FASHION MAGAZINE ADVERTISING:
THE CONSTRUCTIONS OF 'FEMININITY' IN SEVENTEEN

by

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ABSTRACT

Examining the ways in which 'femininity' is defined and reproduced via cultural representations has become an important part of feminist critical practice. By addressing the power that images of women have to define the feminine in specific ways, this work has contributed to our understanding of ‘femininity’ as ascribed and not as an intrinsic female quality. Advertisements in fashion magazines, however, seek to define and naturalize a particular version of femininity while ideologically masking the fact that this definition is an arbitrary construction. These images are one of the sources of information which organize the ways in which the social category 'femininity' is understood in our culture. Thus, advertising images directed to an adolescent audience are particularly significant given that adolescence is a peak period of gender differentiation. While much research has focused upon the content of advertising images of women, this work has not given insight into how the text works to construct the meaning of femininity. The purpose of this research is to examine current definitions of femininity in Seventeen, an adolescent fashion magazine. Quantitative content analysis is used to obtain a systematic description of the manifest content of the representations of femininity. Through the development of a semiotic method further textual analysis addresses the ways in which the text works to construct the meaning of femininity. It was found that despite the incorporation of non-traditional liberation themes into current constructions of femininity, advertisements operate to reproduce traditional definitions of femininity through ideological processes. These processes included the appropriation and reformulation of cultural knowledge, the naturalization of constructed meanings, and the management of contradictions via the appearance of choice and difference. The implications that these constructions have for women's empowerment and struggle for equality are discussed.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ii

Table of Contents iii

List of Tables v

List of Figures vi

Chapter One  Introduction 1
Gender and Advertising 2
Studying Advertising Images of Women 5

Chapter Two  Images of Women in Advertising:
Advertising and Sex Role Stereotyping:
Content Analysis Studies 9
Occupational Roles 12
Non - Occupational Roles 15
Activities 16
Relationships 19
Women's Goals 20
Women Minorities 22
The 'New Woman' 23
Thematic Analyses: Visual Imagery 24
Conclusion 28

Chapter Three  Theoretical Perspectives:
Sex Role Stereotyping 31
The Liberal Feminist Critique 32
The Rise of Cultural Studies 36
Femininity as Discourse 38
Textually Mediated Discourse 42
Advertising as Ideology 46
Conclusion 52

Chapter Four  Research Methodologies:
Analysis of Texts: Quantitative Content Analysis 54
Criticism of Content Analysis 55
Studying Advertising as Signification 57
Semiotics and Decoding Advertisements 58
Principles of the Semiotic Method 60
The Second Order of Signification 70
Outline of Current Study 74
Content and Textual Analysis 78
Chapter Five
Findings:
Content Analysis 83
Advertisement Decodings:
  Maybelline Illegal Lengths Mascara 95
  Soft n' Dri Antiperspirant 106
  Covergirl Marathon Mascara 114

Chapter Six
Conclusion 121
The Operation of Ideology in Advertising 123
Affