in a rattling IRT subway car, speeding through the iron-and-rock guts of Manhattan. She sits on the train, her ears dazed by the loud outcry of wheels against tracks. Surrounded by a galaxy of unknown fellow strangers, she looks up at a long strip of colorful signboards placed high above the bobbing heads of the others. All the posters call for her attention.

Looking down at her, a blond-haired lady cabdriver leans out of her driver's side window. Here is the famed philosopher of this strange urban world, and a woman she can talk to. The tough-wise eyes of the cabby combined with a youthful beauty, speaking to Maria Aguilar directly:

*Estoy sentada 12 horas al dia.*

*Lo ultimo que necesito son hemorroides.*

(Translation: I sit for twelve hours a day. The last thing I need are hemorrhoids.)

Under this candid testimonial lies a package of Preparation H ointment, and the promise "*Alivia dolores y picasonas. Y ayuda a reducir la hinchazon.*" (Translation: Relieves pain and itching. And helps reduce swelling.) As her mind's eye takes it all in, the train sweeps into Maria's stop. She gets out; climbs the stairs to the street; walks to work where she will spend her day sitting on a stool in a small garment factory, sewing hems on pretty dresses.

2) Every day, while Benny Doyle drives his Mustang to work along State Road Number 20, he passes a giant billboard along the shoulder. The billboard is selling whiskey and features a woman in a black velvet dress stretching across its brilliant canvas.

As Benny Doyle downshifts by, the lounging beauty looks out to him. Day after day he sees her here. The first time he wasn't sure, but now he's convinced that her eyes are following him.

3) The morning sun shines on the red-tan forehead of Bill O'Conner as he drinks espresso on his sun deck, alongside the ocean cliffs of La Jolla, California. Turning through the daily paper, he reads a story about Zimbabwe. "Rhodesia," he thinks to himself. The story argues that a large number of Africans in Zimbabwe are fearful about black majority rule, and are concerned over a white exodus. Two black hotel workers are quoted by the article. Bill puts this, as a fact, into his mind.

Later that day, over a business lunch, he repeats the story to five white business associates, sitting at the restaurant table. They share a superior laugh over the ineptitude of black African political rule. Three more tellings, children of the first, take place over the next four days. These are spoken by two of Bill O'Conner's luncheon companions; passed on to still others in the supposed voice of political wisdom.

4) Barbara and John Marsh get into their seven-year-old Dodge pickup and drive twenty-three miles to the nearest Sears in Cedar Rapids. After years of breakdowns and months of hesitation they've decided to buy a new washing machine. They come to Sears because it is there, and because they believe that their new Sears machine will be steady and reliable. The Marshes will pay for their purchase for the next year or so. Barbara's great-grandfather, Elijah Simmons, had purchased a cream-separator from Sears, Roebuck in 1897 and he swore by it.

5) When the clock-radio sprang the morning affront upon him, Archie Bishop rolled resentfully out of his crumpled bed and

trudged slowly to the john. A few moments later he was unconsciously squeezing toothpaste out of a mess of red and white Colgate packaging. A dozen scrubs of the mouth and he expectorated a white, minty glob into the basin. Still groggy, he turned on the hot water, slapping occasional palmfuls onto his gray face.

A can of Noxzema shave cream sat on the edge of the sink with a film of crud and whiskers across its once neat label. Archie reached for the bomb and filled his left hand with a white creamy mound, then spread it over his beard. He shaved then looked with resignation at the regular collection of cuts on his neck.

Stepping into a shower, he soaped up with a soap that promised to wake him up. Groggily, he then grabbed a bottle of Clairol Herbal Essence Shampoo. He turned the tablet-shaped bottle to its back label, carefully reading the "Directions."

"Wet hair."

He wet his hair.

"Lather."

He lathered.

"Rinse."

He rinsed.

"Repeat if necessary."

Not sure whether it was altogether necessary, he repeated the process according to directions.

CONTD. 1) Late in the evening, Maria Aguilar stepped back in the subway train, heading home to the Bronx after a long and tiring day. This time, a poster told her that "The Pain Stops Here!" She barely noticed, but later she would swallow two New Extra Strength Bufferin tablets with a glass of water from a rusty tap.

6) Two cockroaches in cartoon form leer out onto the street from a wall advertisement. The man cockroach is drawn like a hipster, wearing shades and a cockroach zoot-suit. He strolls hand-in-hand with a lady cockroach, who is dressed like a floozy and blushing beet-red. Caught in the midst of their cockroach-rendezvous, they step sinfully into a Black Flag Roach Motel. Beneath them in Spanish, the words:

*Las Cucarachas entran ... pero no pueden salir.*

(Translation: Cockroaches check in ... but they don't check out.)

The roaches are trapped; sin is punished. Salvation is gauged by one's ability to live roach-free. The sinners of the earth shall be inundated by roaches. Moral tales and insects encourage passersby to rid their houses of sin. In their homes, sometimes, people wonder whether God has forsaken them.

7) Beverly Jackson sits at a metal and tan Formica table and looks through the *New York Post*. She is bombarded by a catalog of horror. Children are mutilated ... subway riders attacked .... Fanatics are marauding and noble despots lie in bloody heaps.

Occasionally someone steps off the crime-infested streets to claim a million dollars in lottery winnings.

Beverly Jackson's skin crawls; she feels a knot encircling her lungs. She is beset by immobility, hopelessness, depression. Slowly she walks over to her sixth-floor window, gazing out into the sooty afternoon. From the empty street below, Beverly Jackson imagines a crowd yelling "Jump! ... Jump!"

8) Between 1957 and 1966 Frank Miller saw a dozen John Wayne movies, countless other westerns and war dramas. In 1969 he led a charge up a hill without a name in Southeast Asia. No one followed; he took a bullet in the chest.

Today he sits in a chair and doesn't get up. He feels that images betrayed him, and now he camps out across from the White House while another movie star cuts benefits for veterans. In the morning newspaper he reads of a massive weapons buildup taking place.

9) Gina Concepcion now comes to school wearing the Jordache look. All this has been made possible by weeks and weeks of after school employment at a supermarket checkout counter. Now, each morning, she tugs the decorative denim over her young legs, sucking in her lean belly to close the snaps. These pants are expensive compared to the "no-name" brands, but they're worth it, she reasons. They fit better, and she fits better.

The theater marquee, stretching out over a crumbling, garbage strewn sidewalk, announced "The Decline of Western Civilization." At the ticket window a smaller sign read "All seats \$5.00."

It was ten in the morning and Joyce Hopkins stood before a mirror next to her bed. Her interview at General Public Utilities, Nuclear Division was only four hours away and all she could think was "What to wear?"

A half hour later Joyce stood again before the mirror, wearing a slip and stockings. On the bed, next to her, lay a two-foot-mountain of discarded options. Mocking the title of a recent bestseller, which she hadn't read, she said aloud to herself, "Dress for Success .... What do they like?"

At one o'clock she walked out the door wearing a brownish tweed jacket; a cream-colored Qiana blouse, full-cut with a tied collar; a dark beige skirt, fairly straight and hemmed (by Maria Aguilar) two inches below the knee; shear fawn stockings, and simple but elegant reddish brown pumps on her feet. Her hair was to the shoulder, her look tawny. When she got the job she thanked her friend Millie, a middle manager, for the tip not to wear pants.

10) Joe Davis stood at the endless conveyor, placing caps on a round-the-clock parade of automobile radiators. His nose and eyes burned. His ears buzzed in the din. In a furtive moment he looked up and to the right. On the plant wall was a large yellow sign with **THINK!** printed on it in bold type. Joe turned back quickly to the radiator caps.

Fifty years earlier in another factory, in another state, Joe's grandfather, Nat Davis, had looked up and seen another sign:

*A Clean Machine Runs Better. Your Body Is a Machine.*

*KEEP IT CLEAN.*

Though he tried and tried, Joe Davis' grandfather was never able to get the dirt out from under his nails. Neither could his great-grandfather, who couldn't read.

11) In 1952 Mary Bird left her family in Charleston to earn money as a maid in a Philadelphia suburb. She earned thirty-five dollars a week, plus room and board, in a dingy retreat of a ranch-style tract house. Twenty-eight years later she sits on a bus, heading toward her small room in north Philly. Across from her, on an advertising poster, a sumptuous meal is displayed. Golden fried chicken, green beans glistening with butter and flecked by pimento, and a fluffy cloud of rice fill the greater part of a calico-patterned dinner plate. Next to the plate sits a steaming boat of gravy, and an icy drink in an amber tumbler. The plate is on a quilted blue placemat, flanked by a thick linen napkin and colonial silverware.

As Mary Bird's hungers are aroused, the wording on the placard instructs her: "*Come home to Carolina*"

Shopping List:

paper towels

milk

eggs

rice crispies

chicken

snacks for kids (twinkies, chips, etc.)

potatoes

coke, ginger ale, plain soda

cheer

brillo

peanut butter

bread

ragu (2 jars)

spaghetti

saran wrap

salad

get cleaning, bank, *must pay electric !!!*

12) On his way to Nina's house, Sidney passed an ad for Smirnoff vodka. A sultry beauty with wet hair and beads of moisture on her smooth, tanned face looked out at him. "*Try a Main Squeeze.*" For a teenage boy the invitation transcended the arena of drink; he felt a quick throb pulse at the base of his belly and his step quickened.

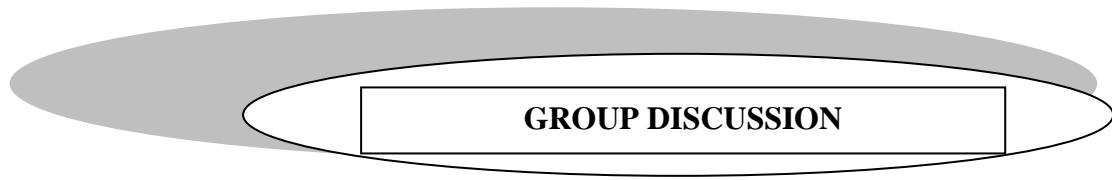
13) In October of 1957, at the age of two and a half, Aaron Stone was watching television. Suddenly, from the black screen, there leaped a circus clown, selling children's vitamins, and yelling "Hi! boys and girls!" He ran, terrified, from the room, screaming. For years after, Aaron watched television in perpetual fear that the vitamin clown would reappear. Slowly his family assured him that the television was just a mechanical box and couldn't really hurt him, that the vitamin clown was harmless. Today, as an adult, Aaron Stone takes vitamins, is ambivalent about clowns, and watches television, although there are occasional moments of anxiety.

The above 13 incidents, which showed a number of advertisement causes and effects, are some of the facts of our lives; disparate moments, disconnected, dissociated. Meaningless moments. Random incidents. Memory traces. Each is an unplanned encounter, part of day-to-day existence. Viewed alone, each by itself, such spaces of our lives seem insignificant and trivial. They are the decisions and reveries of survival;

the stuff of small talk; the chance preoccupations of our eyes and minds in a world of images-soon forgotten. Viewed together, however, as an ensemble, an integrated panorama of social life, human activity, hope and despair, images and information another tale unfolds from these vignettes. They reveal a pattern of life, the structures of perception.

As familiar moments in American life, all of these events bear the footprints of a history that weighs upon us, but is largely untold. We live and breathe an atmosphere where mass images are everywhere in evidence; mass produced, mass distributed. In the streets, in our homes, among a crowd, or alone, they speak to us, overwhelm our vision. Their presence, their messages are given; unavoidable. Though their history is still relatively short, their prehistory is, for the most part, forgotten, unimaginable.

The history that unites the seemingly random routines of daily life is one that embraces the rise of an industrial consumer society. It involves explosive interactions between modernity and old ways of life. It includes the proliferation, over days and decades, of a wide, repeatable vernacular of commercial or advertisement images and ideas. This history spells new patterns of social, productive, and political life.



### GROUP DISCUSSION

Thirteen scenes have been presented in the reading above, with regards to how advertisements can influence our behavior and attitude. Choose one of the scenes presented and, after re-reading and reflecting on your understanding, discuss in groups what kinds of similar advertisements, images or scenes do you have in your daily life experiences?

## B. Masters of Desire<sup>16</sup>

### JACK SOLOMON

*This selection is taken from the book *The Signs of Our Time* (1988), in which Jack Solomon uses semiology, the study of signs, in analyzing contemporary America culture. In this excerpt, Solomon interprets advertising from a semiological perspective, noting the signs and symbols at work in specific ads and suggesting what they mean and why they appeal to the American consumer.*

*Solomon asserts that the American dream breeds desire, a longing for a greater share of pie," and that in order to sell us products advertisements exploit this and other desires, fears, and guilts we share. Specifically, ads present think that particular products can satisfy our desires (for social status, or belonging, or sexual attractiveness), alleviate our fears, and clam our guilt. On a conscious level, we know that most products can't do these things and that we shouldn't be swayed by such promises of beauty, popularity, and success. But the companies that spend millions of dollars on advertising are obviously betting that subconsciously we're more susceptible than we like to admit.*

*As you read, pay attention to the way Solomon interprets specific ads, identifying the signs they contain and the reasons these signs are effective. After you finish the reading you can develop your own semiotic way of interpreting advertisements of your choice.*

Amongst democratic nations, men easily attain a certain equality of condition; but they can never attain in as much as they desire. (Alexis De Tocqueville)

<sup>16</sup> Petracca, Michael and Madeleine Sorapure. (1998). *Common Culture: Reading and Writing about American Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. US: Prentice Hall, Inc, pp. 46 – 59.

On May 10, 1831, a young French aristocrat named Alexis de Tocqueville arrived in New York City at the start of what would become one of the most famous visits to America in our history. He had come to observe firsthand the institutions of the freest, most egalitarian society of the age, but what he found was a paradox. For behind America's mythic promise of equal opportunity, Tocqueville discovered a desire for *unequal* social rewards, a ferocious competition for privilege and distinction. As he wrote in his monumental study, *Democracy in America*:

When all privilege of birth and fortune are abolished, when all professions are accessible to all, and a man's own energies may place him at the top any one of them, an easy and unbounded career seems open to his ambition....  
But this is an erroneous notion, which is corrected by daily experience. [For when] men are nearly alike, and cleave a way through the same throng which surrounds and presses him.

Yet walking quick and cleaving a way is precisely what Americans dream of. We Americans dream of rising above the crowd, of attaining a social summit beyond the reach of ordinary citizens. And therein lies the paradox.

The American dream, in other words, has two faces: the one communally egalitarian and the other competitively elitist. This contradiction is no accident; it is fundamental to the structure of American society. Even as America's great myth of equality celebrates the virtues of mom, apple pie, and the girl or boy next door, it also lures us to achieve social distinction, to rise above the crowd and bask alone in the glory. This land is your land and this land is my land, Woody Guthrie's populist anthem tells us, but we keep trying to increase the "my" at the expense of the "your." Rather than fostering contentment, the American dream breeds desire, a longing for a greater share of the pie. It is as if

our society were a vast high-school football game, with the bulk of the participants noisily rooting in the stands while, deep down, each of them is wishing he or she could be the star quarterback or head cheerleader.

For the semiotician, the contradictory nature of the American myth of equality is nowhere written so clearly as in the signs that American advertisers use to manipulate us into buying their wares. "Manipulate" is the word here, not "persuade"; for advertising campaigns are not sources of product information, they are exercises in behavior modification. Appealing to our subconscious emotions rather than to our conscious intellects, advertisements are designed to exploit the discontentments fostered by the American dream, the constant desire for social success and the material rewards that accompany it. America's consumer economy runs on desire, and advertising stokes the engines by transforming common objects from peanut butter to political candidates into signs of all the things that Americans covet most.

But by semiotically reading the signs that advertising agencies manufacture to stimulate consumption, we can plot the precise state of desire in the audiences to which they are addressed. In this [essay], we'll look at a representative sample of ads and what they say about the emotional climate of the country and the fast-changing trends of American life. Because ours is a highly diverse, pluralistic society various advertisements may say different things depending on their intended audiences, but in every case they say something about America, about the status of our hopes, fears, desires, and beliefs.

Let's begin with two ad campaigns conducted by the same company that bear out Alexis de Tocqueville's observations about the contradictory nature of American society: General Motors' campaigns for its Cadillac and Chevrolet lines.

First, consider an early magazine ad for the Cadillac Allante. Appearing as a full-color, four-page insert in *Time*, the ad seems to say "I'm special – and so is this car" even before, we've begun to read it.

Rather than being printed on the ordinary, flimsy pages of the magazine, the Allante spread appears on glossy coated stock. The unwritten message here is that an extraordinary car deserves an extraordinary advertisement, and that both car and ad are aimed at an extraordinary consumer, or at least one who wishes to appear extraordinary compared to his more ordinary fellow citizens.

Ads of this kind work by creating symbolic associations between their product and what is most coveted by the consumers to whom they are addressed. It is significant, then, that this ad insists that the Allante is virtually an Italian rather than an American car, an automobile, as its copy runs, "Conceived and Commissioned by America's Luxury Car Leader-Cadillac" but "Designed and Handcrafted by Europe's Renowned Design Leader – Pininfarina, SpA, of Turin, Italy." This is not simply a piece of product information, it's a sign of the prestige that European luxury cars enjoy in today's automotive marketplace. Once the luxury car of choice for America's status drivers, Cadillac has fallen far behind its European competitors in the race for the prestige market.

So the Allante essentially represents Cadillac's decision, after years of resisting the trend toward European cars, to introduce its own European import – whose high cost is clearly printed on the last page of the ad. Although \$54,700 is a lot of money to pay for a Cadillac, it's about what you'd expect to pay for a top-of-the-line Mercedes-Benz. That's precisely the point the ad is trying to make: the Allante is no mere car. It's a potent status symbol you can associate with the other major status symbols of the 1980s.

American companies manufacture status symbols because American consumers want them. As Alexis de Tocqueville recognized a century and a half ago, the competitive nature of democratic societies breeds a desire for social distinction, a yearning to rise above the crowd. But given the fact that those who do make it to the top in socially mobile societies have often risen from the lower ranks, they still look like every-

one else. In the socially immobile societies of aristocratic Europe, generations of fixed social conditions produced subtle class signals. The accent of one's voice, the shape of one's nose, or even the set of one's chin, immediately communicated social status. Aside from the nasal bray and uptilted head of the Boston Brahmin, Americans do not have any native sets of personal status signals. If it weren't for his Mercedes-Benz and Manhattan townhouse, the parvenu Wall Street millionaire.....often couldn't be distinguished from the man who tailors his suits. Hence the demand for status symbols, for the objects that mark one off as a social success, is particularly strong in democratic nations – stronger even than in aristocratic societies, where the aristocrat so often looks and sounds different from everyone else.

Status symbols, then, are signs that identify their possessor's place in a social hierarchy, markers of rank and prestige can all think of any number of status symbols-Rolls-Royces, Beverly Hills mansions, even Shar Pei puppies (whose rareness and expense has rocketed them beyond Russian wolfhounds as status pets and has even inspired whole lines of wrinkle-faced stuffed toys) – but how do we know that something *is* status symbol? The explanation is quite simple: when an object (or puppy!) either costs a lot of money or requires influential connections to possess, anyone who possesses it must also possess the necessary mean and influence to acquire it. The object itself really doesn't matter, since it ultimately disappears behind the presumed social potency of its owner. Semiotically, what matters is the signal it sends, its value as a sign of power. One traditional sign of social distinction is owning a country estate and enjoying the peace and privacy that attend it. Advertisements for Mercedes-Benz, Jaguar, and Audi automobiles thus frequently feature drivers motoring quietly along a country road, presumably on their way to or from their country houses.

Advertisers have been quick to exploit the status signals that belong to body language as well. As Hegel observed in the early nineteenth century, it is an ancient aristocratic prerogative to be seen by the lower

orders without having to look at them in return. Tilting his chin high in the air and gazing down at the world under hooded eyelids, the aristocrat invites observation while refusing to look back. We can find such a pose exploited in an advertisement for Cadillac Seville in which we see an elegantly dressed woman out for a drive with her husband in their new Cadillac. If we look closely at the woman's body language, we can see her glance inwardly with a satisfied smile on her face but not outward toward the camera that represents our gaze. She is glad to be seen by us in her Seville, but she isn't interested in looking at *us!*

Ads that are aimed at a broader market take the opposite approach. If the American dream encourage the desire to "arrive," above the mass, it also fosters a desire to be popular, to "belong." Populist commercials accordingly transform products into signs of belonging & utilizing such common icons as country music, small-town life, family picnics, and farmyards. All of these icons are incorporated in GM's "Heartbeat of America" campaign for its Chevrolet line. Unlike the Seville commercial, the faces in the Chevy ads look straight at us and smile. Dress is casual; the mood upbeat. Quick camera cuts take us from rustic to suburban to urban scenes, creating an American montage filmed from sea to shining sea. We all "belong" in a Chevy.

Where price alone doesn't determine the market for a product, advertisers can go either way. Both Johnnie Walker and Jack Daniel's are better-grade whiskies, but where a Johnnie Walker ad appeals to the buyer who wants a mark of aristocratic distinction in his liquor, a Jack Daniel's ad emphasizes the down-home, egalitarian folksiness of its product. Johnnie Walker associates itself with such conventional status symbols as sable coats, Rolls-Royces, and black gold; Jack Daniel's gives us a Good 01' Boy in overalls. In fact, Jack Daniel's Good 01' Boy is an icon of backwoods independence, recalling the days of the moonshiner and the Whisky Rebellion of 1794. Evoking emotions quite at odds with those stimulated in Johnnie Walker ads, the advertisers of Jack Daniel's have chosen to transform their product into a sign of America's populist

tradition. The fact that both ads successfully sell whisky is itself a sign of the dual nature of the American dream.

Beer is also pitched on two levels. Consider the difference between the ways Budweiser and Michelob market their light beers. Bud Light and Michelob Light cost and taste about the same, but Budweiser tends to target the working class while Michelob has gone after the upscale market. Bud commercials are set in working-class bars that contrast with the sophisticated nightclubs and yuppie watering holes of the Michelob campaign. "You're one of the guys," Budweiser assures the assembly line worker and the truck driver, "this Bud's for you." Michelob, on the other hand, makes no such appeal to the democratic instinct of sharing and belonging:

You don't share, you take, grabbing what you can in a competitive dash to "have it all."

Populist advertising is particularly effective in the face of foreign competition. When Americans feel threatened from the outside, they tend to circle the wagons and temporarily forget their class differences. In the face of the Japanese automotive "invasion," Chrysler runs populist commercials in which Lee Lacocca joins the simple folk who buy his cars as the jingle "Born in America" blares in the background. Seeking to capitalize on the popularity of Bruce Springsteen's *Born in the USA* album, these ads gloss over Springsteen's ironic lyrics in a vast display of flag-waving. Chevrolet's "Heartbeat of America" campaign similarly attempts to woo American motorists away from Japanese automobiles by appealing to their patriotic sentiments.

The patriotic iconography of these campaigns also reflects the general cultural mood of the early-to mid-1980s. After a period of national anguish in the wake of the Vietnam War and the Iran hostage crisis America went on a patriotic binge. American athletic triumphs in the Lake Placid and Los Angeles Olympics introduced a sporting tone into the national celebration, often making international affairs appear like one

great Olympiad in which America was always going for the gold. In response, advertisers began to do their own flag-waving. The mood of advertising during this period was definitely upbeat. Even deodorant commercials, which traditionally work on our self doubts and fears of social rejection, jumped on the bandwagon. In the guilty sixties, we had ads like the "Ice Blue Secret" campaign with its connotations of guilt and shame. In the feel-good Reagan eighties, "Sure" deodorant commercials featured images of triumphant Americans throwing up their arms in victory to reveal-no wet marks! Deodorant commercials once had the moral echo of Nathaniel Hawthorne's guilt-ridden *The Scarlet Letter* in the early eighties they had all the moral subtlety of *Rocky IV*, reflecting the emotions of a Vietnam-weary nation eager to embrace the imagery of America Triumphant.

The commercials for Worlds of Wonder's Lazer Tag game featured the futuristic finals of some Soviet-American Lazer Tag shootout ("Practice hard, America!") and carried the emotions of patriotism into an even more aggressive arena. Exploiting the hoopla that surrounded the victory over the Soviets in the hockey finals of the 1980 Olympics, the Lazer Tag ads pandered to an American desire for the sort of clear-cut nationalistic triumphs that the nuclear age has rendered almost impossible. Creating a fantasy setting where patriotic dreams are substituted for complicated realities, the Lazer Tag commercials sought to capture the imaginations of children caught up in the patriotic fervor of the early 1980s.

### **Live the Fantasy**

By reading the signs of American advertising, we can conclude that America is a nation of fantasizers, often preferring the sign to the substance and easily enthralled by a veritable Fantasy Island of commercial illusions. Critics of Madison Avenue often complain that advertisers create consumer desire, but semioticians don't think the situation is

that simple. Advertisers may give shape to consumer fantasies, but they need raw material to work with, the subconscious dreams and desires of the marketplace. As long as these desires remain unconscious, advertisers will be able to exploit them. But by bringing the fantasies to the surface, you can free yourself from advertising's often hypnotic grasp.

I can think of no company that has more successfully seized upon the subconscious fantasies of the American marketplace – indeed the world marketplace – than McDonald's. By no means the first nor the only hamburger chain in the United States, McDonald's emerged victorious in the "burger wars" by transforming hamburgers into signs of all that was desirable in American life. Other chains like Wendy's, Burger King, and Jack-In-The-Box continue to advertise and sell widely, but no company approaches McDonald's transformation of itself into a symbol of American culture.

McDonald's success can be traced to the precision of its advertising. Instead of broadcasting a single "one-size-fits-all" campaign at a time, McDonald's pitches its burgers simultaneously at different age groups, different classes, even different races (Budweiser beer, incidentally, has succeeded in the same way). For children, there is the Ronald McDonald campaign, which presents a fantasy world that has little to do with hamburgers in any rational sense but a great deal to do with the emotional desires of kids. Ronald McDonald and his friends are signs that recall the Muppets, *Sesame Street*, the circus, toys, storybook illustrations, even *Alice in Wonderland*. Such signs do not signify hamburgers. Rather, they are displayed in order to prompt in the child's mind an automatic association of fantasy, fun, and McDonald's.

The same approach is taken in ads aimed at older audiences – teens, adults, and senior citizens. In the teen-oriented ads we may catch a fleeting glimpse of a hamburger or two, but what we are really shown is a teenage fantasy: groups of hip and happy adolescents singing, dancing, and cavorting together. Fearing loneliness more than anything

else, adolescents quickly respond to the group appeal of such commercials. "Eat a Big Mac," these ads say, "and you won't be stuck home alone on Saturday night."

To appeal to an older and more sophisticated audience no longer so afraid of not belonging and more concerned with finding a place to go out to at night, McDonald's has designed the elaborate "Mac Tonight" commercials, which have for their backdrop a night lit urban skyline and at their center a cabaret pianist with a moon-shaped head, a glad manner, and Blues Brothers shades. Such signs prompt an association of McDonald's with nightclubs and urban sophistication, persuading us that McDonald's is a place not only for breakfast or lunch but for dinner too, as if it were a popular off-Broadway nightspot, a place to see and be seen. Even the parody of Kurt Weill's "Mack the Knife" theme song that Mac the Pianist performs is a sign, a subtle signal to the sophisticated hamburger eater able to recognize the origin of the tune in Bertolt Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*.

For yet older customers, McDonald's has designed a commercial around the fact that it employs a large number of retirees and seniors. In one such ad, we see an elderly man leaving his pretty little cottage early in the morning to start work as "the new kid" at McDonald's, and then we watch him during his first day on the job. Of course he is a great success, outdoing everyone else with his energy and efficiency, and he returns home in the evening to a loving wife and happy home. One would almost think that the ad was a kind of moving "help wanted" sign (indeed, McDonald's was hiring elderly employees at the time), but it's really just directed at consumers. Older viewers can see themselves wanted and appreciated in the ad – and perhaps be distracted from the rationally uncomfortable fact that many senior citizens take such jobs because of financial need and thus may be unlikely to own the sort of home that one sees in the commercial. But realism isn't the point here. This is fantasyland, a dream world promising instant gratification no matter what the facts of the matter may be.

Practically the only fantasy that McDonald's doesn't exploit is the fantasy of sex. This is understandable, given McDonald's desire to present itself as a family restaurant. But everywhere else, sexual fantasies, which have always had an important place in American advertising, are beginning to dominate the advertising scene. You expect sexual come-ons in ads for perfume or cosmetics or jewelry – after all, that's what they're selling – but for room deodorizers? In a magazine ad for Claire Burke home fragrances, for example, we see a well-dressed couple cavorting about their bedroom in what looks like a cheery preparation for sadomasochistic exercises. Jordache and Calvin Klein pitch blue jeans as props for teenage sexuality. The phallic appeal of automobiles, traditionally an implicit feature in automotive advertising, becomes quite explicit in a Dodge commercial that shifts back and forth from shots of a young man in an automobile to teasing glimpses of a woman-his date-as she dresses in her apartment.

The very language of today's advertisements is charged with sexuality. Products in the more innocent fifties were "new and improved," but everything in the eighties is "hot!"-as in "hot woman," or sexual heat. Cars are "hot." Movies are "hot." An ad for Valvoline pulses to the rhythm of a "heat wave, burning in my car." Sneakers get red hot in a magazine ad for Travel Fox athletic shoes in which we see male and female figures, clad only in Travel Fox shoes, apparently in the act of copulation – an ad that earned one of *Adweek's* annual "badvertising" awards for shoddy advertising.

The sexual explicitness of contemporary advertising is a sign not so much of American sexual fantasies as of the lengths to which advertisers will go to get attention. Sex never fails as an attention-getter, and in a particularly competitive, and expensive, era for American marketing, advertisers like to bet on a sure thing. Ad people refer to the proliferation of TV, radio, newspaper, magazine, and billboard ads as "clutter," and nothing cuts through the clutter like sex.

By showing the flesh, advertisers work on the deepest, most coercive human emotions of all. Much sexual coercion in advertising, however, is a sign of a desperate need to make certain that clients are getting their money's worth. The appearance of advertisements that refer directly to the prefabricated fantasies of Hollywood is a sign of a different sort of desperation: a desperation for ideas. With the rapid turnover of advertising campaigns mandated by the need to cut through the "clutter," advertisers may be hard pressed for new ad concepts, and so they are more and more frequently turning to already-established models. In the early 1980s, for instance, Pepsi-Cola ran a series of ads broadly alluding to Steven Spielberg's *E. T.* In one such ad, we see a young boy who, like the hero of *E.T.*, witnesses an extraterrestrial visit. The boy is led to a soft-drink machine where he pauses to drink a can of Pepsi as the spaceship he's spotted flies off into the universe. The relationship between the ad and the movie, accordingly, is a parasitical one, with the ad taking its life from the creative body of the film.

Pepsi did something similar in 1987 when it arranged with the producers of the movie *Top Gun* to promote the film's video release in a Pepsi ad to the video itself. This time, however, the parasitical relationship between ad and film was made explicit. Pepsi sales benefited from the video, and the video's sales benefited from Pepsi. It was a marriage made in corporate heaven.

The fact that Pepsi believed that it could stimulate consumption by appealing to the militaristic fantasies dramatized in *Top Gun* reflects similar fantasies in the "Pepsi generation." Earlier generations saw Pepsi associated with high-school courtship rituals, with couples sipping sodas together at the corner drugstore. When the draft was on, young men fantasized about Peggy Sue, not Air Force Flight School. Military service was all too real a possibility to fantasize about. But in an era when military service is not a reality for most young Americans, Pepsi commercials featuring hotshot fly-boys drinking Pepsi while streaking about in their Air Force jets contribute to a youth culture that has forgotten what military

service means. It all looks like such fun in the Pepsi ads, but what they conceal is the fact that military jets are weapons, not high-tech recreational vehicles.

For less militaristic dreamers, Madison Avenue has framed ad campaigns around the cultural prestige of high-tech machinery in its own right. This is especially the case with sports cars, whose hi-tech appeal is so powerful that some people apparently fantasize about *being* sports cars. At least, this is the conclusion one might draw from a Porsche commercial that asked its audience, "If you were a car, what kind of car would you be?" As a candy-red Porsche speeds along a rain-slick forest road, the ad's voice-over describes all the specifications you'd want to have if you were a sports car. "If you were a car," the commercial concludes, "you'd be a Porsche."

In his essay "Car Commercials and *Miami Vice*," Tod Gitlin explains the semiotic appeal of such ads as those in the Porsche campaign. Aired at the height of what may be called America's "myth of the entrepreneur," these commercials were aimed at young corporate managers who imaginatively identified with the "lone wolf" image of a Porsche speeding through the woods. Gitlin points out that such images cater to the fantasies of faceless corporate men who dream of entrepreneurial glory, of striking out on their own like John DeLorean and telling the boss to take his job and shove it. But as DeLorean's spectacular failure demonstrates, the life of the entrepreneur can be extremely risky. So rather than having to go and do it alone and take the risks that accompany entrepreneurial independence, the young executive can substitute fantasy for reality by climbing into his Porsche—or at least that's what Porsche's advertisers wanted him to believe.

But there is more at work in the Porsche ads than the fantasies of corporate America. Ever since Arthur C. Clarke and Stanley Kubrick teamed up to present us with HAL 9000, the demented computer of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the American imagination has been obsessed with the

melding of man and machine. First there was television's *Six Million Dollar Man*, and then movieland's *Star Wars*, *Blade Runner*, and *Robocop*, fantasy visions of a future dominated by machines. Androids haunt our imaginations as machines seize the initiative. *Time* magazine's "Man of the Year" for 1982 was a computer. Robot-built automobiles appeal to drivers who spend their days in front of computer screens-perhaps designing robots. When so much power and prestige is being given to high-tech machines, wouldn't you rather be a Porsche?

In short, the Porsche campaign is a sign of a new mythology that is emerging before our eyes, a myth of the machine, which is replacing the myth of the human. The iconic figure of the little tramp caught up in the cogs of industrial production in Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* signified a humanistic revulsion to the age of the machine. Human beings, such icons said, were superior to machines. Human values should come first in the moral order of things. But as Edith Milton suggests in her essay, "The Track of the Mutant," we are now coming to believe that machines are superior to human beings that mechanical nature is superior to human nature. Rather than being threatened by machines, we long to merge with them. *The Six Million Dollar Man* is one iconic figure in the new mythology; Harrison Ford's sexual coupling with an android is another. In such an age it should come as little wonder that computersynthesized Max Headroom should be a commercial spokesman for Coca-Cola, or that Federal Express should design a series of TV ads featuring mechanical-looking human beings revolving around strange and powerful machines.

### **Fear and Trembling in the Marketplace**

While advertisers play on and reflect back at us our fantasies about everything from fighter pilots to robots, they also play on darker imaginings. If dream and desire can be exploited in the quest for sales, so can nightmare and fear.

The nightmare equivalent of America's populist desire to "belong," for example, is the fear of not belonging, of social rejection, of being different. Advertisements for dandruff shampoos, mouthwashes, deodorants, and laundry detergents ("Ring Around the Collar!") accordingly exploit such fears, bullying us into consumption. Although ads of this type are still around in the 1980s, they were particularly common in the fifties and early sixties, reflecting a society still reeling from the witchhunts of the McCarthy years. When any sort of social eccentricity or difference could result in a public denunciation and the loss of one's job or even liberty, Americans were keen to conform and be like everyone else. No one wanted to be "guilty" of smelling bad or of having a dirty collar.

"Guilt" ads characteristically work by creating narrative situations in which someone is "accused" of some social "transgression," pronounced guilty, and then offered the sponsor's product as a means of returning to "innocence." Such ads, in essence, are parodies of ancient religious rituals of guilt and atonement, whereby sinning humanity is offered salvation through the agency of priest and church. In the world of advertising, a product takes the place of the priest, but the logic of the situation is quite similar.

In commercials for Wisk detergent, for example, we witness the drama of a hapless housewife and her husband as they are mocked by the jeering voices of children shouting "Ring Around the Collar!" "Oh, those dirty rings!" the housewife groans in despair. It's as if she and her husband were being stoned by an angry crowd. But there's hope, there's help, there's Wisk. Cleansing her soul of sin as well as her husband's, the housewife launders his shirts with Wisk, and behold, his collars are clean. Product salvation is only as far as the supermarket.

The recent appearance of advertisements for hospitals treating drug and alcohol addiction have raised the old genre of the guilt ad to new heights (or lows, depending on your perspective). In such ads, we see wives on the verge of leaving their husbands if they don't do something

about their drinking, and salesmen about to lose their jobs. The man is guilty; he has sinned, but he upholds the ritual of guilt and atonement by "confessing" to his wife or boss and agreeing to go to the hospital the ad is pitching.

If guilt looks backward in time to past transgressions, fear, like desire, faces forward, trembling before the future. In the late 1980s, a new kind of fear commercial appeared, one whose narrative played on the worries of young corporate managers struggling up the ladder of success. Representing the nightmare equivalent of the elitist desire to "arrive," ads of this sort created images of failure, storylines of corporate defeat. In one ad for Apple computers, for example, a group of junior executives sits around a table with the boss as he asks each executive how long it will take his or her department to complete some publishing jobs. "Two or three days answers one nervous executive."A week, on overtime," a tight-lipped woman responds. But one young up-and-comer can have everything ready tomorrow, today, or yesterday because his department uses a Macintosh desktop publishing system. Guess who'll get the next promotion?

Fear stalks an ad for AT&T computer systems too. A boss and four junior executives are dining in a posh restaurant. Icons of corporate power and prestige flood the screen – from the executives' formal evening wear to the fancy table setting-but there's tension in the air. It seems that the junior managers have chosen a computer system that's incompatible with the firm's sales and marketing departments. A whole new system will have to be purchased, but the tone of the meeting suggests that it will be handled by a new group of managers. These guys are on the way out. They no longer "belong." Indeed, it's probably no accident that the ad takes place in a restaurant, given the joke that went around in the aftermath of the 1987 market crash, "What do you call a yuppie stockbroker?" the joke ran. "Hey, waiter!" Is the ad trying subtly to suggest that junior executives who choose the wrong computer systems are doomed to suffer the same fate?

For other markets, there are other fears. If McDonald's presents senior citizens with bright fantasies of being useful and appreciated beyond retirement, companies like Secure Horizons dramatize senior citizens' fears of being caught short by a major illness. Running its ads in the wake of budgetary cuts in the Medicare system, Secure Horizons designed a series of commercials featuring a pleasant old man named Harry-who looks and sounds rather like Carroll O'Connor-who tells the story of the scare he got during his wife's recent illness. Fearing that next time Medicare won't cover the bills, he has purchased supplemental health insurance from Secure Horizons and now securely tends his rooftop garden.

Among all the fears advertisers have exploited over the years, I find the fear of not having a posh enough burial site the most arresting. Advertisers usually avoid any mention of death – who wants to associate a product with the gravel-but mortuary advertisers haven't much choice. Generally, they solve their problem by framing cemeteries, as timeless parks presided over by priestly morticians, appealing to our desires for dignity and comfort in the face of bereavement. But in one television commercial for Forest Lawn we find a different approach. In this ad we are presented with the ghost of an old man telling us how he might have found a much nicer resting place than the run-down cemetery in which we find him had his wife only known that Forest Lawn was so "affordable." I presume the ad was supposed to be funny, but it's been pulled off the air. There are some fears that just won't bear joking about, some nightmares too dark to dramatize.

### The Future of an Illusion

There are some signs in the advertising world that Americans are getting fed up with fantasy advertisements and want to hear some straight talk. Weary of extravagant product claims and irrelevant associations, consumers trained by years of advertising to distrust what they

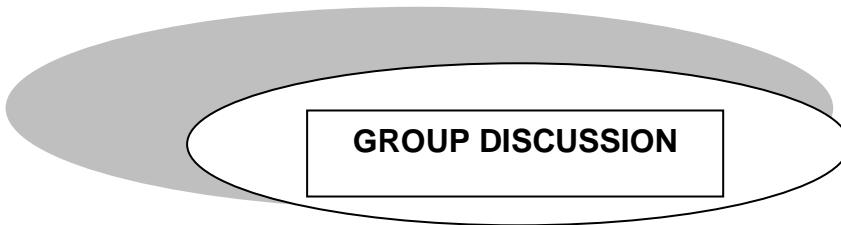
hear seem to be developing an immunity to Commercials. At least, this is the semiotic message I read in the "new realism" advertisements of the eighties, ads that attempt to convince you that what you're seeing is the real thing, that the ad is giving you the straight dope, not advertising hype.

You can recognize the "new realism" by its camera techniques. The lighting is usually subdued to give the ad the effect of being filmed while blinds were drawn. The camera shots are jerky and off-angle, often zooming in for sudden unflattering close-ups, as if the cameraman was an amateur with a home video recorder. In a "realistic" ad for AT&T, for example, we are treated to a monologue by a plump stockbroker – his plumpness intended as a sign that he's for real and not just another actor – who tells us about the problems he's had with his phone system (not AT&T's) as the camera jerks around, generally filming him from below as if the cameraman couldn't quite fit his equipment into the crammed office and had to film the scene on his knees. "This is no fancy advertisement," the ad tries to convince us, "this is sincere."

An ad for Miller draft beer tries the same approach, recreating the effect of an amateur videotape of a wedding celebration. Camera shots shift suddenly from group to group. The picture jumps. Bodies are poorly framed. The color is washed out. Like the beer it is pushing, the ad is supposed to strike us as being "as real as it gets."

Such ads reflect a desire for reality in the marketplace, a weariness with Madison Avenue illusions. But there's no illusion like the illusion of reality. Every special technique that advertisers use to create their "reality effects" is, in fact, more unrealistic than the techniques of "illusory" ads. The world, in reality, doesn't jump around when you look at it. It doesn't appear in subdued gray tones. Our eyes don't have zoom lenses, and we don't look at things with our heads cocked to one side. The irony of the "new realism" is that it is more unrealistic, more artificial, than the ordinary run of television advertising.

But don't expect any truly realistic ads in the future, because a realistic advertisement is a contradiction in terms. The logic of advertising is entirely semiotic: it substitutes signs for things, framed visions of consumer desire for the thing itself. The success of modern advertising, its penetration into every corner of American life, reflects a culture that has itself chosen illusion over reality. At a time when political candidates all have professional image-makers attached to their staffs, and the President of the United States is an actor who once sold shirt collars, all the cultural signs are pointing to more illusions in our lives rather than fewer a fecund breeding ground for the world of the advertiser.



**GROUP DISCUSSION**

1. What does Solomon see as the basic contradiction or conflict inherent in the American Dream? How does advertising exploit this contradiction? Think of specific ads you've seen recently that are manipulative or exploitative in the way that Solomon describes.
2. Solomon offers short interpretations of some specific advertising campaigns-Pepsi, Porsche, McDonald's, and Cadillac, among others. For one example that you found particularly interesting, restate Solomon's interpretation. What would you add to make this interpretation stronger?
3. According to Solomon, advertisers usually appeal either to our dreams and desires or to our guilt and fear. Recall some ads that you think are particularly effective. Were they manipulating our fantasies or our nightmares or did they use other strategies discussed by Solomon? Discuss which strategies you think work best, and why.

4. In this article, Solomon takes a semiotic approach to advertising, because, as he explains, "The logic of advertising is entirely semiotic: it substitutes signs for things, framed visions of consumer desire for the thing itself". List the signs you find in a recent magazine ad that interests you and explore in writing the meaning and the appeal of each of them. What overall conclusions about the ad can you draw from your own semiological analysis?

### C. Skin Deep<sup>17</sup>

**WENDY CHAPKIS**

*The following essay by Wendy Chapkis, which is excerpted from her book *Beauty Secrets: Women and the Politics of Appearance* (1986), moves our theme of women's images in advertising to the international level. As Chapkis points out, the worldwide proliferation of American-made advertisements, television, and movies promotes an image of ideal female beauty that is distinctly "white, Western, and wealthy." Global advertising campaigns and the Americanization of world media largely ignore national, ethnic, and economic differences and "contribute to the belief that success and beauty are brand names with a distinctly white American look to them...." Women throughout the world then, are given a standard of beauty that, for many, is inappropriate.*

*In addition to examining American images abroad, Chapkis discusses the way non-Western women are portrayed in American-made advertisements. These ads present women of color as exotic and subservient, and picture Third World countries as "holiday fantasylands." In all cases, Chapkis suggests, advertising and other media relay a culturally biased image of the world that is inaccurate, even harmful.*

*Before you read, think of what the term "beauty" means to you, particularly your notion of "ideal female beauty. To what extent do you think advertising and mass media in general have influenced the formation of your idea of beauty?*

"Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?" As children we accept that "the fairest" is the same sort of measure as the fastest, the tallest

<sup>17</sup> Petracca, M. & Sorapure, M. (1998). *Common Culture: Reading and Writing about American Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. US: Prentice Hall, Inc, pp. 106 – 118.

or the richest. Later, in the growing sophistication of adulthood, we determine that the most beautiful is more like the bravest, the most popular or the most powerful. It becomes a judgment about which one might have an *opinion* but remains a quality that ultimately can be established by an independent and attentive authority. "Ladies and Gentlemen, the judges have reached a decision. The new Miss World is ...."

Adults thus continue to pose the question "who is the fairest" as though it were meaningful, even when the category of "them all" includes women of diverse races and nationalities. Indeed female beauty is becoming an increasingly standardized quality throughout the world. A standard so strikingly white, Western, and wealthy it is tempting to conclude there must be a conscious conspiracy afoot.

But in fact no hidden plot is needed to explain the pervasiveness of this image. The fantasy of the Good Life populated by Beautiful People wearing The Look has seized the imagination of much of the world. This western model of beauty represents a mandate for a way of life for women throughout the world regardless of how unrelated to each of our ethnic or economic possibilities it is. We invest a great deal in the fantasy, perhaps all the more, the further we are from being able to attain it. This international fantasy becomes the basis of our myths of eroticism success and adventure.

It is "Charlie's Angels" (stars of a 1970s US TV show) who appear to have a good time in the world, not women who are fat or small or skinned. As the center of a world economic system, the U.S. owns the biggest share of the global culture machine. By entering that world imagination, each woman aims to be whiter, more Western, more upper class. This goes beyond simple manipulation.

While the Hearst Corporation is trying to maximize profits on a global scale, that does not fully explain *Cosmopolitan's* popularity in seventeen languages around the world, the Cosmo package seems to offer everything: sexuality, success, independence and beauty. It is powerful and compelling.

A woman working all day making microchips who buys lipstick or cigarettes is buying some tiny sense of dignity and self-esteem along with the glamour.

In large part, the content of the global image is determined by the mechanics of the sell: who creates the images for what products to be marketed through which media controlled by whom? The beauty trade (cosmetics, toiletries, fragrance and fashion) is expanding its market worldwide. And a world market means global marketing. For instance, during the Christmas season of 1982, the same commercials for Antaeus and Chanel No.5 perfumes were being used throughout Europe, the – U.S. and Latin America. And in 1985, *Business Week* reported that Playtex had kicked off:

... a one ad fits all campaign ... betting that a single marketing effort can sell a new bra around the world ... At one point several years ago, Playtex had 43 versions of ads running throughout the world with local managers in charge ... This year Playtex gave all its worldwide business to New York's Grey Advertising.

Tony Bodinetz, vice-chair of KMP in London (a division of the huge international advertising corporation Saatchi and Saatchi) believes this kind of advertising campaign arises in part from cultural chauvinism:

The use of the same ad in various countries is in part based on a calculation of cost effectiveness, but partly it is simply a reflection of an attitude of mind. Some company executive in Pittsburgh or Los Angeles or somewhere thinks "if it works in Pittsburgh it'll work in London ... why the hell would they be any different?" One of the things we fight against here is the fact that American solutions are often imposed on us.

Bodinetz appears to be a minority voice in a company committed to just such a global advertising strategy: "They are committed to it because they need to be. They are looking to get those huge world clients and the way to get the clients is to sell this concept, so they have to believe it,"

says Bodinetz. The competition among the advertising giants for the large corporate accounts is intense. And the world of multinational product and image is very small indeed.

About a dozen advertising agencies worldwide represent the majority of major multinational corporations and themselves operate across national boundaries. The number three advertising agency in the U.S., J. Walter Thompson, for example, is also the most important agency in Argentina, Chile and Venezuela, number two in Brazil and ABC-the American Broadcasting Corporation - a private television these global image makers are American advertising agencies. The products they hype are also overwhelmingly American. U.S. companies alone account for nearly half of global expenditures on advertising, outspending the closest rival, Japan, by five to one. Small wonder then that advertising images tend to be recognizably North American.

These global advertising campaigns increasingly ignore national differences in determining the products to be marketed and the images used to sell them. The ads contribute to the belief that success and beauty are brand names with a distinctly white American look to them. Trade journals *Advertising Age* and *Business Abroad* note the trend: "Rubinstein Ads not Altered for Senoras;" "World Wide Beauty Hints: How Clairol Markets Glamour in Any Language."

The advertising agency Saatchi and Saatchi is enthusiastic about "world branding" and global culture:

Market research will be conducted to look for similarities not seek out differences. Similarities will be exploited positively and efficiently ... developing advertising for an entire region of the world, and not simply for one market to find a real advertising idea so deep in its appeal that it can transcend national borders previously thought inviolate.

Western corporations are not alone in pursuing this transcendent advertising ideal. Shiseido, the Japanese giant in cosmetics, has recently revamped its advertising to present a "determinedly international thrust." It is easy to create an ordinary, nice picture with a nice model and a nice presentation for the product," explains a company executive, "but we wanted to be memorable without being too realistic. Realism would – intrigue from the Orient" – but its models are white and its targeted market is "the international affluent elite." Saatchi and Saatchi agrees that this is the strategy of the future:

Are social developments making outmoded the idea that the differences between nations with regard to this or that durable, cosmetic or coffee were crucial for marketing strategy? Consumer convergence in demography, habits and culture are increasingly leading manufacturers to a consumer-driven rather than a geography-driven view of their marketing territory ... Marketers will be less likely to tailor product positioning to the differing needs of the country next door and more likely to operate on the basis of the common needs for their products.

A "consumer-driven" view of marketing means focusing on that segment of any society likely to purchase a given product. For many products, in particular luxury items, the potential market in large parts the world remains extremely limited. It is certainly true that members of these national elites often more closely resemble their counter-part in other countries than they do their own less affluent compatriots.

In turn, the upper class serves as the model of success and glamour for the rest of the nation. All the pieces of the picture begin to fit neatly together, confirming that there is but one vision of beauty. The woman in the Clairol ad resembles the wife of the Prime Minister or industrial

magnate who dresses in the latest French fashion as faithfully reported in the local version of *Cosmopolitan*.

Corporate advertising is not, then, uniquely responsible for the homogenization of culture around the world. But it is an important team player. Tony Bodinetz explains:

I don't think you can just point the finger and blame advertising, because advertising never leads. But admittedly it is very quick to sense what is happening on the streets or around the world and to jump on a bandwagon. Of course while it is true that advertising never sets the pace, it cannot escape its share of the responsibility for confirming the view that to "join the club" you've got to look like this, smell like this, speak like this and dress like this.

This vision of beauty and success has been made familiar around the world not only through ads but via the American media of magazines, television and motion pictures. In much of the world, a large portion of television programming is composed of American imports. Foreign programs make up well over half of television fare in such countries as Ecuador, Chile and Malaysia. In Western Europe, the Middle East and parts of Asia more than 20 percent of all television programs are made in the U.S. One popular American program, "Bonanza" was once seen in 60 countries with an estimated audience of 350 million. The equivalent, "Dallas" is watched by millions from Malaysia to South Africa.

The Americanization of the world media has had useful spinoffs for marketing. Saatchi and Saatchi again:

... television and motion pictures are creating elements of shared culture. And this cultural convergence is facilitating the establishment of multinational brand characters. The worldwide proliferation of the Marlboro brand would not have been possible without TV and motion picture education about the virile rugged character of the American

West and the American cowboy, helped by increasing color TV penetration.

That American television should be so omnipresent is not entirely 18 due to chance or to the excellence of the U.S. "sitcom." In the 1950s, ABC – the American Broadcasting Corporation, a private television company-received U.S. government AID funding to create the first television stations in Ecuador, Colombia and Peru. They also provided technical assistance for the development of many others. By the early 1970s, ninety countries throughout the world were buying *ABC* programs and business agreements between *ABC* and its Latin American affiliates allow the corporation to choose both programs and sponsors for peak viewing hours. Even without such direct control, foreign imports are often the programming of choice because small local networks find it much cheaper to buy American programs than to produce their own.

Television, and the related Hollywood film industry are not the 19 only media plying their wares around the world. Many of the top twenty American magazine corporations also produce for a world market. Hearst Corporation, the third largest magazine corporation in the U.S., produces a Latin American version of "Good Housekeeping" -*Buenhogar-* and *Vanidades* (the women's magazine with the largest circulation in Latin America). Hearst also publishes the internationally popular *Cosmopolitan*. Conde Nast, number six on the U.S. list, publishes and distributes adapted versions of *Vogue* magazine in many countries.

Researchers in Latin America studied the content of these transnational women's magazines and found striking similarities from country to country. The majority of articles focused on beauty fashion or products for use in the home. Perhaps even more telling, almost a third of the total space was devoted to advertising and 60 percent of all advertisements were for the products of transnational corporations.

Of course, the media have always relied heavily on advertising. Now, though, the relationship is so intimate that one corporation may own both the magazine advertising a product and the company producing it. Media authority Ben Bagdikian puts it bluntly: "The major media and giant corporations have always been allies; they are now a single entity."

Four of the fifty largest U.S. media corporations are among the fifty largest advertisers. All three of the major American television networks and three of the four leading movie studios are part of companies so large that they appear on the list of the 500 largest corporations in the United States. Thus, not only does one country determine the jingle much of the world will hum, but a very few, large corporations own the piper.

While it would be wrong to suggest that this is the result of a conscious conspiracy among the various parts of the global culture machine (U.S.-based multinational corporations; U.S. dominated international advertising and the U.S. entertainment and media industries), it is safe to say that they all benefit from a collective global fantasy of success and beauty defined by white skin, Western culture and imported products.

Elaborate make-up is part of the electronics image in Malaysia, and the factories even provide classes in how to apply it. This allows the workers to feel they are part of a global culture which includes the choice between Avon and Mary Quant products.

There just seems to be a great desire to aspire to Western values and Western culture ... Often an ad will be written in English because that is one way of flattering the audience: "You are smart, sophisticated and educated." I suppose that is also why the models tend to be white ...

Dr. Fu Nong Yu [a plastic surgeon in Peking] performs "eye jobs" to create folded or "double" eyelids, considered a mark

of wide-eyed beauty .... Most northern Chinese are born without double eyelids and Fu takes a few stitches to remove the epicanthal fold in the upper eyelid that is typical of Asians  
...

Japanese television commercials are a paean to the American way of life, full of glamorous movie stars and famous sports heroes ... Despite a growing pride in things Japanese, the United States remains a cultural pacesetter for Japan ... If a Japanese company cannot find an American celebrity to endorse its product, it may opt for displaying the product in a recognizably U.S. setting or placing a blue-eyed, blond model alongside it.

Naturally, this trend toward global cultural homogenization has not gone unchallenged. Indigenous culture remains a powerful alternative to the white Western model of success and beauty. In some countries traditional images are officially promoted as a response to the flood of imported Western culture. In other countries, local culture acts subversively as the bearer of otherwise illegal messages of political, economic and cultural resistance.

Following the Sandinista victory over the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua, sexist advertising was banned. If a woman now appears in an advertisement, there must be a reason other than providing a sexual come-on to the potential buyer. While *Vanidades* and *Cosmopolitan*, with their transnational advertising, can still be purchased in Managua, the local billboards do not offer images of the wealthy white glamour girl.

Another, although very different reaction to Western sexualized imagery of women, is evidenced in the Islamic countries of North Africa and the Middle East. A dramatic symbol of religious, national and patriarchal culture, the veil, is increasingly being adopted by women in these countries. The use of the veil to reclaim (and in some cases to reinvent) indigenous culture is clearly problematic but hardly inexplicable. Shortly before the overthrow of

the Shah in Iran, the most popular women's magazine in that country was *Zan-e Ruz* (*Woman of Today*) with a circulation of over 100,000. The periodical was filled with love stories starring blonde, blue-eyed heroines lifted directly from Western magazines. Of the 35 percent of the periodical taken up with ads, much focused on beauty and cosmetic products again often featuring blonde models. One researcher observed "the great stress on physical appearance in a situation of acute sexual repression is ... somehow ironic." More than ironic, the resulting tensions may have helped encourage both the Islamic revival and the subsequent return to the veil.

Significantly, while the veil may be an important and visible symbol of resistance to Western culture and values, it is worn by women only. Women throughout the world tend to be designated as culture bearers and given the burdensome responsibility of preserving traditional values and aesthetics. In recent studies in several African countries, researchers discovered that women were seen both as repositories of traditional culture and those most likely to succumb to Western influences. Women in Uganda, for example, were seen as:

... scapegoats not only for male confusion and conflict over what the contemporary roles of women should be, but for the dilemmas produced by adjusting to rapid social change. Where men have given up traditional customs and restraints on dress, but feel traitors to their own culture, they yearn for the security and compensation of at least knowing that women are loyal to it.

In much the same way, women in Zambia have been held responsible "when the state of morality was chaotic ... " and when cultural traditions became "contaminated by Western influence." Unfortunately, women of the Third World single handedly can no more turn back Western cultural domination than they can be held responsible for its powerful and enduring influence. And while women certainly are at the forefront of many forms of

resistance including the cultural, "tradition" may not be the only element women will choose to draw on in creating a culture that speaks of and to their lives.

At the international festival of women's culture, Black women fill the stage night after night with their presence. To watch them is not simply to admire but to feel pride. They allow for no less. Their self-respect is utterly contagious and offers a vision of power beyond the borders of white commercial culture.

These women using music, language and movement different from my own, still speak directly to me. "This is a heart beat. This is all of our heart beats. And it is beating for you. And for you. And for you." (Edwina Lee Tyler playing her African drum.)

The destructive effect of racism on the self-image of people of color is well-documented and much bemoaned-especially among anti-racist whites. Isn't it terrible that Blacks have felt a need to "relax" their curly hair to appear more attractive? Isn't it shocking that eye jobs creating a Western eyelid were popular among certain Vietnamese women during the war? Isn't it distressing that the model for female beauty sold to developing nations is the same White Woman sold to the West?

Yes. But at some level it is also profoundly reassuring to white women; we are, after all, the model. We do embody at least one element of the beauty formula. Our white Western lives are the stuff of global fantasy and demonstrably enviable.

This international commercial trend can easily be misrepresented as evidence of a unanimous esthetic judgment. But people of color are not alone in buying fantasies packaged in a distant ethnic reality. For the Western white, "paradise is tropical, and passion, rhythmic movement and sensuality all wear dark skin. Just as the white Western world serves the repository for certain elements of a global myth of success and beauty, so too does the world of color represent related myths of sensuality, adventure and exoticism.

The fantasy of the Western Good Life is grounded in the reality of the economic privilege of the industrialized West. Perhaps the fantasy of

sensuality and passion ascribed to the Third World reflects something similar about the realities of privilege and oppression. It is certainly true that to maintain a position of privilege in a world of tremendous poverty requires some measure of emotional shutting down, a distancing of the self from the unentitled other. Puerto Rican poet Aurora Levins Morales suggests that this has consequences for white culture:

There is a kind of aliveness that has been obtained in oppressed cultures that gets shut down in dominant culture. There is a lot of fear that comes with privilege. Fear that others want to take your stuff away from you. It means an incredible locking down. Also you have to be in control all the time. Being always in control is not conducive to sensuality.

Power is the arbiter determining which characteristics will be ascribed to the self and which will be projected onto the other. These complimentary images are the basis of myths of white and black, male and female, the self and Other ....

The world of advertising is a rich source of imagery of women of color, often combining racist and sexist stereotypes in one picture. Advertisements using Asian women, for example, are evocative not only of the sexual mystery but also the docility and subservience supposedly "natural to the oriental female." This is true whether the product is the woman herself (as an assembly line worker or a "hospitality girl" in a holiday "sex tour") or another good or service enhanced by the female touch. A Malaysian electronics firm advertising brochure reads:

The manual dexterity of the oriental female is famous the world over. Her hands are small and she works fast with extreme care. Who, therefore, could be better qualified by nature and inheritance to contribute to the efficiency of the bench assembly line than the oriental girl?

And this from Thai International Airlines:

Gentle people ... caring for you comes naturally to the girls of Thai. The gentle art of service and courtesy is one they learn from childhood ... Beautiful Thai.

As the advertising technique of "world branding" helps spread white Western culture to developing nations, Third World women increasingly appear in advertisements in the West promising entry to that vanishing world of the exotic. These women thus become metaphors for adventure, cultural difference and sexual subservience; items apparently increasingly hard to come by in the industrialized West.

Especially interesting are those ads selling travel and tourism. Their invitation is to escape to paradise on earth-in itself fascinating given the way Third World countries are represented in the other media. The split images are quite remarkable: the exotic is marketed as a holiday fantasyland while "the underdeveloped world" is used in the West as shorthand for poverty, hunger, political corruption and religious fanaticism.

Of course, airlines and other branches of the tourist industry, are in the business of selling fantasy not theories of underdevelopment. "A taste of Paradise to Sri Lanka ... Discover the infinite beaches with the people of Paradise" whispers the Air Lanka ad. The text is set against a picture of a deserted white sandy beach with a small inserted photo of a smiling Asian flight hostess.

The use of foreign locales and peoples to enhance the magic properties of a product is an effective marketing technique. It is easier to suspend judgment and accept the promise of the fantastic if it is set far from familiar soil. Just as we doubt that the truly romantic can happen to people who look too ordinary, it is harder to believe that the truly fantastic can happen too close to home.

In the past, travel belonged to a small, very privileged elite. We saw pictures of Brigitte Bardot in St. Tropez and knew both were the stuff of dreams. Now we can choose to visit the Cote d' Azur on a holiday, taking advantage of bargain flights or package tours. But when we walk the streets of our collective dreams, we don't look like Bardot. And the romantic adventures that befell her seem to pass us by. Perhaps we are not beautiful enough, or rich enough, to bring out the true magic of St. Tropez?

Rather than concluding that the fantasy was never a full and true reflection of reality, we simply set our sights on ever more distant shores. The more inaccessible, the better. Travel brochures almost always suggest that this spot is still "unspoiled"; perhaps the compulsive clicking of )f cameras is an attempt to recapture the quiet, frozen images of the dream we thought we bought. Back home, looking through the carefully composed shots, the exotic again resembles the airline ads that fed our fantasies.

Ironically, travel to exotic lands actually robs us of their exoticism; 43 the exotic must remain unfamiliar in order to retain its mystery. Experience creates familiarity, something our culture teaches us is the antithesis of romance. So while travel ads promise access to the exotic, they must also emphasize its unknowable Otherness... A Singapore Airlines ad reads:

Across four continents of the earth ... you are an unsolved  
mystery in a sarong kebaya. Who are you Singapore Girl?"

A serenely beautiful Asian woman stares directly into the camera, an intimate look, steady and deep: "The airline with the most modern fleet in the world still believes in the romance of travel." And, as Singapore Airlines reminds us, there is nothing more romantic than the mysterious Asian woman. Nothing else appears in their ads. Exotic cloth is wrapped around undemanding oriental gentleness: "Enjoy the kind of inflight service even other airlines talk about, with gentle hostesses in sarong kebayas caring for you as only they know how." Yes, their girls nave a reputation, but they don't mind.

Hilton International promotes their hotels in Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, Singapore, Taipei and Tokyo with the pictured five Asian women (some dressed in traditional outfits, others in western service uniforms): "Life oriental style ... A carefully melded roads of East and West. You've focused on Hilton International. A blend of Oriental hospitality and international service."

The ad speaks to the fantasy and the *fear* of travel in exotic lands. Hilton will help smooth out the cultural confusions by carefully melding East and West. A safe way to enjoy exoticism. You can "enter a world where a myriad of surrounding sights and sensations tantalize your imagination, and let the Hilton International world of thoughtful vices *put your mind at ease.*" The hotel is no simple place to sleep, no more than an airline is simply a means of transportation. It is a fantasy, in *A Way of Life*, or at least the safe imitation of one. "Specializing in unexpected-a lobby in exact replica of a sultan's palace. Our owning replica of a pirate chasing brigantine ... "

Perfumes, cosmetics and certain fashion lines promise the look the exotic for those unable or unwilling to actually travel to distant tries. The Ultima II cosmetic line by Revlon is marketed as a way East to meet West. "The collection is Ultima's lyrical translation of loveliest colors the Orient has to offer." Note the use of the word - in so many of these ads. Orient is a realm of fantasy; Asia is a real place. Orient brings to mind the mystery of the exotic region of the Asia says Vietnam, Red China, Toyota car competition. The most striking thing about the Ultima II "East Meets West" advertisement is the photograph accompanying it. Lauren Hutton sits on a cushion with something reminiscent of a kimono (but showing too much flesh). She looks down with a slightly amused smile at her hands folded in her lap. Across from her, an Asian woman dressed in a real kimono bows to symbol of daring Western womanhood. This is apparently the proper attitude for East when meeting West.

Perfume ads are particularly fond of the exotic motif. And again the racial stereotypes and the promise of exotic fantasy "Island Gardenia by Jovan: Delicate. Exotic. Above all ... Sensuous. Only in the islands do the most delicate flowers grow a little wilder." by Guy Laroche: Fidji, le parfum des paradis retrouves." "Mitsouko Guerlain: Serenely mysterious". Even such a mundane product as panty hose can be sold touch of the exotic: "The look. ... the feel. .. of the Orient. Now yours in a - pantyhose. Sheer Elegance, Silky smooth, radiant ... " This ad points one of the stereotypes that may help make the Asian woman the model of acceptable exotic sexuality. Like an idealized child, she is described as small, docile, available and never demanding. Her body is as "smooth and silky" as the hairless body of a sexually innocent child. High fashion, too, often makes use of exotica. *Vogue* magazine is especially fond of setting its white models, dressed in "native inspired" fashions, against such backdrops as the Tunisian Oasis of Nefta. Magazines for working class women, on the other hand, only rarely show such exotic fashions or locales. In part this may reflect the fact that the Hilton International Way of Life is a much more familiar fantasy to *Vogue* readers and while *Vogue* suggests that, for the wealthy, fashion is artful play, the *Cosmopolitan* reader knows that in the realm of Dress for Success clothing is serious business. For working women, the exotic is, at best, an *after hours* image created through cosmetics, perfumes and daring sexual practices-all important elements of the "Sex and the Single Girl" success package. Apparently only those who are beyond any doubt white, Western and wealthy afford to look Third World.

### GROUP DISCUSSION

According to Chapkis, how do travel and cosmetic advertisements present Asian women? What does Chapkis think is wrong with these images? To what extent do you agree with her?

## **D. Comprehending Advertisements Through Jean Baudrillard's Postmodernism<sup>18</sup>**

**EKAWATI MARHAENNY DUKUT<sup>19</sup>**

**Abstract:** Nowadays people are living in a postmodern society, which is nihilistic because many things are being simulated that no one actually knows which is real. What people see on television or a magazine, for example, is regarded more real than the reality itself. One of the factors that make a society feel more comfortable living in a hyper-real world is because of the existence of advertisements or ads. Thus, to understand what is signified by an ad, a reader or consumer needs to take in mind, Jean Baudrillard's theory of postmodernism.

**Key words:** Postmodernism, Jean Baudrillard, advertisements

### **INTRODUCTION**

The study of advertisements (ads) connotes the comprehension of ads' existence as a sign as well as a product, which resulted from a postmodern society's lifestyle. This is possible only when ads are analyzed through a semiotic means, because ads are thought to take root from a concrete reality (Noviani, 2002, p. ix). In other words, ads are argued to have a social reference to the society who is trying to comprehend the ads shown on a media such as a television. Take for example, the television ad of an Indonesian car *Kijang*. It is widely accepted that the car can be used to upload the extended family, i.e. the grandfather, grandmother, father, mother,

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<sup>18</sup> This article is part of a dissertation argument, the writer proposes to the American Studies, Post-Graduate Program of Gadjah Mada University. My gratitude is dedicated to Prof. Dr. C. Soebakdi Soemanto, S.U. for his initial insights on postmodernism thinking. It is written up for *Celt: a Journal of Culture, English Language Teaching and Literature*, July 2006 edition.

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sister, brother, cousin, parent-in-law, and so on. However, the ad tend to exaggerate the notion of the 'extended family' terminology because in reality, the car cannot carry all of the family, it can merely carry 8 adults.

Using a postmodern perspective theorized by Jean Baudrillard, where ads are regarded to not blindly take root from the social reality yet represent the simulation which mirrored it (Noviani 2002, viii), it becomes understandable for the underlying reason of the ad creator to introduce such a hyper-real phenomenon. Baudrillard believes that ads are created to touch the ambition of somebody's desire to be more than what he can own. This is why the copywriter sees it safe to exaggerate about the *Kijang* car example above. Another example is the value of luxury, exclusiveness and glamorous life *Lux* beauty soap tries to offer through its television ad. It does so by exposing that almost all Indonesian popular film stars would frequently use it and thus, creates the analogy that by using the soap one can feel living like the film stars advertised. In reality, it is true that those using *Lux* soap can be bodily clean and have outstanding fragrance. Yet, to have a life like and become a film star like that shown in the ad – is only a dream. It is interesting, however, to find that most consumers do not mind buying the soap because they are satisfied enough to have that dream.

Why is it easy to influence postmodern consumers to buy the products shown on ads? How does Baudrillard explain about postmodern society's acceptance of the signs and values represented by ads as a popular culture product? This article will: 1) define and give some interpretations to what is being conceived as a postmodern society by comparing it with a modern one, 2) discuss why ads can be categorized as a popular cultural product, and 3) discuss the influence and relationship of ads as a popular cultural product with the consumer culture theory of Baudrillard's hyper-reality and nihilism.

## MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM

To know about postmodernism, it is wise to learn about modernism movement first. There are a number of definitions offered for the word

'modernism'. According to Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane in their book entitled *Modernism 1890-1930*, it is "The movement towards sophistication and mannerism, technical display, internal self-skepticism" (1986, p. 16). They continue to say that "impressionism, post-impressionism, expressionism, cubism, futurism, symbolism, imagism, vorticism, dadaism, surrealism" is included in the era of modernism (Bradbury and McFarlane 1986, p. 23). Whereas, Mary Klages (2006) explain modernism as a movement in 1910-1930 that disagreed with the Victorianism belief of "how art should be made, consumed and what it should mean". Modernism, is a movement which is highly conscious of its aesthetical reflection that allows an analysis of a paradoxical reality, which is ambiguous and open without any certainty and, which disagrees with the idea of an integrated being who suffers from a destructuring and dehumanization (Featherstone 2005, p. 15).

The movement following after modernism is postmodernism (Ritzer 2003, p. 15). According to Kohler (1977) and Hasan (1985) postmodernism as cited in Mike Featherstone (2005, p. 16) is firstly used by Federico de Onis in the 1930s to show people's reaction towards modernism. The postmodernists' theorists include Daniel Bell, Julia Kristeva, Jean-Francois Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard and Frederick Jameson. In art, post modernism carries the characteristics, such as the "boundary abolition of art with everyday life, the collapse of hierarchical difference between high and popular culture, a mixing of stylistics, which gives importance to eclectics, parody, pastiche, the shallowness of cultural surface, the sloping down of artists' creativity and assumption, so that art is merely a repeated representation of life" (Featherstone 2005, p. 17). According to Witcombe (2006), a word like 'equality' in an American society, is regarded an inapplicable representation of reality since the position and salary of a woman lecturer, for example, will never be equal to those of her male counterpart. In other words, 'equal' opportunity for gender difference is a vocabulary that shows an unrealistic condition in the U.S.A.

Although both modernism and postmodernism both argue for a self-consciousness of the subject who experiences destructuralism and

dehumanization, there are a number of differences between them. According to George Ritzer (2003, p. 19-20) there is a tendency of a postmodernist to criticize anything in association with postmodernism. Second, postmodernist thinkers tend to exaggerate the pre-modern phenomena of the emotion, feeling, intuition, reflection, speculation, personal experience, habit, metaphysics, tradition, cosmology, religious and mystique experience. Third, postmodernists tend to refuse the modern discourse of meticulous and logical academic lifestyle. Thus, for a postmodernist, he will not try to make the world know his condition but rather he will play with the unusual circumstances the world has to offer.

In his article “Postmodernism” Klages (2006) explains that the terminology is also used to refer to the two principles of being anti-modern or agreeing with the task of redefining modernism’s premises. What is meant by anti-modernism is the act of deconstructing postmodernism’s doctrine of refusing the pre-eminence of reasoning, righteousness, belief in the perfection of mankind, and the premise that a society can be rebuilt with better circumstances. Postmodern deconstructionists believe that the concept of “equality” and ‘freedom’ cannot be naturally understood or could never be attained because the concepts are only an ideology that are constructed by mankind. In this case, the requirements to explain about the belief in God, the self, and the postmodernists, usually reject the aim of life and world’s reality. Consequently, postmodern thinkers see the world as nihilistic, i.e. all normal activities are disregarded and whatever could not be seen can be learnt and communicated. The understanding that life is meaningless becomes the basic belief of the postmodernist philosophers. Meanwhile, the second principle, which concentrates on the revision of the modern concepts are referred to the constructive postmodernists. The followers, in this case do not reject modernism’s concepts but attempt to make better the premises and other traditional concepts.

Similar to the postmodernist deconstructionist, they try to erase everything that stops them to find all means of making a legitimization and logical view of the modernist’s principle. One way to reach it is by offering the

ethic's viewpoint of aestheticism and religious institution. Henceforth, basically both postmodernism deconstructionist and constructionist try to get rid of constricting themselves and adopt the unknowing and ambiguous concept of defining a world. By comparison, if a modernist wants to find a closed conclusion, the postmodernist prefers to see the open-ended vision and sees in more detail the process of something that is continually happening. Therefore, even though a postmodernist knows that his world is full of nihilism, he still has time to reflect on his own condition. He realizes that he is a man who is involved in the deconstructive process of finding the meaning about his own and society's existence.

## **ADVERTISEMENT: A POPULAR CULTURE PRODUCT**

Advertisement in the American Studies discipline is studied in Popular Culture. Denotatively, a popular culture is one's everyday culture that is widely accepted by the society. For example, behaviors, hobby, how someone acts and not act, what is being eaten and worn, things that are connected with everyday transportation, sport, religion, etc (Wilson 1995, 5). According to Dominic Strinati (2003), Stan Le Roy Wilson (1995), Michael Petracca and Madeleine Sorapure (1998), popular culture includes the study of e.g. television, film, music, sports, cyberspace, and ads. Not only in America but also in any other countries, the lives of mankind are always colored with many kinds of ads that are displayed in various texts, illustrations and color. According to Kasiyan (2004, p. 1) the existence of ads are no longer regarded as a phenomenon but an everyday culture of a society. Henceforth, it is this everyday existence that makes ads a popular culture. Ads is interesting to study in connection with the postmodern society, because it becomes understandable for why ads readers and consumers are satisfied enough just by the happiness and satisfaction of the hyper-real life or "*kebahagiaan semu*" (pretentious happiness) (Piliang 2003, p. 95) that are presented by the ads. Nigel Watson further explains that consumers do not really become interested in the use of the products advertised, but they are interested in the

symbolization it carries or "the image and the way it appears to others" (2001, p. 57).

Of similar belief, Jack Solomon regards that postmodern consumers tend to live on ads for the symbolical status it brings into mankind's lives (1998, p. 48). Therefore, if someone can wear a Rolex watch or drive a BMW that someone will feel that he has obtained a higher status in life. This is why when advertisers want to attract consumers to buy their fashionable clothes (that may not be from an expensive cloth); they would make use of pretty, sexy, and alluring woman model that wears a Rolex watch and stands besides a BMW. On the other hand, it may be the case that the really more expensive clothing worn by another model standing besides a Hyundai, may not attracted as many consumers as the other one. In other words, postmodern ads tend to deal more with the cultural representations of a product rather than the quality it carries, and thus, is in congruent with the nature of popular culture (Strinati 2003, 267). In the eyes of Jean Baudrillard, the postmodernism world is filled with simulations such as exemplified. As a result, things that are 'real' usually become a 'hyper-reality'. T.R. Quigley (2006) gives his support when he believes that living in the hyper-reality of a postmodern world would give the legitimacy to schizophrenics because those kinds of people have no direct access to what are supposedly real. This is similar to the world offered by ads. The world they offer to their readers or consumers are hyper-real and are not long lasting but they still maintain their continual attraction.

To make ads continually interesting, copywriters often do research to know that the products they offered would be relevant to certain types of consumers and popular for a certain frame of time. According to Barker (2005, p. 50) the copywriters realize that the popular audiences have their own way of making a connection to the texts and illustrations described by the ads, which may create a discursive competition among themselves in order to make decisions about how popularly the ad will be accepted by the audiences. So, they deliberately created ads that have a relational process between the signified and the signifier. Consequently, to know what the ads

are trying to transmit to the audience, a researcher who wants to comprehend about advertising would need to firstly employ a semiotic analysis of the ads.

Strinati (2003, p. 13) believes that semiotics can explain why a real material can never be judged real, because of the many connotations it may have. For a semiotician, the reality is always constructed and understood in multi-layered meanings, which may never be wrong as it usually has a certain aim behind the creation and with which the meanings can never be expressed the same by its analysts.

Like what is written by Roland Barthes in his book *Mythologies* (1972), meaning is never the same as meaning is created from a system of codes and rules that have been agreed upon a society with a certain cultural understanding. Barthes believes that an object is a sign, whose values are decided by the codes carried out by the postmodern society. Ironically, when man consumes the object that consists of those signs, the man feels unique. But in reality, that man becomes a mirror of his societal group that consumes that object. Thus, ‘unique’ needs to be understood as being indifferent but at the same time ‘the same’. So, the semiotics analysis of an ad must take into consideration the postmodern consumer culture theory of Jean Baudrillard’s nihilism, too.

## BAUDRILLARD AND POSTMODERNISM’S CONSUMER CULTURE

### A. Hyper-Reality and simulacra

Jean Baudrillard was raised in structuralists and semioticians' surroundings. He is a valued member of the postmodernist thinkers because his ideas are useful for the general community (cited in Ritzer 2003, p. 132). Baudrillard regards society as being dispersed or exploded into the public mass. The social key factors such as the existence of social class and ethnic differences have dissolved with the creation of a mass that cannot be differentiated from one another. The world for Baudrillard is one where a chain of modern differences have fallen apart because the real condition is no

longer real. Life becomes a hyper-reality because it is owned by the public mass and no longer by the private individual.

Chris Barker defines the word ‘hyper’ to show something as “more real than the real” (20006), whereby the reality in this case, is produced according to a model that is not yet set beforehand but artificially produced as a discursive of re-touchable realities that may be similar to the self-hallucinations made by mankind. With regards to this concept, Baudrillard (cited in Sarup 1993, 164) sees that the postmodern society is a mimic of simulacra comparisons. The following exemplify the phenomena. When the soccer match between Real Madrid and Naples, who fought for the European championship, happened in 1987, it was done at night without any real supporters. Even though supporters were not allowed to enter the stadium because officials were afraid the Madrid supporters would make a dispute over the game, many television viewers were entertained to see the simulation match on television. This exemplifies how the postmodern society enjoys the simulacra of the soccer match on television as much as what it may have been in reality.

Another example is when trying to appreciate the value of Van Gogh’s classical paintings. People acknowledge that there is only one real true painting that deserves a high valuable price. Yet, it is with conscience that the same people would prefer to buy the imitation for the sake that it has the same image of showing to others how much they appreciate Van Gogh’s masterpiece. The high-class status symbol the people received for owning a Van Gogh painting – although only an imitation – is reason enough to buy the copy. Actually, it is absurd that in the example of the flowering of pirated CDs, no one is able to find out which of the CD is the real copy because mass production is so simple to do. Yet, it is a usual phenomenon. In the postmodern society no one wants to know which CD is the first replica of the real CD, what matters is the society can possess the CD they longed for.

The above example shows how the practice of media has changed the original view of the world into a world of simulacrum. What is real is no longer

related with the real world but with whatever is presented in the media of the radio, newspaper or television. In other words, what is seen on television is becoming today's real world. What is presented on television has entered the human life and the human life has entered in television. Sarup (1993, 165) understands it as what may be fiction has become a reality and what is real has become a fiction.

## B. Consumer culture and its entrapment

Baudrillard's point of view about simulacra or hyper-reality is published in his book *The System of Objects* (1968). It argues that the basic principle of an ordered structure organization is through understanding the works of a consumer culture. Baudrillard continues to explain that consumer products have a classification system and effect towards the formation of a certain behavior (2004, p. 61).

In the case of ads, copywriters intentionally produce codes for their product through symbols that makes it different from other products. If the product becomes an object and later consumed, it will transfer the meaning of codes. The unlimited symbols have become one of the factors to regulate the society even though the same sign can make a consumer feel free to express the ownership of the product. So, consumers here do not mean only consuming the values of the ad but consuming many of the symbols offered (Sarup, 1993, p. 162). Copywriters are aware that a consumer may be searching for his class or existence in a society through an object or product offered. So, they created their ads to fulfill the function of a commodity that would not only fulfill the needs of an individual but also the needs of the individual's social class. They do so, on the basis of Baudrillard's (2004) theory that no one is actually complete on his own, but he exists because there are other people, things, and objects that results a range of relations to build the unique characteristics of the individual. Ads are made to fulfill mankind's needs of a simulacra world. Baudrillard says that,

...adverts generate false needs – for example, the desire to be a certain kind of person, wearing a particular type of clothes, eating a particular type of food, drinking particular drinks, using particular items, etc (cited in Storey, 1996, p. 114).

Thus, if someone buys a Big Mac in McDonald's restaurant, he is not only buying it to have his stomach full, but he gives himself a sign or image that he is part of a busy and active community who has no time to cook for himself. He believes he has no alternative but to realize his simulacra world by buying a fast food product, which is practical and suitable for his middle class budget.

John Storey says that the consumer culture's ideology is a "displacement process" strategy (1996, p. 115) because it wants to continually find something new. This entails that a person who consumes the hyper-real world offered by ads, also believes he would be whole and continually exist in his hyper-real world:

...consumption will make us whole again; consumption will make us full again; consumption will make us complete again" consumption will return us to the blissful state of the 'imaginary' (Storey, 1996, p. 117).

Consequently, John Fiske comments the following: "Live to Love, and Love to Shop, so you see... if I can buy enough things, I'll never have to work at love again!" (cited in Storey 1996, p.115). This necessitates the meaning that shopping is an endless consuming activity. Therefore, a person may have a society's permission to buy a product and use the commodity advertised to satisfy his material needs because it is also an actualization of his dream, deep want, identity and a way for better communication. Henceforth, as clever as one tries to not be interested and attracted by a product advertised in television, newspaper, magazine, brochure or banner posted along a street

– copywriters understood well that it has become a basic human character of always desiring a new hope to better himself, to be loved, and to feel complete. So, studying about ads entails just how well copywriters know about the postmodern consumer culture's entrapments.

## CONCLUSION

Scholars interested in studying about ads must be aware of Baudrillard's postmodern theory, which explains how the things that cannot be attained in reality can be reached through the postmodern simulacra of ads. Baudrillard's concept of nihilism manages to explain why the individual can no longer have its privacy. The popular consumption of products advertised have produced people who are very similar to another. For example, Britney Spear's popularity has made almost all teenagers to go out from the same salon or boutique and make them all look like her. Where is the real Britney Spears? The postmodern society is not interested with the answer. What is important is, ads helped to form a nihilistic world – a world that makes almost everyone satisfied to be at another place, doing something else, wear another kind of clothing, eat and drink something else, be somebody else – without going anywhere or do something crazy because everything can be simulated at their fingertips!

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## E. Cracking the Code: Discover the Global Cultural Value of Magazine Advertisements<sup>20</sup>

**EKAWATI MARHAENNY DUKUT**

**Abstract:** *In the era of globalization where electronic media takes on a rapid and various pace, the effect of advertising towards a consumer's decision-making is unavoidable. Advertising, which transmits messages with certain codes that will be perceived and interpreted differently by its readers, has become a successful form of marketing communication. Some researchers say that in promoting its goods, services, and ideas; advertising has intellectual methods that readers do not see it as a manipulative agent towards the development of one's cultural understanding. With this in mind, as literature teachers, I believe we can help our students to read advertisements more critically. Students could be taught how to crack the hidden codes of advertising intellectually. One way is to train them in exercising semiotics as a tissue of codes that form the universal culture of advertisements.*

*This paper shares a discussion of some different cultural values found between Asia's Eastern and U.S.A.'s Western culture. In dealing with advertisements, samples of those found from an Indonesian magazine to represent the Eastern culture, is contested with those from the U.S.A., which represents the Western culture. The data used in the discussion are from an on-going research in magazine advertisement analysis. They are used to show how teachers can help students become more aware of why certain codes of life that is implanted in advertisements from other's*

<sup>20</sup> This article discusses parts of the writer's on-going doctoral research where some of the ideas have been presented in the 6th Asia TEFL International Conference, Globalizing Asia: The Role of ELT, held in Bali, Indonesia, 2008. It is under review for a nationally accredited journal in Indonesia. The citations follow the APA style.

*culture may be appropriate but at the same time needs to be avoided to ensure the development of a positive understanding of one's original culture.*

**Key words:** globalization, culture, code, semiotics, advertisements

## THE COMPLEXITY OF CODE INTERPRETATION

To explain what a code is, as lecturers, we can at least ask literature students to read one of the most popular classical western short-story, "The Gold Bug". Written by Edgar Allan Poe in 1843, it is acknowledged as the first detective mystery story that introduces the idea of using a coded language (Adams, 1972; Cawelti, 1976; Dukut, 1999; Symons, 1972). His story on deciphering a cryptograph "53##+" being a translation for "A good" (read Poe in Peithman, 1986, p. 378) became a platform for future radio operators, spy stories and secret societies on how to communicate in coded languages.

Similar to language, culture can be defined as a "tissue of codes" (Solomon, 1988, p. 2) where on the surface level the complex system of culture's signs has meanings that are not always clearly understood. In order to grasp the ideas behind the given code or culture's signs, we need to have a deep level of understanding the codes. Solomon (1988, p. 3) continue to clarify that to understand a code there is a need to link signs with their meanings. For example, when approaching a traffic intersection, it is not enough to know that one light is red and the other is green. We have to know the significance of the signs in addition to the function. If we do not understand the function of the red or green light sign, an accident may likely happen. Of similar condition, if we give someone a heart-shaped greeting card on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February, it does not suggest that the receiver is asked to obtain a cardiovascular examination, but rather we are sending a message that is conventional to the code of St. Valentine, i.e. we are giving a sign that we want the receiver to understand how much we especially love her/ him. Thus, to understand a code, we do need an ability to link the signs.

Codes, however, can be ideologically motivated. Consider the word 'abortion'. Linguistically, it means the termination of a pregnancy. Therefore, to someone who prefers to save lives, the word synonymous means 'murder'. Yet, in contrast, to a women's rights activist, the word will refer to the achievement of a woman's right of choosing her own biological destiny. Henceforth, codes may also bear political or social meanings.

In the example of the outfit worn by Uncle Sam, an U.S.A. citizen would understand that it is a sign of pride for Uncle Sam to be dressed-up in an American flag suit. Yet in comparison, in Indonesia and perhaps in other Asian countries, if someone is found to dress-up with a shirt and trousers, whose colors corresponds to a country's flag, the person wearing the dress may be considered insulting the country. This is because some culture bans people using the colors of their country's flag as daily clothing because it has been socially constructed in the people's minds that the color arrangement can only be used for the honorable flag.

There is also a difference in the showing of respect to the person talking to us for different cultures. For the U.S.A. people, which represent the Western culture, it is culturally expected for the listener to show interest by exchanging a direct eye contact with the speaker and immediately asks a question when there is something not understood during the speaker's lecture. In other words, curiosity is more preferred in the American environment to achieve a challengingly active discussion rather than having a passive audience. In comparison, for most Eastern people originating from Asia, the active behavior is considered impolite since the questioner may have disrupted the guest speaker before s/he had the chance to finish her/his speech.

Similarly, the showing of a smile for a Westerner may be interpreted differently also for the Eastern culture. To a Westerner, a smile would mean a pleasant or happy feeling of the bearer. In contrast, to an Easterner, however, a smile is usually also a disguise of embarrassment or a mask of bereavement, meanwhile happiness is shown behind a straight face (Stewart

& Bennet, 1991, p. 58). Thus, if for example an American lecturer asks his Asian student why s/he has not done her/his homework, the lecturer may be surprised to see why a smile is shown by the student. In contrast, when the lecturer expects the Asian student to show a big smile of happiness after her/his compliments for the outstanding work the student showed, the lecturer may be unhappy to find that the student only returned the comment by giving the lecturer an expressionless face.

A sign is a “thing – whether object, word, or picture – which has a particular meaning to a person or group of people” (Williamson, 1992, p.71). So, culture signs or codes, such as the examples illustrated are not easy to recognize unless we have a chance to grow within a culture. According to Proshina and Ustinova (2012, p. 33) persuasion used in each nation’s ads are “determined by culture” that some ads are “difficult to translate” unless that person knows the particular culture well-enough. Solomon (1988, p. 4) adds that we may not always recognize the cultural codes that surround us, because most influential signs are not words at all, instead they are usually objects and social practices with hidden meanings that we usually are not accustomed to look for. A different culture has a belief system for different things and therefore would respond to certain cultural codes with different kinds of actions.

In the era of globalization, codes which specifically point to a certain culture are becoming blurry. One of the causes for this happening is the rise of technology that welcomes the bombardment of advertisements whether through the electronic media like the cyberspace, radio, TV, video and movie commercials and likewise, the non-electronic ones such as the magazine, newspaper, pamphlet, and billboard advertisements. Another cause is because advertisements tend to easily go global that it is difficult to know from where exactly the advertisements originate. What is local can become global, and yet what is global can also become local (Kearney, 1995, p. 553). Advertisements, however, have a way of carrying certain cultural values (Williamson, 1992). Thus, we should be aware that there is a great possibility

of cultural transfer or lifestyle through the popularity of for example, U.S.A. products, which are advertised in Asia.

## CULTURAL CODES IN ADVERTISEMENTS

Historically, advertising grew from the need to stimulate consumption to meet the demands of mass production (Brierly, 1996, p. 12). This is why there is an understanding that an advertisement is created “to motivate consumers to buy goods or certain consumers not to buy goods, and to change attitudes or encourage retailers to stock produce” (Brierly, 1996, p. 1). Consequently, an advertiser aims to sell as many goods as possible, so the seller could obtain as much profit as possible from prospective consumers (fowles, 1996). However, the function of an advertisement is not merely selling a product but also selling a certain lifestyle (Jhally, 1987; Leiss, Klein, & Jhally, 1990. The original understanding of wearing jeans as a sturdy outfit for working in the ranch in its development, manages to be transformed into an outfit identical to the hard working city lifestyle of the modern people. One of the reasons for this development is owed to the popularity of jeans advertised in the many forms of media technology we are currently given. The choice of not wearing just any kind of jeans, but a certain brand of jeans is because people want to show off a certain image. People expect that a different kind of status symbol will be shown for those who decide to wear a Levi's, Gap, or Guess jeans (Maask & Solomon, 1997, p. 101-102).

Most of the time “the codes of advertising are the same as the codes of myths” such as “revealing the universal problems of life (good and evil, life and death, happiness and misery), as well as their promised resolution” (Solomon, 1988, p. 5). For this reason, people do not regard advertising as manipulative. Most of the time people search for advertisements as a form of first hand information that will help them decide on whether to buy a product or service. An advertisement is a text of codes that “signs of general cultural trends” (Solomon, 1988, p. 5). Henceforth, whether a person is directly aware or not, s/he defines how trendy or up-to-date s/he is through what is popularly

shown in advertisements. Jhally (1987, p.1) agrees on this opinion when he argues that advertisements play a key role in the creation of people's needs. Let us reflect some of our personal experiences. Would we have known that dressing up in a suit would entail formality for business meetings if it were not for advertisements? Would Asian ladies, for example, ever think of coloring their hair to hide their age in addition to more importantly expose their inner beauty, if it were not for the tireless efforts of advertising? One of the criteria in judging how modern the culture of society is, in my opinion, can be based on how close the offers made by advertisements meet our daily needs or dreams.

As written previously, advertisements are found everywhere even though we do not intend to seek any, they are unavoidable. Thus, it is wise for potential consumers to be selective with what s/he should take from the lifestyle sold or transferred through advertisements. For most women, when wanting to read as a form of entertainment, picking up a magazine is the usual choice. In comparison to other reading materials, the magazine is usually well read, picked up 5.4 times more and read on average for about 54 minutes (Constardine, 2009, p.5). Not only is the magazine a media to pass up time but sometimes the featured articles and the products in the magazine advertisements are believed by some women as the best place to have the latest infotainment, health, beauty and fashion tips (Irwansyah, 2011).

In most globalized magazine advertisements, such as those that are originally published by the U.S.A., there are some Western lifestyle and products that can be taken without any scrutiny as they may directly fit to anybody's tastes. However, there are also those which need to be reconsidered since they may not be comfortably appropriate for the culture from the Eastern countries.

Figure 1: Estee Lauder's suntan lotion  
(White, 2005, p. 31)



As an example, in the one of the most globalized magazine of today, the U.S.A. *Cosmopolitan*, a Caucasian model is used to advertise Estee Lauder's suntan lotion (see figure 1). The lotion advertised may not be directly appropriate for most Asian complexion. Similarly, in Malaysia, a lingerie product which shows sexy Caucasian women models, according to Frith and Muller (2003) may not be appropriate for the society, whose majority would often wear Muslim garments that are mostly closed from head to toe. Thereby, the publication of these kinds of products in magazines distributed in Asia may not be as many as those in Western countries. As an alternative, advertisers will need to be creative and instead introduce whitening lotion products with an Asian model like that exemplified in Indonesia's *Cosmopolitan* magazine (see figure 2).



Figure 2: Yves Saint Laurent's whitening lotion  
(Soedardjo, 2007, p. 121)

The vast amount of sunshine in most Asian countries, such as that found in the Indonesian climate would encourage advertisers to try and sell more whitening rather than suntan lotion. What makes the product popular and becomes accepted is, nevertheless, also influenced by the cultural value that the society gives to the product. For example, because summer does not last long, an American would feel proud to show her deep tan to show how sporty and healthy the person is. Yet, in order to have the sun tan just enough and not damaging the skin, a suntan lotion product is needed. This explains why sun tan lotions are advertised in the U.S.A. *Cosmopolitan*. In contrast, not many whitening lotions are found in the U.S.A. *Cosmopolitan*, because their

already white complexion will become pale if whitening lotion is applied to their face or body. Paleness is a code of how ill a person is as a result from her irregular exercises.

On the other hand, to the Asian culture, if a person has a deep tan to a dark complexion, it is a sign of how unhealthy a person is. The sunlight and pollution are understood to be a factor of the dark complexion, so a woman is most likely judged to be unconcerned about her hygiene. Thus, in the Indonesian *Cosmopolitan* magazine advertisements, there are more whitening lotion advertisements rather than sun tan lotion ones since a white complexion for an Indonesian suggests modernity and high class. This understanding is comparable to how the Chinese sees the white “porcelain skin” (Frith, Sha, & Cheng, 2005, p. 1) as being an attraction of a woman’s beauty.

The lovely and fair or white complexion of the Indonesian women has long been understood by the Indonesian culture that it signals how clean and healthy they are. Most Indonesian women feel like a princess, and are proud to be admired for the special time the women have in taking good care of her white body’s beauty. In addition to feeling like a princess, the women also feel that their whiteness suggests superiority like the experience of the Dutch who has historically colonialized Indonesia for 300 years. In other words, the whiteness is equivalent to some kind of hierachal power. Consequently, almost any kind of whitening product is a sell-out in Indonesia. Saraswati supports this when she says: “Skin-whitening advertisements dominate the landscape of Indonesian women’s magazines” (2010, p. 1). Therefore, most of the time whitening advertisements appears on the first pages of Indonesian magazines.

There are, however, some advertisements that are left to readers as it is, without considering how the reader’s culture would react and evaluate the message it may portray. Take for example, the advertisement seen in picture 3, which comes up in both Indonesian and USA’s 2007 *Cosmopolitan*:



Figure 3: Calvin Klein's two new fragrances  
(White, 2007, p. 53) and (Soedardjo, 2007, p. 53)

By glancing at the picture illustrated in it, it seems to portray how a couple is allowed to have a free sexual relationship. To an Indonesian reader, this case may be regarded as taboo, since a sexual relationship and behavior is not something to be shown freely in public. Thus, some may not be comfortable with that particular advertisement. Yet, if the reader care to see it in more detail, it may be logical to accept the image, because the product offered in the advertisement is about a perfume. Thus, the reader should understand it as a universal or global culture value of how a perfume's scent could attract the opposite sex to be in close contact. When an advertisement reader is able to understand Calvin Klein's message like that illustrated, then the initial misunderstanding of thinking that the advertisement is teaching some kind of sexual behavior can be avoided. As readers, how then can we choose which advertised product is best for our needs? I believe it is not enough to find out how appropriate the product is to a user's needs. However, it is also important to understand what values are coded through the advertised product.

Solomon (cited in Maask & Solomon, 1997, p. 120) believes that "advertising does not work in vacuum: it plays upon deeply held cultural values and desire in order to stimulate consumption". Consequently, how can we read the signs of advertisements? The next paragraphs will show how our students can be taught how to crack the codes of advertisements.

## **SEMIOTICALLY CRACKING THE HIDDEN MESSAGES OF ADVERTISEMENTS**

To interpret and write about the signs of any kind of popular culture's products, we need to use an appropriate method. Without a methodology for interpreting signs, writing about them could become just a little more than

descriptive reviews or opinion pieces. There is nothing wrong with writing descriptions or opinions, however, most lecturers prefer students who can write analytical essays that present theses or arguments that are developed by some supporting evidences. The method especially designed for the purpose suggested by Pradopo (2001) Maask and Solomon (1997) as well as Storey (1988) is semiotics. Maask and Solomon (1974) explain that we are always “practicing sophisticated semiotic analyses every day” of our lives. Reading this page is an act of semiotic decoding since we need to interpret the signs that form the words and letters. Figuring out just what a student is signaling by wearing a particular dress is also a semiotic reading. Every kind of cultural activity, to a semiotician leaves a trace of meaning.

Semiotics is the study of signs. Its modern form took shape in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries through the writings and lectures of two men. Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) was an American philosopher and physicist who first coined the word ‘semiotics’, while Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) was a Swiss linguist whose lectures became the foundation for what he called ‘semiology’. The application of semiotics to the interpretation of popular culture was, however, pioneered by the French semiologist, Roland Barthes (1915-1980) in the 1950s, which is discussed in his book *Mythologies*. It was Barthes who showed the way to analyzing the cultural significance of wrestling to striptease, and from toys to plastics. It was also he, who established the political dimensions of semiotic analysis. According to Maask and Solomon (1997, p. 5) Barthes’s main argument is that:

all social behavior is political in the sense that it reflects some personal or group interest. Such interests are encoded in what are called “ideologies,” or world views, that express the values and opinions of those who hold them. Politics, then, is just another name for the clash of ideologies that takes place in any complex society where the interest of all those who belong to it constantly compete with one another.

Consider, for example the advertising images of a happy housewife doing her housework with the magic of a modern technology (figure 4), which is taken from an Indonesian *Cosmopolitan* magazine or a supplement product (picture 5), whose advertisement is taken from the U.S.A.'s *People* magazine. To most readers, the image may look normal as it signifies the natural way a housewife should be. But to a feminist semiotician, the happy housewife is really an image designed by the patriarchal, male-centered society to convince women that their workplace is in the home and not in the work force competing with men. Semioticians would ask questions such as: Why does this thing look the way it does? Why are they saying this? Why am I doing this? What are they really saying? What am I really doing? In short, nothing is taken for granted when analyzing the images or activity shown in advertisements.



Figure 4: Zojurushi coffee maker

(Soedardjo, 2007, p. 275)



Figure 5: Fiber sure supplement

(Huey, 2008, p. 133)

Barthes informs that the semiotic analysis allows a student to concentrate on the verbal and non-verbal signs of advertisements. With the analysis, signs within an advertisement can firstly be interpreted denotatively. Then, it can be interpreted using a secondary level of analysis, i.e. reading the signs connotatively. After this process, the result of the connotative analysis is interpreted again by taking consideration the surroundings of the

advertisement, such as what is socially, culturally, and politically hidden behind the construction. This action produces a multi-layered semiotic reading of an advertisement as a signifier and signified data (read Dukut, 2007). Thus, giving attention to an advertisement as carrying a number of signified signs and signifiers, that are more than once interpreted denotatively and then connotatively, the values hidden in the advertisement can be cracked open. Brierly (1996, p. 204) remarks that the copywriters, as a matter of fact, work on three levels of meaning:

Firstly and obviously, they construct denotative meanings; recognizing and comprehending words and images for their immediate meaning that we all share (recognizing a tree as a tree, etc.) Secondly, they use metaphors and connotative meanings that culturally specific groups can understand; ... (red roses meaning love, a tree standing for strength, reliability, nature, family (tree), etc.). And finally, they try to anchor meanings on a personal level by reminding people of eventful or memorable things that have occurred in their lives in a preferred way (...images of new born babies, which trigger people's memories of births of their own children...).

Berger (2000, pp. 175-176) suggests that in analyzing advertisements we have to focus on both the *verbal* and *non-verbal* signs by taking into consideration the following questions: (1) What is the general concept of the advertisement? What kind of mood does it create? How did it achieve that? (2) How is it designed? How are the components and basic elements organized? (3) What is the relationship between the picture and what is written? What does it say to the analyst? (4) What signs and symbols are found? What roles do they play? (5) Are there personal figures (a man, a woman, children, animals) in it? What kinds of expressions do they show? How are their pose, hair style, ethnicity, education, relationship? (6) What is the background like, what does it suggest? Where is the setting and what

meaning does it suggest? (7) What themes are shown? What is the advertisement about? (e.g. is the plot about the scene of a woman and man drinking tea about jealousy or truthful relationship?) (8) Is the kind of language used in the advertisement showing information, or does it create certain emotional responses or both? What techniques are used by the copywriter: humor, life's values, comparison, gender or sexual critiques? (9) How is its aesthetical value? What understanding is created when using a long-shot or close-ranged camera? How does the lighting and color influence the understanding? and (10) What sociological, political, and cultural view points are grasped through the advertisement?

The advertisement may just show a pair of jeans but there may be values on sexism or gender difference. Nevertheless, the latter question especially solidifies the argument that not only does selling a product become the objective of advertisements – it is also selling a society's cultural values and lifestyles.

## THE NEED OF CRITICALLY READING ADVERTISEMENTS

Not putting aside the importance of other kinds of media, nowadays many Asian countries have bought licenses to publish magazines which originated from America, Australia, and/or Britain. The *Cosmopolitan*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Men's or Women's Health*, *Vogue*, and *Good Housekeeping* have reached a popular demand that there is for example, an Indonesian, Singaporean, Malaysian, Chinese version for each of them. It is lucky if we can see and read advertisements that advertised the originating country's products, because the theme and contextual setting chosen by the copywriter would be directly appropriate to that country's basic culture. Similarly, even though the language used may be in English language, we are still lucky to find if the themes chosen for an overseas product advertised in an Asian magazine media adheres with the Asian cultural values. As a consequence, although the magazines are U.S.A. licensed, the advertisement in it would have messages that are directly acceptable to Asian's traditional cultures.

It needs a closer inspection, however, when we find an advertisement with an English language and a Western product advertised that shows no kind of editing and is published in an Asian magazine. We would need to think twice as to whether we could directly swallow in all of the information exposed or we should make a critical analysis of it. When a critical analysis is done, it can help make a filtering process of the information passed through the advertisement's coded messages. It will also assist us as Asian readers, in finally making an appropriate decision of how urgent we ought to follow the Western lifestyle offered by buying the product advertised. It is for this reason that lecturers should teach students how to critically read advertisements. By cracking the codes of advertising, therefore, we can help make our Eastern culture develop into a Western one or continue to stay with the Eastern one but in a more positive way.

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## F. Framing a Globalized Cultural Identity with a

### Transnational American Studies

EKAWATI MARHAENNY DUKUT<sup>21</sup>

*American Studies as a discipline has developed from an intellectual history synthesis to a transnational one. With the transnationalism of American Studies embracing globalization as an important factor, American Studies scholars are expected to not only learn about the American experience within its borders, but also within its cross-borders, in addition to the outside border lines. American Studies no longer focus its research about American works developed in the U.S.A. but it also looks at the works developed outside the country. An inspection of how some magazine advertisements of the world wide distributed Cosmopolitan becomes a media of transmitting American values globally and how the 2012 U.S. Presidential election has affected the U.S. become points of discussion in this paper. The discussion is hoped to make Indonesian American Studies scholar reflect on what kinds of opportunities and challenges they can have for their own cultural identity.*

**Key words:** American Studies, cultural identity, globalization, transnationalism.

## TRANSNATIONALISM IN AMERICAN STUDIES

Founded by Vernon Louis Parrington in 1928, American Studies as a discipline sprang from combining the methodologies of literary criticism and historical research that gave birth to his “intellectual history synthesis”.

<sup>21</sup> This article has been published in the proceeding of a conference on “American Studies in Indonesia and Its Implications” ISBN: 978-602-18660-9-2 that is organized by the American Studies Students’ and Alumni Association (ASSAA)’s scholar summit in 1 December 2012, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta. The citation used for this article is MLA style.

Twenty years after Parrington, Tremain McDowell similarly argued that in viewing American Studies there was a need to not only see the history by making a reconciliation of the past-present-future but also on the reconciliation of the academic disciplines and the region-nation-world. This means that, a play of multi disciplinary studies were needed to deconstruct what was seen as the ‘region’ to represent what became the ‘nation’, in order to understand the ‘world’. Many years later, Leo Marx was among those that developed the region-nation-world idea to conceptualize his micro to macro approach. The first scholar to have made a signature of applying McDowell’s three forms of reconciliation methodology mentioned, however, was Henry Nash Smith with his influential myth and symbol work on the *Virgin Land* in 1950. Allan Trachtenberg was another scholar that employed the methodology for his 1965’s *Brooklyn Bridge*. Returning to Smith, he also wrote a provoking article, “Can American Studies Develop a Method”, which emphasized McDowell’s reconciliation of academic disciplines. He wrote that the American Studies found its strength in the collaboration of various academic disciplines for its “conventional methods of inquiry” (207). So, in analyzing an American Studies material the disciplines from literature, history, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, economics, and psychology could be integrated and refracted through an American lens. This is why, later in the 1970s, Gene Wise showed that as a discipline, American Studies could embrace “ethnic studies, black studies, women’s studies, folklore studies and popular culture studies” (332). Up to this present day, this “interconnection of disciplines” (Gurian 79) is believed to have contributed to the discipline of American Studies.

American Studies as a discipline is also striking with regards to its multicultural American experience of minority groups that molds the larger culture of the American nation. Alice Kessler-Harris gave her personal background as an example of the notion. She said:

If you ask me where I come from, I'll tell you that I was born in England during World War II of refugee parents who were Hungarian-speaking, then German – the language of the refugee community.

Finally, we were sent to school to learn English – an event that happened shortly before we all moved to Wales where I lived until we emigrated to the United States. By then I was a teenager. How do I construct myself? It depends on the circumstance. Neither Hungarian nor Czech, neither English nor Welsh, I claim identities as my sense of otherness requires. I suppose that makes me a certain kind of American (307).

The life example above was what made 1980 Americanists expressed their importance of a multicultural curriculum in America. This multiculturalism process is believed to show how the U.S.A. apply its realizations of being a democratic nation

With the increasing number of media technology in the 1990s, the study of the everyday life or popular culture also became a unique factor of studying the American experience. George Lipsitz saw an importance of focusing on the contexts and processes of cultural creation in addition to whatever became the validated texts because there was recognition that the “circulation of ideas and images pervades all forms of social life” (624). Consequently, this explained for the growing number of research on popular culture products such as the creation of hip hop music, Walt Disney movie, the beauty industry or the Oprah Winfrey television show.

In November 12, 2004 the president of the American Studies Association, Shelley Fisher Fishkin, however, gave a new twist to the conceptualization of American Studies. In her address, she mentioned the importance of using transnationalism in its methodology. She reasoned that in studying the complexities of the American culture that developed from a migration of cultures, American Studies scholars must look “beyond the nation’s borders” and try to understand how the nation could be seen from beyond those borders (21). This is because she saw the U.S. as a participant of a “global flow of people, ideas, texts and products” (Fishkin 24), so the U.S. is seen as a nation who readily welcomes globalization. As an illustration,

Fishkin mentioned that there are Asian women working in the U.S. and also in Asia zones of assembly and manufacturing. Because of this, in literature, for example, Fishkin regarded the cultural work done on American literature whether from outside or inside the U.S. are both materials that are valid subjects of study (26).

The creolization of food in the Caribbean and also the Korean identity by studying the responses of the Koreans eating at McDonald's in Seoul are equally valid of study. In her address, Fishkin continued to argue that the scholarships given to people to come to America is not to export an arrogant, pro-American nationalist, but rather to promote an understanding of the multiple meanings of American culture (21). Not putting aside the important concepts of previous founding fathers of American Studies, therefore, Fishkin's recent transnationalism idea show American Studies scholars that the U.S. experience is better understood by reflecting to the migration of multi cultures over two centuries ago. It was this fact that form U.S.A. culture as being made from globalized nations.

## **IDENTIFYING GLOBALIZATION**

Many foreign scholars have been invited to study about the American culture, whether for a tour, a conference, a workshop, a short course, or for as long as a graduate study. If not able to have that fortune, with the advancement of technology, foreigners would already have some experience of the American culture through the transformations of its popular culture products. These could be through fictions, movies, television shows or magazine advertisements distributed in foreigners' local newsstands. How has U.S.A. as a nation that is influenced by globalization showed its current cultural identity? Before dealing with the question, let us first look into the word global, which has become a popular adjective in recent years.

Upon the word global, Douglas Kellner informs that it has become the "buzzword" ever since the 1990s (285). This must have been the reason for Wimal Dissanayake's statement who says about globalization being the

"defining marker of the twenty-first century" (26). The statement is backed up by Vidya S.A. Kumar's definition of globalization, which is a concept created spontaneously to reflect people's experiences of having a social integration, which compromises the bonds between nation states (94). Citing Cesare Poppi and A.S. Bhalla who are globalization theorists, Kumar describes globalization as a condition, phenomenon, stage, phase, discourse, ideology or a "series of waves" whose nature undergoes one or many processes (91-92). With regards to the nature of being a process, Nayef R.F. Al-Rodhan (5) offers the definition of globalization as one that "encompasses the causes, course, and consequences of transnational and transcultural integration of human and non-human activities". The human activities in this case encompass the linguistic, cultural, economic, and political aspects of human life that are part of the human and social sphere. Whereas, the non-human activities incorporate but are not limited to, the spread of bacteria and non-human disease such as bird flu and natural disasters such as tornadoes, tsunamis, earthquakes, and hurricanes. This is why Al-Rodhan sees globalization as a current that impacts communities, cultures, and economies for years. He believes it resulted from transnational and transcultural integrations that occurred globally throughout human history. Because of these transnational and transcultural points, therefore, the American Studies' methodology of deconstructing nations with transnationalism is considered a significant choice for scholars of today.

In addition to Al-Rodhan and Kumar's definition of globalization, Kellner argued further that the current world is organized by the acceleration of globalization that is strengthened through the domination of a world capitalistic economic system, which lays the platform for transnational corporations and organizations that wear down local cultures and traditions (287). Dissayanake (26-27) has a similar view but prefers to analyze globalization through a number of levels, which corresponds to the American Studies' play of bringing forth an interdisciplinary of studies. She explained that in the economic level there has been a worldwide spread of free market capitalism with its complex ways that influences the local economy. She

understood this as being influenced by the dominant knowledge of economy that obeyed different axioms from the world's industrial economy and the ever growing influence of multinational corporations. At the technological level, Dissayanake says that the impact of increasingly new communications from satellite to internet and websites were significant contributions for globalization. Then, at the cultural level the impacts of consumerism, commodification and transnationalized forms of popular pleasures and desires, along with indigenous traditions were those that have also built up the characteristics of globalization. Finally, at the political and social level, she believes the challenges of a nation-state, the proliferation of non-governmental organizations, and the new social order that has come from the fall of Soviet communism are the building up factors of globalization.

## **INDONESIAN AND U.S. COSMOPOLITAN's GLOBAL VALUES**

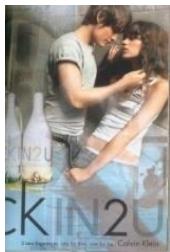
Currently, I am an American Studies scholar from Indonesia, who is given the opportunity to do research in the U.S. for my dissertation on women magazine advertisements. The discussion about globalization above has made me reflect the *Cosmopolitan* through the American Studies' lens of transnationalism. *Cosmopolitan* is one of the most popular magazines in the world, because according to David Machin and Joanna Thornborrow the *Cosmopolitan* has 44 international versions (453). So, this makes it a good example to discuss about the magazine's global values. For starters, the magazine is said to have been localized to different degrees and in different ways, which results in observable differences between the versions. Yet, in the different versions, it managed to globally distribute its 'brand' thus leaving with it some similarities between the 44 versions (Machin and Thornborrow 454). The brand referred to here is about the set of representation and value that are not directly tied to a specific product or products but on the basic theme of the magazine. In this case, Machin and Thornborrow regards *Cosmopolitan* to have set itself into selling the values of "independence, power and fun" (Machin and Thornborrow 455), whereas Kathryn McMahon

regards it as offering the values of "love, success, sex", and "money" (381). With regards to this, I believe, these set of values have signified the magazine's running theme of fun, fearless female.

Acknowledging G. Kress and T. Van Leeuwen, the values set are not only disseminated by the magazine but also realized by the aid of other media such as the television industry who show the same values through a display of fashion items, cosmetics and also in the cafe industry. The magazine did start at the local environment, but because the magazine is globalized, the values become transnationalized in order to be received well by people all over the world. It follows that the realizations of the global values Kress and Van Leeuwen speak of, is aligned through *Cosmopolitan*'s advertisements on for example, the choice of fun and fearless female's clothing or cosmetics for the models in the magazine. Based on the notion of globalization, it is an interesting point that some advertisements in the magazine can be exactly the same, by means of textual and visual means. For example, is how the English language and American environment of daring to be sexy is used in the magazine advertisement for all over the world without any editions to it. I believe it is done to successfully transmit the globalized phenomenon. An example of this is a Calvin Klein jeans advertisement seen in both the U.S. and Indonesian *Cosmopolitan*'s version of September 2007 (see picture 1), whose text and visual images are left exactly the same. It is a good sample of how women are globally expected to be daring in making decisions for her own life. This is because, by being daring, a woman is expected to have the power to control her own money for the fun and success of her love life. Thus, as stated above, the values of power, independence, fun, love, success, sexy and money are clearly transmitted. Another sample can be seen in Clinique advertisement, where the text has been translated but the values transmitted are still the same. Through the Indonesian version (see picture 2) of Clinique cosmetic's text which says the cosmetics can get rid of blemishes and the visually blue color of the bottle to represent water, as a reader, I see it transmitting the value of cleanliness for women. This same value is transmitted also in the American version (see picture 3) where there is a

splash of water over the bottle, coupled by the text ‘clarifying lotion’ and the big word ‘Yes’ at the top right corner of the advertisement. These signals all support the brand name, Clinique, which to my understanding signifies the word ‘clean’.

Although not explicitly said, the value of being clean from any blemishes, according to me enhances all of the values *Cosmopolitan* wants to reach its readers. It is obvious to me that the advertisement supports the magazine of trying to convince women to be independent and have a successful career that brings in money enough to buy cosmetics. As a result, women can have the power to seek for a fun and healthy life. With this aim in life, there is a connotation, too, that a ‘clean from blemish woman’ may successfully attract the male she seeks for love.



Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3



Picture 4



Picture 5

In the next sample of advertisements, although the language used in the text and the models are brought locally, both the Indonesian version of picture 4 and the American version of picture 5, signify the same value of making women have a healthy life to maintain women’s power. These advertisements can be read as transmitting the global message: with power, women can keep up with the popular, fun-fearless-female *Cosmopolitan* identity. Although the above advertisements can be discussed in more details, nevertheless, these samples can make other readers see how the advertisements successfully help transmit the magazine’s global values. Nowadays, I can see more healthy, and slim women wear jeans, and do not have any blemishes. Although the jeans may not be a Calvin Klein and the cosmetics used may not be a Clinique product, nevertheless, it is proof that the magazine has globally transferred the values to most women. It is clear that magazine

advertisements can give ample opportunities to transfer cultural values, yet, the challenge is whether or not the values are always well received, and brought forth well without endangering the already held traditional local values. It is a challenge for Indonesian women readers of *Cosmopolitan* to take the positive sides of those values without losing her traditional stereotype of, for example, being an obedient wife and mother.

## **AN AMERICAN STUDIES VIEW OF GLOBALIZATION'S IMPLICATIONS**

Making use of the aforementioned definitions of globalization and being an Indonesian currently reasearching in Ohio, U.S.A. makes me reflect to the implications it has on the U.S. people as well. Being a direct observer of the 2012 presidential election, I have the opportunity to experience the economic and political conditions of the country. One of the heated debate issues in the election was about China's threat to America who has a spectacular economic growth from trade and investments. There has been a rise of products made from China worldwide, that some U.S. people feel it will threaten the economic flow of the U.S. In the first presidential election debate of 26 September 2012, Mitt Romney accused Barack Obama's previous administration for not creating ample job opportunities, thereby lessening the economic flow of the people. It is interesting, however, to learn that Romney was believed as one of those who decreased job opportunities due to the closing of some of his U.S. enterprises, in order to open one instead in China because manpower was cheaper there. The U.S. house bubble experience from George W. Bush's administration was also a factor that led to the worse economic depression ever since the 1930s Great Depression. Aversa said there was a housing correction and declining dollar value that resulted U.S. subprime mortgage crises and losses of 159,000 jobs by September 2008. At the end of the Bush administration, Jefferey A. Bader (3) accounted that America's trade deficit with China was about \$250 billion annually that it left many Americans feel vulnerable to Chinese's ownership of the \$1 trillion in

U.S. government-guaranteed debt. This condition may no longer support the claim of the U.S. as a super power nation.

In addition to the political economic factor above, due to globalization the U.S. is just as vulnerable as other countries to natural disasters. A few days before Obama was re-elected as President for the term 2012-2016, people in Carolina, New Jersey and New York experienced the Sandy Hurricane, which some people believed is more disastrous than the previous Katrina. The flood and the cut of main power supplies in the two states have contributed to the stop of all transportation and the stock market of New York. This non-human factor of globalization, has directly influenced the flow of the nation's economy, too. This unfavorable condition is made even worse when a week after, the snow from Carolina reached New Jersey and New York who still have no power. This disaster has unfortunately led to the rationing of gas, which forced people to alternatively queue up based on the odd and even number of their car's license number. If usually Christmas shoe boxes are given out to Third World countries, I would not be surprised if this Christmas, some of the boxes would go to the Americans themselves. It is thus, understandable for why in a CNN television interview of November 10, 2012, a lady remarked that she is doomed. This brings the realization of Fishkin's point previously about the importance for Americans to study examples of how the cross-border or outside border deal with, for example, natural disasters and thus gas rationing in U.S. may be avoided.

Obama's re-election is phenomenal, not only because of the natural disaster experienced above, but also on the building up of the nation's cultural identity. As an American Studies scholar, I observe that America as a nation of immigrants, is becoming stronger and there is a shift of people's expectations of who should lead the U.S. country. The U.S. people no longer want an always White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant to become their leader. They are now more open to someone like Obama who is the first Black American President. Being an American citizen who has relatives and experiences in Africa and Indonesia makes Obama a globalized person. This becomes prove that the minority groups are now being heard more than before. In fact, it was

the points from the growing number of Hispanic-Americans, African-Americans, single career women, and youngsters who have given the victory number for Obama. The Republicans from Romney's side took a great blow when they thought they could depend on the white male and faithful wives of America to win the election.

The U.S. presidential election experience is proof of how through globalized values, America is moving beyond some of their traditional beliefs. It is now up to other countries, such as Indonesia to see the phenomena as either an opportunity or challenge to upgrade the country.

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## G. The Transnational Success of Cosmopolitan Magazine

**EKAWATI MARHAENNY DUKUT<sup>22</sup>**

**Abstract:** Studying about an American popular culture product such as the *Cosmopolitan magazine* for American Studies' scholars can no longer be framed in studying how it is operated within the U.S. only. Instead, a look at how it is being transferred across nation's borders and how it is regulated in other nations become a concern also to scholars. Time and space is no longer a border for a world that is transnational, so global values that are being sold in the magazine's advertisements are being made continually popular by inserting local ideas. How has *Cosmopolitan* successfully achieved its globality? The following article discusses on the transnational culture that *Cosmopolitan* and its magazine advertisement brings and how it has taken in the local to support the global.

**Keywords:** *Cosmopolitan*, *Global*, *Local*, *Transnational*, *Popular culture*

## INTRODUCTION

Eversince 2004, American Studies scholars are encouraged to use trananationalism in their methodology. This means that scholars are asked to look "beyond the nation's borders" when criticizing a piece of work, because the U.S. culture originated from a migration of cultures (Fishkein, 2004, p. 21). With the coming of different cultures into the U.S., transnationalism paved

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<sup>22</sup> This article has been published in *Rubikon: Journal of Transnational American Studies*, Vol. 1 no 2, September 2014, that is organized by the American Studies Society of Indonesia, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta. A copy of the pdf article is available for download at <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=7doKc8EAAAJ&hl=en>. The citation used for this article is APA style.

the way for whatever is popular in the U.S. to be as equally as popular in other nations. This can be possible whenever the U.S. people originating from these multi-cultures have a chance to return to their origins and spread the idea of for example, the benefit of the already popular culture of the U.S. supermarkets, fast food chains and credit cards.

The word transnational is sometimes interchangeable with the words “international, multinational, global”, and “supranational” (De Mooji, 2004, p. 6) that connotes “boundarylessness” so that a Coca-Cola can be travelling around the globe and being drank by a “Black, White, Middle Eastern, East and South Asian, who is beating his own indigenous drums to the beat of the Coca Cola jingle” (Rao, 1996, p. 1). According to Haque (2011, p. 1) transnationalism is globalization, and is usually associated with the free market-based classical liberal economic policies pursued by developing and transnational societies of the world, that have embraced Western, more precisely, American values and modes of doing things not only in the realm of economics and politics but more visibly in the production, consumption and circulation of popular culture products, manifested in a pervasive process of commodification of advertising.

With regards to advertising, in addition to those posted on the internet where its usage is continually climbing at astounding rates on a worldwide basis (Roberts & Hajun, 2001, p. 18), the traditional pages of print advertising in magazines are still popularly used as publication and promoting media. Feng and Frith (2008, p. 2) informs that eversince the 1900s, advertisements from the back of especially women magazine pages were moved to the front because they were a good source of revenue. Years later, the advertisements are also integrated with advertorials. With advertorials’ special position, therefore, many transnational advertisers use the chance to globalize women magazines. The expansion of women magazines crossing the borders have been made possible with the glonbal media corpporations’ franchise systems that produces international women’s magazines. Thus, making advertisements in international women’s magazines have a globalized culture.

The globalized culture that advertisements have is in making their readers, who are potential consumers to not only watch, but also dream, and eventually buy things. Having the advertisements go transnational, therefore, makes corporations or organizations think of how to sell the American dream for Europeans or Asians. How it is possible to sell an American Barbie to a Japanese or an Indonesian, is a clause of example. One best way to do is create valuable images and make consumers addicted to it (Transnational Advertising Culture). This is why, nowadays, "joy and happiness are perfumes" and "love-and-caring and hope are cosmetics" for most women of the world (Kavanagh, 2013). One of the most popular women's magazines which enjoy global success is the *Cosmopolitan*. Below is a recount of its history and how *Cosmopolitan* later achieved its transnational success story.

## THE SUCCESS STORY OF COSMOPOLITAN MAGAZINE

*Cosmopolitan* magazine started its business in the U.S. in 1886 and since that time, the magazine experienced a management of various owners (Simkin, 2013). First it was owned by the founders, Schlichtand Field, who initially intended the magazine to be read for the family because there were articles devoted exclusively for the caring and management of children, cooking, household decoration, and other interests for women such as fashion. In addition to this, articles for the younger members of the family were available.

Eventhough this domesticated magazine managed to reach a circulation of 25,000 in its first year, the founders could only manage the business for two years (Simkin, 2013). By 1889 the magazine was owned by John Brisben Walker, who appointed E.D. Walker as his editor. The new editor made the magazine more attractive, by providing colorful illustrations, serials and book reviews. Serial stories from Theodore Dreiser, Rudyard Kipling, Jack London, Willa Cather and Edith Wharton were among those that help built up *Cosmopolitan* as a popular literary magazine. Thus, by 1892 its circulation climbed up to 75,000 and made *Cosmopolitan* one of America's

leading literary magazine. Walker's management, however, was successful for only ten years. William Randolph Hearst became the next owner to have bought the *Cosmopolitan* for US \$400 in 1905. In his ownership, well-known journalists and top illustrators were hired to help him publish a literary magazine which had three serials and ten short stories. Due to its popularity, its circulation risen up to 1,700,000 with an advertising income of \$5,000,000 in 1930. A decade after, the circulation amount was then increased up to 2,000,000 during World War II. Yet, due to the rise of paperbacks and television, there was a decrease in the demand for fiction in the 1950s *Cosmopolitan*. This decrease continued on for a decade, until Helen Gurley Brown took over as chief editor in 1965.

In Brown's hands, she refocused the literary magazine into a magazine for women. The change from a literary magazine to a women's magazine was because the 1960s was also the rise of feminism. In this decade, women demonstrated against their daily domesticated role as housewives and other forms of discrimination such as the lower pay and fewer promotions for women at the work force. It was in this decade that women are taught to believe, that they, too, have the abilities to have political and academic achievements (Friedan, 1963, p. 348). With the above condition, therefore, Brown cleverly made the *Cosmopolitan* magazine as a media that can give support and advice to women on how to deal with their new roles. Her message of 'Live big, go for it, be the best you can be in every area of your life' and vision for women to be 'fun, fearless female' was popular among women readers. She envisioned that a woman may still want to be traditional in many ways, but did not want to get her identity from other people because she wanted to achieve on her own. Therefore, she made the magazine to "serve career women in their 20s and 30s by writing openly on topics such as sex and personal relationships including premarital and extramarital affairs (Sternadore, 2011, p. 2). Other women's magazine had also treated sex as a subject but they were most often in the context of its domestication (Ehrenreich and English). In *Cosmopolitan*, sex was discussed as a "function of the public sphere, in the context of the workplace, and in the explicit terms

of the marketplace" (McMohan, 1990, p. 382). By 2001, the *Cosmopolitan* reached a much greater popularity among young women with a circulation of 2,963,351 in the U.S. (Pan, 1993, p. 8).

*Cosmopolitan* is continually popular. It is more than a magazine, it is an "empire, a brand, a state of mind" (Taylor, 2003, p. 7). With a target audience of young, ambitious, and informed women, most readers are employees, who have earnings and time to spend. It is for this reason that advertisers would look into *Cosmopolitan* to advertise their products. For example, Taylor (2003, p. 7-8) reports that in the United Kingdom (U.K.) Cosmo women would spend over 1 billion a year on fashion, 2 billion on their homes, 3.5 billion on food, 1.4 billion on new cars and an account for 1 out of 11 spent on cosmetics and skincare. It is also in *Cosmopolitan* that readers rely on as a girl-power guide to getting things right. Citing Kesley, *Cosmopolitan* magazine is regarded

More insightful and intimate than the best friends, more of an instant feel-good fix than the bubbliest of champagnes, more saucy and sinful than the most calorific of chocolates, Cosmo is the relationship bible for today's modern woman. It's fun, fearless and flabulously flirtatious attitude is a manifesto for her life (Taylor, 2003, p. 8).

*Cosmopolitan* is basically a magazine that women would use as a guide. It has established a brand, too. In 2001 the National Magazine Company launched *Cosmo GIRL!* And *Cosmopolitan Bride*. There is also a *Cosmo TV* with 3 TV networks, 2 Spanish language channels, 1 in Spain and 1 in Latin America, and an English TV channel in Canada launched in February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2008. *Cosmo Radio* airs in Sirius Radio XM162 in the U.K. and also targets its listeners of the 18-34 age group (Kesley, 2003).

*Cosmopolitan's* success story is also partly owed to the condition that women are the largest consumers. It is the women rather than men that "spend more time on shopping, banking, and sending e-greeting cards (Pan, 1993, p. 5). Women are seen to be financially powerful with an "expenditure

of about \$2 trillion per year in the U.S> because in the familiy, they are usually in charge of the familes' daily finances" (Pan, 1993, p. 6). Because it is predicted that \$12.5 trillion will be passing through women's hands in between the years of 2010 and 2015, thus, eversince 2004, the *Cosmopolitan* was expanded internationally with 25 languages and reaches the women of Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, China, and othet nations (Pan, 1993, p. 8).

In 2010, the prediction is proven true. The latest data in 2013 showed that the *Cosmopolitan* magazine was recognized as the most popular magazine in the world because it had 64 international editions, printed in 35 languages and distributed in more than 100 countries (*Cosmopolitan* magazine). The numbers mentioned here are mostly related to the print magazines. Nowadays, with digital magazines on the internet, its popularity is more than ever on the rise. Eversince it made itself available on the Zinio platform in 2005 and much later on the Ipad, the magazine definitely gained exceptional popularity with its 100,000 individual subscribers.

## **HELEN GURLEY BROWN AND HER COSMOPOLITAN MESSAGE**

The name *Cosmopolitan* is not only a magazine label, but literarily to show that it is intended for the modern, outgoing cosmo or modern women of the 18-34 years-old range. For the 32 years as editor, this Cosmo-ness to Brown has been translated in to the revolutionary idea that "women working outside of the home can have sex, including sex outside of marriage" (McMohan, 1990, p. 382). Because the magazine explicitly puts on many things about sex, it becomes the reason for people to have the attribute that *Cosmopolitan* magazine means sex. As explained above, it was Brown that promoted the running theme of placing importance to women's sexual desire as a working goal for the magazine. It was not the first time she did this. Back in 1962, she was successful in her then-scandalous self-help book, *Sex and the Single*, which sold 2 milion copies in 3 weeks in 35 countries and made

the bestseller lists in the *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times* and *Time* (Scanlon, 2009, p. 1).

In her book, *Sex and the Single Girl*, Brown (1962, p. 1) encouraged women to advance their situation of being alone by being daring and finding suitable partners. Through a list of men available in a women's life, brown suggested in one of her book chapter for where women should meet and how to keep a good healthy shape, so women can maintain their sexy outlook. Other chapters of Brown's book showed how women could become a good home maker and manager by becoming a good home decorator, cook, and child manager, yet also having financial independence and have freedom to sexual relationships regardless of whether a woman is still single or already married. Although receiving many critics at a time when *Cosmopolitan* was already famed as the foundering for monthly fiction, it was these initial ideas for women who should have a "sexual desire" and "financial self-sufficiency" (Simmons-Duffin, 2012) that Brown persistently transfers to the *Cosmopolitan* magazine. This is why, Kate White as the current editor, could instruct almost every issue of *Cosmopolitan* to have the word explicitly written on the cover and articles' headlines.

With regards to the runiing theme of sexual desire, based on a research that McMohan (1990, p. 384) did to a selection of articles from the 38 issues of the 1976 tp 1988 *Cosmopolitan* magazines, she found 77 articles talking about relationships with men, 51 articles on the lives of celebrities and 49 articles explicitly offering advice about sex. Yet in the 49 articles she mentioned are misleading, because in reality their articles about relationships with men, and the lives of celebrities contained sexually explicit material and deal with sexual relationships and problems (McMohan, 1990, p. 385). Consequently, it is logical to see many vocabularies and phrases, which connote the theme of sexuality throughout many of the magazine's issues. In the U.S. August 2012 issue, for example, the following phrases are found: "52 Sex Tips", "When Your Vagina Acts Weird After Sex", "50 Kinky Sex Movies" and "His Best Sex Ever" (Zimmerman, 2012). Interestingly enough, it is this particular message that is being maintained globally by many other countries.

As informed by Pan (1993) *Cosmopolitan* has been distributed in Argentina, Australia, Barzil, Chile, China, and other nations. Zimmerman (2012) also says that the other nations or countries also include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Britain, China, Croatia, Finland, France, India, Indonesia, Middle East, Mongolia, Russia, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, and Vietnam.

When *Cosmopolitan* is globalized, it means that the U.S. magazine's version gets to be read by people of different countries. It may also mean that some articles or advertisements from the original U.S. version are directly translated from the English language to the different nation or countries' languages. Yet most of the time it is the magazine's messages that are transnationalized by bringing the global into the local. This means that the article on, for example: "His Best Sex Tips" may be a show and tell of the local people's experiences rather than just taking for granted the ones directly from the U.S. with no changes whatsoever.

As a transnational magazine, *Cosmopolitan* relies on a global strategy, dealing with a private 50-page manual, which dictates criteria in the selection of cover models and editorial focus (Nelson & Paek, 2005, p.3 72). For example, the woman on the cover is "always a woman, with large hair, remarkable features and not too much clothing." (Carr). This becomes understandable for why a Russian *Cosmopolitan* co-editor then comments, "Hearst is a great partner, as long as you don't put a guy on the cover" (Carr).

## APPLICATION OF COSMOPOLITAN'S TRANSNATIONALITY

Samples on how *Cosmopolitan* applies transnationality throughout the globe are illustrated as follows. In Indonesia, the *Cosmopolitan* changed the way Indonesian women think about sex. It used to be a taboo topic, but now it can be discussed openly. Originally called *Cosmopolitan Higina*, the initial September 1997 made its breaking new ground of promoting sexually assertive women

(Saraswati, 201, p. 21). Upon this fact, Saraswati (2010, p. 22) commented that although there were protests from some Muslim groups, in Indonesia women became to love sex too much, it was nonetheless this sexuality issue that made *Cosmopolitan* a great hit and has a circulation of 139,000 in the year of 2004. To state yet another transnational example is in Russia's *Cosmopolitan* edition. Because young Russians cannot afford to move out from their parents' homes, the editor then released an article on how to have sex while living with their parents (Carr).

With regards to other countries, it is written that in India the message received by the readers is that Indian women can marry someone whom they like and not because their parents told them to (Zimmerman, 2012). Because Indian women traditionally live with their parents until marriage, the teachings that women can go out and find their own men is a culture that needs to be accustomed. In Singapore, whenever a sexual content is published in a yellow warning box with the writings: 'Unsuitable for the Young' would run over the cover. For the Middle East, dating and premarital sex are punishable by law, so the editor had to treat the issue for sex carefully. In South Korea, articles on sex are not as popular as the 'dreamy wedding ones', so pages of the magazine are inclined to have lots of fashion wear and accessories for the bride-to-be. In Finland, to change the notion that Finnish guys are not hot, most of the centerfold type pages are filled with topless Finnish guys. For nations, who are not overly interested with sex issues, the editors of *Cosmopolitan* have made ways for ideas that would sell better. For example, in Kazakhstan, readers are more interested in articles on career and travel rather than sex, because as a newly independent and developing nation, their women are more interested in the kinds of career opportunities and economy the market has to offer. In Croatia the topics on how women could act bravely on their own have

been the most popular. Lastly, for Germany, it is the business-oriented issues that become a hit.

In obtaining its materials, Chang (2001, p. 3) explains that *Cosmopolitan* has both "centralized and localized" qualities. Various editions from many countries can borrow materials from a "central bank", which is from the New York headquarters. The borrowing can also be from the "sister bank" of other countries, thereby making *Cosmopolitan* unique as it blends the global and local topics concerning womenhood. This model allows a "parent company to build branches or subsidiary networks of local agents and in this way, they can establish important connection and alliances in foreign markets" (Feng & Frith, 2008, p. 2). What usually happens when new magazine editions are to be published is the local publishing companies form some joint ventures with the head office of the international publishing company. Then, the staff from the head office will be sent to train the staff and editors in the new foreign office to receive text and pictures from the head offices. By making use of the parent publication's brand name, reputation, format, and experience, the local editions of the international magazines have more of a chance to attract international advertisers.

Technically, a team of staff members at *Cosmopolitan* headquarters would usually create the initial ideas for the articles and have them transferred to the *Cosmopolitan* network around the globe (Zimmerman, 2013). The magazine has a database for international editors to see what features the U.S. headquarters have in mind three months beforehand. Once the images and layout for the featured article are uploaded, each international editor can adjust the contents according to their own countries' needs. The following is an illustration:

What appeared as 'Fascinating Breast Fact' in the U.S. July 2011 *Cosmopolitan* which featured a close-up of a woman tugging her shirt open, became '15 Facts You Need to Know About Your Breasts' in the October 2011

edition of *Cosmo Middle East*, where it ran a model demurely dangling a bra over her shoulder. ‘What His Sleep Habits Can Tell You’ ran in Cosmo U.S. in March 2012, and, months later, appeared in China (same photography but with text translated into Chinse) and in Armenia (different photography). And what ran as the fashion spread ‘Motorcycle Diaries’ in August 2009 in Cosmo U.S. – featuring an abandoned gas station, denim, plaids, a hot guy and the open road – ran two years later in Cosmo Mongolia with the same blend of denim, plaid, gas station and open road, except the whole thing had been reshot with guys who looked Mongolian (Zimmerman, 2012).

A similar sample on how Indonesian *Cosmopolitan* has made a transnationality of the U.S. version is as follows. For example, it is found that the Hollywood blonde haired celebrity, Britney Murphy, is on the *Cosmopolitan* cover from the U.S. June 2003, U.S. September 2004, U.S. July 2006, Serbian July 2006 and Indonesia’s August 2006 version. All have her as a model, but photographed in different attires. The U.S. June 2003 have her in white, you-can-see blouse with the top part unzipped, thus showing the cleavage of her breasts. The length of the blouse is midi length, which deliberately shows off her belly button with the way she wears her tight blue denim. With a blonde hair and no smile on her face, Murphy looks professionally sexy. This sexiness is maintained in the other two U.S. versions, i.e. the September 2004, which has Murphy again showing the cleavage of her breasts but now wearing a red, white, black abstract motif party dress. Meanwhile, the July 2006 version, chose Murphy to wear a floral pink dress. In sequence with the U.S. July 2006 in the Indonesian August 2006 version, which shows her in a sexy, tight, red dress, which is just like the Serbian’s choice for their September 2006.

Who is Murphy that she is used in three of the U.S. issues and also used for the cover of other nation's issues? She is one of the luckiest celebrities to be on three issues of the prestigious magazine. Kate White tells HollywoodLife.com (Cosmo Editor Fondly Remembers Brittany Murphy) that Murphy is known for her upbeat and cheerful demeanor. She is remembered well by fans because in addition to starring a number of Hollywood movies such as *Something Wicked* (2012), *The Ramen Girl* (2008), *Sin City* (2005) and many more. She gained her popularity from the film *Girl Interrupted* (1999) and *Clueless* (1995). In addition to cinema movies, she was a leading female performer for a TV film in *David and Lisa* (1998) and vocal singer for a TV series *King of the Hill* (1997) that her death at 32 years old had surprised many of her fans.

Inspecting the covers again, an example for the same monthly issue is the May 2009. In it is found that the model in the U.S. version is Whitney Port who has on an orange low cut summer dress with a long blonde hair. By comparison, the Indonesian May 2009 edition prefers to have Britney Spears, who is also with blond hair, but in white three-piece suit. Although Spears has a formal suit on, the way she stares at the readers and how she clutches her suit and opens her legs while standing with no smile on her face are equally sexy signs for some readers. From these covers, it is learnt that transnationality is the myth of the beautiful goddess like women, who ought to have a long blonde hair, where through her gaze, readers can feel how confident a woman can be with herself. Referring back to Brown's 'fun, fearless female' concept, then it fits with the ideal picture of a financially independent woman who knows what to do with her gifted capabilities.

Inside the magazine, the transnationality of some articles or sections may be exemplified by the May 2009 version. In the U.S. version's one-page section of *Hot Sheet: 6 Things Being Buzzed About Right Now* becomes the Indonesia's two-page section of *Hot*

*Sheet: 7 Hal Yang Sedang Hangat Dibicarakan.* In the U.S. version there are small notes on: 1. The truth about sloppy kisses, 2. The practice of peacocking, 3. What's not so hot of Pamela Anderson's behavior, 4. Sexed-up sandals, 5. Twiter.com blows up, and an 6. Announcement that "a whooping 88 percent of men admit to fantasizing about one of their female coworkers" (White, p. 35). By comparison, the Indonesian version has: 1. *Hang out di Rooftop*, 2. *Bergembiralah*, 3. *Halus tanpa cela*, 4. *Perihal keterlambatan*, 5. *Waspada Alzheimer*, 6. *Fisik atau Fakta* with one out of four photos showing Ellen DeGeneres and Colin Farrell kissing sloppily, and a small announcement on "*Tahukah Anda? 69% pria mengatakan kalau mereka tak akan pernah berselingkuh dari pasangan atau kekasihnya, tapi 31% pria juga mengaku berfantasi soal kekasih sahabatnya. Wow!*" What is the same in both versions is the show of a couple kissing sloppily and the percentages found on men fantasizing about women (Basuki, 2009, p. 54-55). The mentioned sample means to show that the editor of the Indonesian magazine does have the freedom of which ideas are to keep, discard, or expand from the U.S. version, so that they go with the local readers' needs, and they do not go over the basic mission of encouraging financially dependent women who know how to deal with their own sexual desires.

It becomes clear form the discussions above, therefore, that the global message of *Cosmopolitan* can be made local in order to achieve continual recognition and the increase of reenues. This quality is something that advertisers are on the go for. Thus, eventhough some themes on sex are repeatable in editions of *Cosmopolitan* in all over the world, the magazine is assured in its success of never lacking a world wide readership.

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## H. A Popular Culture Research on American Hegemony in Transnational Women Magazine Advertisements

EKAWATI MARHAENNY DUKUT<sup>23</sup>

**Abstract:** Women magazine advertisements from the United States of America (U.S.A.) cross border in space of time and location due to the transnational characteristics of American popular culture. By traveling through spaces of time, an advertisement from previous years is possible to come up again in many years after. This occurrence happens in some U.S. women magazine advertisements. Meanwhile through spaces of location, U.S. magazine advertisements can also be published in magazines from other nations with almost no real difference in its visualizations, like what happens in Indonesian women magazines. Scholars claim the occurrence is influenced by the American hegemony phenomena. Working under the American Studies discipline, the researcher chooses a total of 3621 women magazine advertisements from the 2007-2008 issues of U.S. Ladies Home Journal, O: The Oprah Magazine, Cosmopolitan; Indonesian Cosmopolitan, Kartini, and Femina, as well as 1960 Ladies Home Journal to become the main data for research. In her research, a thread of popular culture, consumer culture and gender ideology perspectives are found. First, through popular culture, the advertisements gain an easy acces for transnationality and globalization. Second, through consumer culture, the researcher finds that women are

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<sup>23</sup> This article has been published in *Rubikon: Journal of Transnational American Studies*, vol. 2 no. 1, February 2015 that is organized by the American Studies Society of Indonesia, Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta. It discusses the writer's dissertation: *American Hegemony In Popular Culture: A Transnational American Studies on Women Magazine Advertisements* The pdf is available for download at <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=7doKc8EAAAJ&hl=en> which directs readers to <http://repository.unika.ac.id/15539/1/Eka.Rubikon%20vol%202%20no%201.pdf> The citation used for this article is MLA style.

*acknowledged as the highest potential as consumers because they are the decision makers of their own family's household expenses. Third, by dissecting and analyzing the advertisements in more detail, the research also finds that gender ideology confirms how society still want women to maintain the traditional roles of women as mothers and housewives.*

**Keywords:** *Transnational American Studies, popular culture, hegemony, gender ideology*

## INTRODUCTION

Crisscrossing influences in global society today is an absolute phenomenon because in the era of globalization where cultures are becoming transnational, people have difficulty in distinguishing what becomes the characteristic of a nation due to the emergence of borderless areas among nations. With regards to the phenomenon, it is interesting to take note of Kraidy's opinion (2002) that with globalization, the culture of "the entire world has been molded in the image of a Western, mainly American, culture" (p. 1). Part of the reason for this particular condition is because in foreign and domestic policies, according to Beeson (2004), America has assumed "an unprecedented prominence in the affairs of other nations and regions as they seek to accommodate, and where possible benefit from, the evolution of American hegemony" (p. 1). The hegemonic status of being the most powerful country on the planet has been continually maintained by America with their popularity of American products, such as the mushrooming of McDonald's restaurants and the worldwide spread of the credit card (Ritzer, 1998). The credit card has especially encouraged people to continually buy American products with ease, thus, support the continual hegemonic status America has over other nations. In Crockatt's view (2007), however, American hegemony is not only caused by the global service of credit cards, but it is also caused by the identification of the U.S. as a country which is

incomparable to others due to the understanding that America has been regarded as the chosen country to lead and become the savior of all nations (p. 16). In relation to this, Ferguson (2003) observes that America's massive economy output, powerful military and soft cultural power has also led America to hegemony and therefore makes an undeniable picture of the reality of American globalization (2003, p. 21).

America's globalization is said to have taken into account of Marshall McLuhan's prophecy (2002) of the "Global Village" (p. 1). In this village, McLuhan predicts that by way of electricity, unique cultures of certain countries are blending into one another to produce a global village of similar cultures. After half a century later, the electricity media McLuhan talks about is revealed in the occurrence of the internet. The internet, which reaches great distances through its increasing speed (Vertovec, 1999, p. 1) has created an invisibility of areas' boundaries. With much information on the many kinds of American products that are available within a single click, the American popular culture has easily crossed the borders of many nations. For this reason, Ritzer (1998) argues that America's culture is tied to no place and no period when he cites Smith who believes that the characterization of globalization is "context-less" because it is "a true mélange of disparate components drawn from everywhere and nowhere, borne upon the modern chariots of global telecommunications systems" (p. 84).

In this discussion on the cross bordering phenomenon of context-less communication, America is witty in not only taking advantage of the digital media of the internet but also through a more conventional print media, such as the magazine, which is prepared for cultures whose modern digital technology is still limited. Through either digital or printed media, therefore, a person from anywhere in the world can learn and be immersed in the American culture. Through the digital and print media, global citizens are potentially influenced to dress up, behave and think like the Americans.

As an example, the popularization of the McDonald's burger not only increase America's economy and elevate its hegemonic status, but it has also

introduced the modern fast food eating habit for people on the run. The American eating habit and its effect on transforming other nations' way of thinking is, consequently, making it increasingly difficult to recognize the origin of someone's culture. The uncertainty of someone's origin is based on W.B. Yeats' belief on globalization as the factor for the "Western world [that] is going Eastern, even as the East goes Western" (McLuhan, 1964, p. 44). The intertwining of the Asian and American culture above is, in other words, caused by the global or transnational character of American popular culture.

A study on American popular culture, which deals with the everyday life phenomenon of what Americans do during their spare time and what they listen to, talk about or wear each day is an interesting, likewise, important area of American Studies research. This is especially relevant when considering that the Indonesian culture, according to Beng-Huat (2000) is heavily influenced by the existence of American popular culture. With American popular culture easily transnationalized across the globe, Beng Huat reports that most Indonesians aspire to be Americans. Not only do Indonesians admire whatever is American, but they see the need to buy American products, which are advertised in women magazine advertisements, in order to be identified as a member of the world's leading global citizen. In Beng-Huat's understanding (2000), Indonesians feel a sense of pride in using American products because it not only "signal self-identities" but also establish and "maintain membership of collective identities" (p. 137). In support of this, Warde (1994) comments that,

today, people define themselves through the messages they transmit to others through the goods and practices that they possess and display. They manipulate or manage appearances and thereby create and sustain a "self-identity". In a world where there is an increasing number of commodities available to act as props in this process, identity becomes more than a matter of the personal selection of self-image. (p. 878)

In other words, to an Indonesian the purchase and use of American commodities is a crucial need in showing their identity. The American popular culture product helps transform Indonesians' appearances and identifies them as members of a leading global group. The products or American commodities, thus, have a hegemonic nature. In relation to American Studies research, therefore, a number of questions arise. First, is how the magazine advertisements as a media of promoting the American products can influence women magazine readers to be interested in and trap them into a consumer culture. Second, is how can they signal the dream of achieving a global self-identity. Third, because most of the advertisements are published in women magazines, it is also interesting to question whether the women images used in the advertisements have a gender ideology influence behind them or not.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The above phenomenon on the cross-bordering of culture and American hegemony is also experienced in the field of American Studies when facing the development of the U.S. In the New American Studies, Rowe explains, "Where traditional American studies focus on one single dominant culture that assimilates with other immigrant cultures, the more recent or New American Studies focus on the cultural hybridities that have occurred historically among the many cultures that constitute the American nation." (Rowe, 2002, p.12). Rowe (2002) also expresses that American Studies scholars are strongly encouraged to give attention to the "intersections and interactions" of the different cultures in America, which help make up the "cultural hybridities" that constitute its people (p. 167). The focus on cultural hybridities in the New American Studies approach, have encouraged scholars to make use of the coming of the multi-cultured immigrants in America as an important history to the shaping up of the country. It is this cultural hybridity in women magazine advertisements that may be the key to the strong hegemony position of American popular culture.

In the field of American Studies, the cross-bordering phenomenon is equivalent to the transnational phenomenon of popular culture. As informed above, in the transnational culture of American hegemony, a cultural hybridity arises from America's multi-cultures. Rowe's view, which sees the effect of the immigrant's culture variations in American history as an important element of research in American Studies, is the same with Fishkin, another distinguished American Studies scholar's view point. It is Fishkin, who has been encouraging American Studies scholars to acknowledge scholarly research by embracing the complexities behind the building up of an American identity (2004, p. 1). Although initial discussions of the concept have begun since the 1990s, it was not until 2004 that Transnational American Studies as a theory is formalized by Fishkin (2004) in her American Studies Association's presidential address. In order to understand the whole American culture, she states: "The goal of American studies scholarship is not exporting and championing an arrogant, pro-American nationalism but understanding the multiple meaning of America and American culture in all their complexity" (p. 20). This means that Fishkin believes American culture is a result of not just one single culture but a result of a hybrid of cultures that spring up from the various immigrants that make up America. Fishkin (2004) also exclaims that "Today American studies scholars increasingly recognize that that understanding requires looking beyond the nation's borders, and understanding how the nation is seen from vantage points beyond its borders" (p. 20). Her address, opens up the understanding that in looking at America, the place of American hegemony's self-regard would permit scholars to gain more distinction and better multi-cultural understandings of what was or could be defined as American. This hints that with transnationalism in New American Studies, theories of cosmopolitanism and post-national conception of global or planetary citizenship is now intellectually challenged.

As understood from the above discussions, in dealing with a global phenomenon, research that deals with what most people "listen, buy, read, consume, and seem to enjoy to the full" (Hall, 2002, p. 446) and "do in their dominant culture" (Hall, 2002, p. 448) is important to do. The advent of

American popular culture that is made transnational through women magazine advertisements is a factor that causes the country's position to have a strong relationship with other countries. The popular use of Google facilities with that of Apple computers and Ipads are proof of how American popular culture has been an influencing leader to the world. Like informed by Beng-Huat's (2000) and Warde's (1994) above in his "self-identity" proclamation, owning an American popular culture product is understood by Indonesians and other nations as a realization for a "sense of freedom, personal power, and status aspiration" (Tomlinson, 1990, p. 6). These are tempting people to be consumptive in their lives. To these people, the more American products they have, the more hegemon they can be. Yet in consuming American popular culture products, Indonesians and other countries often do not realize how powerful the American culture is in changing the people's lifestyle and every day habits.

The hegemonic influence America has over other nations, such as Indonesia via its popular culture products has made some strong impact to the local culture. When Indonesians interact with American popular culture, they are unconsciously sending and absorbing the new culture with others' cultures, too. In the process, there is a tendency for a shift or reconstruction of the cultural belief when absorption of globalized American products is being concerned.

Thus, not only do Easterners become influenced by the Western culture, but at the other end, the Westerners are also getting impressions from the Eastern countries. This article, therefore, makes a discussion on an American Studies research which deals with American hegemony by way of popular women magazine advertisements.

## METHODOLOGY

The data source for the research reported here is advertisements from three popular U.S. women magazines of 2007-2008, i.e. *Cosmopolitan* (905 advertisements), *Ladies' Home Journal* (587 advertisements), and *O: the*

*Oprah Magazine* (786 advertisements); and three popular Indonesian women magazines, i.e. *Cosmopolitan* (723 advertisements), *Kartini* (102 advertisements) and *Femina* (170 advertisements). This particular year frame is chosen because there was a world economy recession or crisis in 2008, thus gives the assumption that there are more advertisements of products in the magazines. Yet, by comparing it to the year before, i.e. 2007, the research finds that the number of advertisements published in the six magazines do not have any significant difference in number. Thus, the economic recession experienced by people do not directly affect how many industries choose to pay up for promotions through magazine advertisements.

The research on magazine advertisements uses *Cosmopolitan* because it is acknowledged as the most popular franchised magazine, which is brought transnational across the world. In almost any country, there is *Cosmopolitan* magazine. This gives reason why *Cosmopolitan* Indonesia is directly compared to the U.S. version. The transnational phenomenon of the magazine advertisements in the sample of the U.S. *Cosmopolitan* magazine, according to Lagani in a YouTube interview has the position as the “number one magazine in the world” (2009), thus, it promises a better understanding on the study of women magazines as a representation of how the factor of space or location can result differences in the choice of American popular culture products advertised in American women magazine versus the Indonesian ones.

The transnational characteristics on popular culture also forces the research to deal with the borderless boundary of space time. As a representative for this, there is a seventh magazine, i.e. the selection of 1960-1961 *Ladies' Home Journal* magazine (348 advertisements), which is reknowned as the pioneering and most long standing magazine in America. In seeing the similarities and differences of the 2000s edition versus the 1960s, the research can find whether or not there has been a development in women's image that is used as the models for the American popular culture products advertised in the magazines. This step is important to do, since a Philadelphia advertising agency, N.W. Ayer and Son, has opened up the

understanding that advertisements have a high credibility in an historical reconstruction (Marchand, 1986, p. xv). The fact that America is formed from multi cultures, also makes it necessary for the research to use magazine advertisements from *O: the Oprah Magazine* that is founded by an African-American in the year 2000.

*Femina* and *Kartini* are two of the most popular women magazines circulated in Indonesia. These magazines are used as variable to see how transnational are the American popular culture's products advertised in magazines. The more transnational the advertisements are, then some advertisement from either the American *Cosmopolitan*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and *O: the Oprah Magazine* could be found in the Indonesian one without any changes in either the visualization and verbal texts. Yet. Since transnational also entails cultural hybridity, the research also wants to see what has the Indonesian copywriters do to accommodate the Indonesian audience for the American products advertised in the Indonesian magazines.

## DISCUSSION

### A. SUCCESS OF CROSS BORDERING NATIONS WITH WOMEN MAGAZINE ADVERTISEMENTS' FREEDOM IMAGERY

America is stereotyped as a country, which offers its inhabitants to have the freedom in choosing the kind life one wants to have without any real hindrance from anyone. In analyzing the kinds of imageries advertisements offer to women, the most frequent imagery found in the research is one that represents the value of freedom. The expression of freedom, in this case is supported by imageries that show a democracy of working independently or being self-reliant and in the self confidence of making decisions in purchasing the appropriate products advertised in the magazines for the benefit of the family.

In the U.S., the exercises of democracy for its people commences by giving low affordable prices to magazines. If, for example, a college or foreign graduate student can have a stipend of U.S. \$1000 and the price of a newly

published magazine is around a U.S. \$3 to \$5 range that means it is less than 1% of the stipend, thereby it makes possible for everyone to buy and read a magazine. In reading a magazine advertisement, there is no boundary of race, age or gender, so the price range should accommodate for as many people to consume it. Next, magazines are the media for women's aspirations to work independently and pursue for a career. Thus, in magazines there are various kinds of modern technology advertisements that decrease the burden of women's housework and office work duties, so that in doing the duties women are encouraged to do them alone without asking for any assistance from the men. Magazines also teaches women to speak up freely and express themselves through forums of making complaints, suggestions or answering questions for polling purposes, thus advertisements that show images on making women feel more worthy as a human being are often used deliberately to attract potential consumers. For this reason, magazine advertisements often offer chances for women to exercise their own decision making in purchasing advertised products to achieve a more comfortable life in either the U.S. or Indonesian setting.

Some prominent issues which relates with the freedom imagery of women are shown, first with the idea that women can do so much more and better with the conditions they already have. The issue of women's self-actualization is presented in, for example, the hair spray magazine advertisement which holds the women's hair even though she moves about a lot. From USA *Cosmopolitan*, February 2007, p. 84, it is seen that a woman freely laughs out loud at the accomplishment she has done with her hair spray. The image seems to point to how in every way she moves, her hair manages to hold well into place that she is satisfied with the result of her hair spray. Spraying the hair spray around herself is an expression that signifies the feeling of a personal achievement in using the product. The way she dresses herself with a sleeveless top that show off some of her beautiful body curves is also a sign that she has a high self-reliance of the independence of whatever she can do to elevate a self-confident feeling. The text at the bottom right saying "BEAUTY THAT HOLDS" not only signifies how the hair spray

holds her beautiful hair in place, but also in how she holds her audience's breath for the beauty she is expressing.

In Indonesia, the freedom of being a self-reliant person is manifested in the ownership of a credit card. The offering of the "Lady Series" card from Lippo Bank promises the possibility of women achieving and possessing many things. She could choose the Lady Pink card to get her to Paris, or the Lady Diamond card to buy the shoes and gown she needs to see a theatrical performance, or the Lady Gold card to get her shopping and bring back packages of goodies. Women can freely go anywhere, do anything and buy whatever she wants with a bonus of 5% savings. In the Lippo Bank Lady Card (*Femina*, 29 Mei-4Jun 2008, p. 109) there is the promise of a bonus or discount, which becomes a marketing strategy that most Indonesian consumers often look forward to. Credit cards to Indonesians are identical to discounts on something.

In the same magazine, *Femina*, the offer of a credit card from BII and BCA all have discounts to the other leisure activity Indonesians love to do, i.e. eating Western food at U.S. franchise restaurants. For BII, it is using a *satay* kebab with as much as 50% discounts to merchants and restaurants listed in the advertisements, whereas for BCA it is offering a 15% off to the pizza menu available at a Pizza Hut restaurant. Somehow eating a Western food and paying it with a credit card signifies a higher social status for Indonesian consumers. The advertisement on a Citibank credit card, however, chooses to use fashion jewelry accessories in the picture. This means that the value of the American credit card is not delegated like for the Indonesian middle class who loves to use it for food, but instead the American credit card is for the high class, thus, the image used in the Citibank card is diamond ring and bracelet, and a matching glittery purse. Instead of a discount for the purchase of the jewelry, Citibank is offering a 0% installment. Interestingly, advertisements on credit cards are not seen in any of the U.S. magazines chosen as data. The credit card is already a culture for the Americans that the advertisers assumes everyone already has one and so there is no need to advertise. If in Indonesia people still need to be influenced into making a

credit card, for Americans it is odd to see someone only having a debit and no credit card.

America is known as a consumer country. This implies that it is ordinary to have people pay in credit for the things they need. In lifestyle, this effected the way Americans could easily donate their materials for others even though the thing they are donating is still in god quality or have only been used for a couple of months. By comparison, for Indonesians parting with their material is hard to do since buying it was by debit card or by cash, thus, there is a tendency for passing down materials to others only when the material is already bad in quality or no longer meet the kind of prestige Indonesians seek by having the material. Indonesians see that the experience they had in the past with their materials is something to treasure and retold to their grandchildren. By comparison, Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) point out that the U.S. is a very future-oriented society.

Freedom imagery is supported by how optimistic and self-confident the models in the advertisements are. For example, a backless dress worn by a model signifies the daring attitude a woman can do in proudly exposing her back and thus become the center of attraction by the male counterpart. The expression of the model which shows a daring and full of confident attitude signifies the self-actualization and awareness of her own sexy body and its power to 'allure' men, that all men, as represented in the advertisement's background see her as the ideal type of woman.

The image is seen in the Giorgio Armani perfume advertisement in the Indonesian *Cosmopolitan*, February, 2007, p. 21. It is, however, interesting to point out that the magazine uses the hybridity of a half-naked female Caucasian model with the backless dress. It is as though a confirmation that only Western foreigners are allowed to act the way they are. However, the appearance of the female model with brown hair and dark make up in the advertisement above, makes her looking similar with an Indonesian woman which brings a sense of closeness to signify that Indonesian women are capable to achieve the same thing. A year later, a similar attempt in showing

how a woman are free to express oneself by being daring with her half-naked body is found in a Vaseline product advertisement. In it is used an Indo-European model, Dewi Sandra, whose hair is colored brunette, thus from afar she looks Western (*Indonesian Cosmopolitan*, November 2008, p. 153).

Although she is an Indonesian actress, the background of one of her parent being a Westerner allows her to show off her sexy back like the Giorgio Armani advertisement. Looking through the number of advertisements in th Indonesian *Cosmopolitan* of 2007-2008, there is found no advertisement with a backless and fully bred Indonesian model. This shows that although the magazine is franchised, it realizes its Indonesian audience and thus carry on the culture that it is impolite to fully show one's sexy self in public.

Yet, in finding out whether there are instances of exactly the same advertisement from the U.S. *Cosmopolitan* and Indonesian version, women's freedom imagery is found in the Calvin Klein product's advertisement on jeans, which shows off the film star Brooke Sheilds and Kate Moss. The Brooke Shields advertisement in the 1980s shot by Richard Avedon, was a popular advertisement because of the first of many taboo-breaking Klein advertisements. It showed the fifteen-year-old Shields, who is innocent with long straight hair and clear eyes, wearing a Calvin Klein is turning slowly towards the camera is asking boldly, "Know what comes between me and my Calvins? Nothing". People may vaguely know Shields before they saw the advertisement. She had starred in the *Blue Lagoon*, a teenager film that is known for her nude scenes, thus she becomes the icon for Calvin Klein's sex appeal.

A decade later, Brooke Shields is replaced by the supermodel, Kate Moss whose thin body became the next celebrity for the Calvin Klein jeans and perfume. When Klein saw that Americans were ready for more and more suggestive or sexual advertising, he made sure that he and his clothing were in full view of a series of provocative advertisements. The advertisement on Calvin Klein's perfume, which is published in both the 2007 U.S. *Cosmopolitan* and Indonesian *Cosmopolitan* do not show off half-naked

bodies, but instead show a fully clothed Kate Moss, yet using sexually provocative gesture with a guy as though they were about to make some kind of sexual favors. Explanation on why there are women freedom imagery in advertisements is because it help spread consumerism in both American and Indonesian magazines. Ever since the post-World War II era, the women's magazine industry used demographics to classify their readers and predict their consumption patterns (Gough-Yates, 2003, p. 2). This has shifted classifying women readers in the 1950s, by their motivations and attitudes, which constructed a diverse "women's market" (Winship, 1987, p. 46). The same approach is used by companies who want to sell their products through the process of market potential research. These companies believe that in the context of selling foreign products, it is important to make sure that the products sold answers the consumers' needs. In the attempt to seduce women to buy more of the products it is found that women's freedom imagery is globally accepted and wanted by most women.

By the late 1970s, the motivational research was replaced by "lifestyle segmentations" (Gough-Yates, 2003, p. 2), which shape the new image of women who are decision makers of buying products. In the 1990s, women's magazines shifted their representation of women to having sexual confidence and independence, when they found the new middle class call for "pleasure as a duty, self-expression, bodily expression and natural sexuality" (Gough-Yates, 2003, pp. 140-143). It is those reasons that in both American and Indonesian *Cosmopolitan* magazines, advertisements rely on sexual scenes in expressing a freedom imagery in advertisements.

In showing how women can exercise her freedom of choice, advertisements also offer that there is strength in women collectivism, which is represented in the notion of sisterhood. It has been noted that women always gather in a group along with the other women. Grouping with the fellow women strengthen the sense of belonging. According to Lindquist and Sirgy (2006) the sense of belonging relates to the terms of security, camaraderie and friendship which strengthen one's position in the society. In collectivism, women are able to actualize themselves by sharing and talking

about their daily life problems with their fellow women when they gather with their friends (p. 176). Further, American culture increasingly supports the need to work collectively to solve problems. Despite the fact that the spirit of individualism is still strong for the U.S. people, today's consumers tend to place greater value on teamwork. The advertisement on Nivea body product, which shows three American women of multi race, i.e. an African-American with a Mexican-American and European-American are making friendly conversation while applying Nivea body lotion on their legs from *O: The Oprah Magazine* of May 2007, p. 68-69 show the strength of collectivism in women. The advertisement seem to inform that women can achieve freedom by making use of the opportunity to be together to talk out whatever problems women have. In the advertisement, the problem may be any career and household problems or the dryness on their skin, thus becomes reason why Nivea body lotion is needed. (Lindquist and Sirgy, 2006)

In Indonesia, finding strength through collectivism to express freedom is also found in the emphasis of togetherness or *gotong royong*. The Indonesian women's tradition of *arisan* where women are gathered to discuss their problems, eat together, gossip and conduct a kind of lottery, that still persists until nowadays, becomes the media for self expression in the Indonesian *Cosmopolitan* November 2008, p. 73 issue. The happy smiles of the models signify the happiness of being with friends and enjoy that sense of belonging to a group of woman. Although the product advertised is a handy camera, the message transferred from this advertisement clearly reads: you will be happy when you gather with your friends and you can keep the happiness by capturing it with a handy cam. Interestingly, the advertisement which represents the collectivism value in Indonesian *Cosmopolitan* magazines being analyzed only covers 1% of all the issues found compared with American *Cosmopolitan* advertisements on collectivism which covers around 3.4% of the advertisement's total data for the research. It is interesting to note that in Indonesian magazines, collectivism is usually shown in relation with the product of technology.

## B. Patriarchy Hegemony in the Gender Ideology of Women's Marriage, Motherhood, and Work Life

Advertisements in magazines are paradoxical. Although it can be a media to transfer a freedom imagery, they also transfer the confirmation that women are bind under a patriarchy hegemony of keeping women in their own household. In a milk advertisement from a U.S. magazine, a message that is transferred to its readers is that being healthy means the freedom of women to focus on ways to increase their health by consuming as much milk each day as it contains a high dosage of vitamin D. As shown in a U.S. milk advertisement, where an elderly woman is seen to have a 'white' mustache to prove that she has just drunk milk, it shows that there is no restriction as to whom can consume milk for health. No matter how young or old, how busy is a manager of an office or business woman or a mother of a baby is, or how sexy a red dressed actress is, in a series of *Got Milk* advertisement with an accompanying text "In show business your figure shows. That's why I drink milk" (*Ladies' Home Journal* August 2007, p.3) and "Staying active, eating right, and drinking 24 ounces of low fat free milk a day helps you look at your best" (O: *The Oprah Magazine*, February 2007, p. 41) the *Got Milk* advertisement becomes proof that women are free individuals who can choose to drink milk as a daily beverage to keep healthy.

By contrast, Indonesian advertisements on milk produce are also valued, but women models used gives out the image that it is the duty for mothers to buy milk for her family. Therefore, it does not elevate the sense of freedom imagery that the *Got Milk* advertisement above has. The Indonesian mother positioned around a dining table and kitchen has instead solidifies the meaning of patriarchy hegemony. The explanation for this is, it has not become a habit yet for Indonesians to drink milk every day. Thus, milk in the *Frisian Flag* advertisement from (*Femina* 24-30 May 2007, p.135) is still exclusively limited for the growing children and not for every member of the family.

Reflectng back to the *Ladies' Home Journal* magazine advertisemnts in the 1960s, it is interesting that women are given this patriarchy hegemony images. Almost all of the images of women are located in kitchens doing household chores. Examples are women promoting laundry detergents, or dishwashing detergents, which claim that the ingredients in the detergents can still leave women's hands silky smooth. If women are shown some kind of freedom, it is usually in fashion and cosmetics advertisements, but beside the women are men lurking at her and giving compliments on how beautiful is his wife. This wife scene only solidifies that men can only give freedom to women to be beautiful by acknowledging that she is a wife of someone.

In Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1974) out of a sample of 4,500 wives that consisted of middle-class, high school or college educated American women were divided into three gender ideology categories, they are either the True Housewife, The Career Woman, or The Balanced Homemaker type (pp. 199-200).

In the first category, housekeeping becomes the main interest of these women that the comfortable and well-running home for her family is something that makes her proud and satisfied that she would not want to exchange it with any other type of job nor will anyone be able to take over the job she is managing. It is in this Housewife type of women that appliance marketers see the potential of selling their products to, thus becomes the main reason why 1960s advertisements are filled with household appliances. In the research, it is found that 7% of a total of 3621 advertisements under scrutiny follow this rule.

The second category is the Career Woman, whom Friedan believes to be the minority and extremely unhealthy according to the sellers' point of view because although these women would buy appliances, such women do not believe their primary place is in the home and thus are considered *too critical* by sellers. Meanwhile, the third category, the Balanced Homemaker, is the ideal type. Having some outside interests or has held a job before turning into the career of homemaking, she would readily accept any kind of help a home

appliance mechanic offers, although not accepting fully in order that she can still exercise her managing qualities to make a well-running household.

With the development of women's equality of rights to a workplace outside of the home, marketers devised ways for appealing these women with an X mix aid so they can spend their money to get rid of the boredom in the home by creatively doing something:

Every effort must be made to sell X Mix, as a base upon which the woman's creative effort is used.

The appeal should emphasize the fact that X Mix aids the woman in expressing her creativity because it takes the drudgery away. At the same time stress should be laid upon the cooking manipulations, the fun that goes with them, permitting you to feel that X Mix baking is real baking. (Friedan, 1974, p. 202)

In her book *Shaping Our Mother's World: American Women' Magazines*, Walker (2000) discusses the role of magazines as a business of expressing editorial philosophies to readers who yearn for personal, social and family advice, in addition to providing entertainment and information about the period of 1940 to 1960 that celebrated women's primary role as a cook and creative homemaker (pp. viii-ix). Especially for the 1950s, Kammen (1999), in his *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change and the 20th Century*, adds the discussion that the American family was immersed in the claim that the rise of income in the economic sector has developed a culture of what used to be a 'need' to become into a 'want' of something for the newly targeted women consumers (Kammen, 1999).

There has been a saying that one should keep up with the Joneses to mean whatever the Jones's family has, it has got to be whatever one has also. During this period of popular culture affluence, although not needing a dish washer machine, since washing dishes for a small family of four is still manageable to a housewife; yet because the neighbor has one, then advertisers show their philosophy that is not wrong to want one, too, for the

sake of modernity or as a show-off to party goers. This American attitude of wanting to have whatever their neighbors' have has made some dilemma when at the war time, mass produced things became scarce due to the limitations of manpower at factories.

With men going to war as soldiers, women had the chance to join the work force and did a man's job. Joining the work force for women was not a matter of choice, however. Women had to work because some could not live with the small "pittance" given by the government as dependents of their husbands (Walker, 2000, p. 84). However, this creates a controversy about the morality of motherly and domestic work with that of public employment (Walker, 2000, p. 67).

If, like discussed previously, during the war, women's magazines target their readers to become nationalistic by supporting the war as army helpers who would "roll bandages, knit warm clothing for servicemen, distribute ration coupons and work for the Red Cross" (Walker, 2000, p. 80) by contrast, after the war, the 350,000 'Rossie the Riveter' women who joined the Women's Army Corps were asked to return to their cultural role as the controller of their domestic world and engage in their lifelong, unpaid employment. A magazine article entitled "Women Work for Their Country" written by Dorothy Dunbar Bromley was in support of this cause, when she wrote in *Women's Home Companion* (December 1941) that in being a woman,

You needn't pilot an airplane, nurse in the army or go into a munitions factory to be of help. There are a number of important though less dramatic things to be done. Volunteer as an air raid warden, drive soldiers and their families to and from camps, entertain at the service clubs and at home. At Traveler's Aid booths in a hundred cities trained volunteers hand out information to boys on week-end leave.

Take a home-nursing course or be a gray lady – a hospital assistant. Study nutrition at a Red Cross class and keep your family well, or study canteen work for larger-scale feeding. If

you are qualified teach instead of learn. And when spring comes plant a vegetable garden. (Walker, 1998, p. 35)

To be a woman, then necessitates a far more important duty in the household where a woman, can be her own boss rather than being in a work force. According to the article “The Married Woman Goes Back to Work”, which was published in *Woman’s Home Companion* of October 1956, women went to work for three reasons:

First of all, there’s the obvious answer – money. But statistics show few women need the money for survival...

The second thing that drives women out of the house and into an office or factory to earn a weekly check is prestige...

“At last,” a woman, who operates a punch machine in a printing plant, said, “I have something to talk to my husband about in the evening...” (Walker, 1998, pp. 88-91)

The three reasons mentioned connotes that whatever a woman makes outside of the house is regarded an event to have extra money. As implied by the article, the required necessities of the home seem to be sufficiently supplied by whatever earnings any man of the house would earn. With a woman working, it can create a woman to have a higher status in society because she belongs to those who are not in the normal position of a full-time housewife.

The prestige is made possible because the woman can get to know some of the outside world, thereby, she can have a conversation about what her husband similarly knows. Yet in that same article, a woman is also challenged with the following a number of questions from Walker about work (1998, pp. 91-96). First, in the question “Can you afford to work” a woman is made to realize that by working the family will have to have an additional expense due to the kinds of wardrobe, beauty care, transportation costs, telephone calls and lunch hour activities such as window shopping. A woman worker is challenged to the idea that if she earns only 75 cents an hour, she may not break even when paying a child care assistant for the same 75 cents

because the woman will still have to find extra money somewhere to pay up for her federal income tax, which comes up to 23 cents. The article puts up the following remark:

To be absolutely realistic, then you should add up all of the hidden costs that may be entailed in your working, then figure out how much you will have to earn in order to pay these costs plus your income tax. If your expenses will be \$50 a week, and your husband's income will put your whole paycheck into the 30 percent bracket, you'll need a salary of \$71.50 to break even.  
(Walker, 1998, p. 93)

The arithmetic bluntly tells women that it really is not worth working outside the home because a woman cannot afford to have one, so the only best solution is for women to just conform to society's rule of becoming obedient housewives.

In the question "What can you do", the magazine article mentions that the home and community experience have given a woman a certain balance, maturity, organizational ability and warmth (Walker, 1998, pp. 93-94). However, these qualities are something that employers would most likely not buy as they only go under the heading "experiences" and not professional qualifications. A woman's age is also a factor that would most likely decide employers not to accept a woman on a job. If ever a woman does get a job, it would be teaching elementary school students that gives a salary to around \$84,000 a year.

Another profession is a nursing field or hospital administration, which requires the applicant to be under fifty and have had two years of high school education. In the science field, a woman must have a Bachelor of Science degree, something that even the male counterparts only have some success in meeting the requirements. Doing office work such as filing, stenography, electric machine punching, book keeping and handling the switchboard is something that large numbers of women are absorbed into doing. In other words, if most women in the 1950-60s have not obtained a qualified

education and only depended on the housework experience, then there is only a small chance of working outside the home.

In the question "What does your husband think of you working?" the article gives the inclination that husbands mind about wives and mothers working because the child is the one that often suffers from common colds and the garden that was usually made neat would need pruning once in a while. "Are you healthy and energetic" is a question that makes a woman reflect on the idea that if she decides to accept a paying job outside the home, she must take care of herself well enough in order to return home and still have the energy and health to continue with the daily duties of cooking, wash dishes, sort laundry and be ready as a host in entertaining her husband's friends.

Then, "Are you adaptable" is another challenging question that asks whether or not women who are already used to the independence they had at home without any supervision and can be the boss to any kind of home event would enable them to become novices and forget the age to office supervisors who need young, smart, non-sensitive, dependable, and quick working employees. Basically, women are supposed to get the general understanding that in answer to those questions a woman's best place is in the home.

After the war, therefore, it is not surprising to learn that a combination of government and business policies and public opinion has favored the patriarchy system of men to return to their industrial jobs, and thus, solidly domesticating the women as homemakers. Although some women are reliable workers, who are helped by magazines with practical advice on how to deal with war or career challenges; the lack of adequate day care facilities, which proceeds to the closing off the centers for their baby boom children, has made it difficult for women to look for long-term job opportunities. Rothman (1978) reports that the federal government has only established day-care centers in 1943, where by 1945 only 10% of them were available for use with very limited facilities and located at inconvenient places, as it was

too close to emergency places and encouraged too many women to stay even more at work that rearing their own children no longer became their main duties (p. 223). This consequently, gives reason for some pages of magazines to insert articles that warn women about the increase of juvenile delinquency as a cause for women who decides to abandon their children (Walker, 2000).

In the background of this day care issue, Tuttle (1993) comments that there is actually an issue of a male dominated group who regard the entry of millions of women into the paid labor force that was threatening the patriarchal goal of returning women to the life-time performance of unpaid, largely domestic tasks (p. 70). In other words, although through magazines women are also shown how to become beautiful and attractive with the many kinds of sophistication in cosmetics and how to be practical in cooking; doing housework and using smart clothes for their career, ever since the beginning women are conditioned as beings that cannot work well unless working in their own household. Through magazines, the women were told to both buy and make savings in the family budget, in order to strive for improved class, and thus have amiable budget to buy the modern facilitating machines advertised in magazines.

The advertisement on the modern gas stove, cooking utensils, sewing machine and vacuum cleaner are claimed to help ease and make quicker the work of the dutiful housewives. Like the advertisements in the *Ladies' Home Journal*, December 1960 issue, in *Femina* 2007, there is a picture of both mother and daughter showing how happy they are with their LG washing machine that claims to not crease clothes when washed. In it is written: "Cuci pakaian Anda dengan mesin cuci LG! Teknologi perputaran ganda Turbo Drum-nya, mencegah cucian tidak kusut karena terlilit dengan pakaian lain". Second, in a 2008 Indonesian *Cosmopolitan* is an LG refrigerator advertisement that promises consumers to be as classy as the machine and the woman model in red when a consumer decides to purchase the refrigerator. Talking about how the refrigerator is made equivalent with the classy woman is interestingly an idea that is similar to Walker's opinion (2000)

about women's magazine advertisements that makes a match of "shiny [white] postwar kitchens" with the "whiteness of the proud owners" (p. 133).

In some respect, this is similar to Tomagola's finding (1998) that Indonesian women cannot avoid the kitchen even though she has a high education and salary because advertisers have cleverly, ensure women that housework does not enslave women because it is an entertainment to make a husband satisfied (p. 341). Unlike the American society, although already in the year 2000s having washing machines and refrigerators for Indonesians are still relegated for certain middle to high class consumers and not for every social class. Therefore, the kind of visualization and text used in the Indonesian advertisement is one way of enticing the women consumers to buy the products with the promise of receiving something luxurious in return. By comparison, in the U.S. magazine data used for this research, no advertisements on washing machine and refrigerator are found. This may be due to the understanding that in almost any American house or apartments, these kinds of machinery are already available that there is no need for advertising them. The non-availability of washing machines and refrigerator advertisements in the USA magazine is probably a form of negotiation since washing machines are easily accessible in USA neighborhood laundry mats by just putting in some coins into the slots (see LG refrigerator advertisement in the Indonesian *Cosmopolitan*, November 2008, p. 201).

Thus, if there is supposed to be a consumer, it would point only to landlords or house and apartment tenants rather than the overall woman audience. The kind of household machinery found advertised in the magazines as data is instead, a vacuum cleaner, which seems to be a must have for any woman. An example is found in the November 2007 *O: the Oprah Magazine* (p. 142), where in it is shown in the Halo vacuum cleaner that promises to be "the world's only germ killing vacuum cleaner" and second, is a Dyson slim vacuum cleaner which is light weight and promises to be "no longer an oxymoron" in the May 2007 (p. 173) issue.

It is interesting to reflect on why the word “oxymoron” is used here in the text for Dyson vacuum cleaner. It suggests that in the past the machine was not intelligent enough to pick up dirt, so that through time, the machine continually receives a modern outlook and function. It is also interesting to notice that these vacuum cleaners are not advertised in the USA *Cosmopolitan* or *Ladies' Home Journal* which also becomes the main data for this research researcher. One explanation may be caused by the understanding that housework is perhaps racially relegated to the minority groups, such as the African-American mammies, who in the past were referred to household slaves. In the present time, these vacuum cleaners are mostly in the hands of women minorities who are working for a cleaning service agency. Thus, may explain for why the vacuum cleaner is only found in O: *The Oprah Magazine* whose readers are not only the European white but also includes the black African-Americans.

The above discussion, nevertheless, shows that ever since the World War II era and up to now, many women think that owning modern household machines will help perform the dual responsibility of a mother or housewife and worker better. Walker (2000) gives the understanding that purchasing certain products and appliances promises women to be out from lower class drudgery. The following samples of texts found in advertisements show how advertisers try to influence women into thinking how helpful a household appliance is. For example, is in “More Small Electric Appliances That Work For You” (*Good Housekeeping*, November 1950) that is used to describe a steam iron.

Another is in the advertisement of a Spry shortening, which is a basic ingredient to making Fried Chicken, Beef burger Toasties, and summertime Sherbert Cake. In the advertisement, a woman is shown opening up a refrigerator door to get rid of the heat of the day with a text that says: “To the Woman who thinks it is too hot to cook! You will spend less time in your kitchen if you use these modern short-cuts, New methods [which is] only possible because Spry is homogenized” (*Ladies' Home Journal*, August 1953).

Although women are thankful to have these modern appliances most have not realized that having all of those facilities have just given emphasis on the fact that women are being undervalued by society. In other words, the kinds of house work women usually do are understood as non-important. By purchasing modern household machines, it could be said that women are empowered by the men who prefer to have women stay at home. Thanks to "Home Economics High School Text Book" of 1954, a woman is able to learn how to become an ideal housewife, because it has been an aspiration before the end of the 1950s for many girls to be married and have a decent family life (Lamb, 2011, p. 1). The kinds of activities an ideal housewife would do is to maintain the house, prepare meals, take care of the children, help them with their homework, doing the dishes and laundry while remaining elegant.

Why do women not mind with the idea of being a housewife? Nies offers the reflection upon the American society that believes "a successful college woman of the era was supposed to have an engagement ring on her finger by the end of her senior year" (2008, p. 49). Meanwhile, Mintz and Kellogg (1988) refer to a speech given by a college student, Adlai Stevenson, in 1955 who says that, a woman's role in life was to "influence us, man and boy, to restore valid, meaningful purpose to life in your home" and "to keep their husbands truly purposeful". This is also similar to the text of an advertisement that ran: "What's college? That's where girls who are above cooking and sewing go to meet a man so they can spend their lives cooking and sewing" (Mintz & Kellogg, 1988).

Discussing about the suburban family in the 1960s was a female dominated and pro-child one with a father's absence. This suburban society was interestingly created at the cause of having no new housing built during the twenty years that men had been busy going to war, that it forced many people to leave the cities and settle in the districts. According to Lamb (2011) the housings with large gardens that range from \$6,000 to \$62,000 in the suburbs appealed to all low-average to higher class people (p. 7). This appeal was far greater when in the cities many kinds of jobs are abundantly available and that the community in the suburbs was helpful in providing a share of

some of the neighborhood's cars for people who had to work in the cities. The safety of the children was also the attraction of the suburbs because some mothers offer help in raising the children of other mothers who had to work in cities. It is for this reason that magazines make an effort of not only domesticating women to do housework but also in reminding women to raise their children well. Articles from the popular Dr. Benjamin Spock, who wrote a regular column for *Ladies' Home Journal* in the beginning of July 1954 (Walker, 2000, p. 174) were among those that women read at a regular basis to help make them become better mothers.

It cannot be denied that women are mothers. That is the stereotype which grows in this world. However, motherhood relates to several meanings. According to Woodward (1999), motherhood is the identity position of the biological, social, and symbolic. Motherhood also means that women should behave, but cannot express their minds too freely (pp. 240-241). This means that women, in this case, mothers, are not allowed to stand out. Mothers are in the shadow of an understanding that they should abide to the rule of taking care of their children, husband, and their beautiful house. Woodward says, that mothers need not to be smart or express their mind because it is the "idealized standard which are culturally prescribed" (Woodward, 1999, p. 243).

Hence, mothers cannot be separated from the media, especially magazines, where it is used as an identity for "a shared imaginary community" (Woodward, 1999, p. 269). Mothers are depicted to do the housework and take care of their body, too. In doing the housework, advertisements through magazines spread the product to make mothers easy to do the housework. They seem to help mothers, but they do not. As discussed earlier in this research, advertisers make ways for mothers to buy the household products to ease their work but at the same time, make some kind of agreement that it is a nature for women to keep staying at home. The psychoanalyst, Luce Irigaray argues that "the patriarchal system of representations excludes the mother from culture" (as cited in Woodward, 1999, p. 244), so, in order to speak rather than be spoken, mothers have to

be put into a “subject-position” but one that is “not as identical as a woman” (Woodward, 1999, p. 245).

The following are samples, whose theme travel through time and space, i.e. about how a mother is represented in magazines as provider of a family’s healthy meal and child rearing, which among others must be concerned about children’s health like shown in this Unguentine First-Aid spray advertisement from *Ladies’ Home Journal* June 1961, p.24). Other advertisement samples are how a mother or grandmother would show little girls how to become a good cook, or a mother about to bathe her children to signify how a mother is concerned with hygiene, and healthy meals for the family like shown in *Ladies’ Home Journal*, February 2008, p.73. To avoid the fact that women should be at home, the magazine has created a side job for women. One of those is the *Ladies’ Home Journal* magazine, which offers the women to search for subscribers. If women can persuade friends to subscribe to the magazine, the magazine will give them an amount of money. Another strategy is for these women to send in menu or articles about their home cooking, such as that done by with the features of the Betty Crocker menu. This means women do not need to go outside the house to earn money. It makes mothers happy, but most importantly it makes the magazine happy, too, as it gets more subscribers and also get more support from those who wants to keep the women at home.

Ever since the 1950s up to now, magazine advertisements also influence the hegemony of women, through the trap of making women think that they will not be as attractive if not using the kinds of fashion and makeup magazine advertisements suggest. As seen in the advertisements, the Emily Tyler style fashion (*Ladies’ Home Journal*, December 1960, p. 127) i.e. women wearing a long gown or skirt has used the strategy of luring women to buy their fashion product by making women feel they can be as important as a princess or first lady hosting a ballroom function that daughters are also encouraged to dress in a similar fashion as their mothers and use as minimal makeup they can for daily use. In the advertisement makeup tips, the text underneath the picture, it says:

I know boys who come right out and speak their disapproval of too much makeup," says Patsy Davis. The deb's favorite formula: lipstick and powder by day; for evening add a touch of mascara and eye shadow "if it does something for you" (*Ladies' Home Journal*, December 1960, p. 65)

The excerpt above shows that advertisers know exactly that women would read advertisements as a source of information for beauty tips. In suggesting the kinds of ideal beauty, advertisements have unfortunately manipulated women to be submissive also under the name of the patriarchy system.

In magazine advertisements, it may seem that women are given a way out to show their self-confidence and self-esteem by choosing for example, their own kinds of cosmetics through the range of cosmetic samples shown in magazine advertisements. However, consciously aware or not, women want to be made beautiful and adored by the men and other women. To a feminist, this condition actually signifies that women want to become an object that can please those in the patriarchy level of hegemony. For a capitalist, which in this case includes corporations and advertising agencies, knowing that women aspire for a clean, fresh and younger looking face, they make a system where women would depend on them to find some kind of identity by being different or better than others.

Advertisers know that women are not usually satisfied with their own condition and look to others for some kind of identity because it is in the difference that women find their identity. For this reason, advertisers make sure that their product stands out and attracts the women magazine reader to look more than once to their advertised product.

## **CONCLUSION**

Advertisers know that women are their best consumers. The research discussed here sets out with the question on how the magazine advertisements can trap and influence women readers as consumer culture. The answer to this is, magazine advertisements managed to position women

as the decision maker, thereby with many influential visual and verbal texts women are made to not only want but feel they need the product. The second question is how the advertisements can signal the dream of achieving a global self-identity. The answer to this is, advertisements play with a freedom imagery, so women can freely exercise their democracy of choosing the array of products they desire to have and consume continually as they elevate their self-identity and social status. The last question on whether or not the women images used in the advertisements have a gender ideology intent, is answered in the idea that cultural patriarchy hegemony make ways for women to fulfill Friedan's categorization of either the True Housewife, the Career Woman, or the Balanced Homemaker type.

As an American Studies research that based heavily on women magazine advertisements as data for Popular Culture, the research, which is grounded in nature sums up the advertisement's interpretation and analysis to emit the following theories: (1) American hegemony is possible by way of the transnationality of popular culture, (2) women magazine advertisements is the best media to reach out to women who are the number one target of consumer culture, (3) cultural hybridity exists only when there is a negotiation of cultural diversity, (4) cultural homogeneity results from a borderless world of popular culture, (5) the construction of a pseudo-freedom and egalitarian position for career women is constraint by nature's gender ideology and patriarchy hegemony, (6) the representations of women in magazine advertisements is the gender ideology of women as the only true housewife, balanced homemaker, and best provider of families' health; and (7) the highest satisfaction in a woman is when she fulfils the myth of the beautiful chattel men are continually competing for.

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### INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT

Re-reading the last FIVE articles above about advertisements and globalization, how do you predict the image of women will be in the near future? Will we still see a great difference on the fashion style of women from different countries of origin? Why and why not? Explain!

Find any kind of magazine and look through the advertisements. What do the advertisements mean to you? What themes can you find? Are there any cultural values which you think is extraordinary? Write a paper about your findings!

Bring a hard copy of at least THREE advertisements to be consulted at least TWICE with your lecturer before finally submitting your paper on an AGREED topic and title. A paper will not be accepted unless consultations have taken place.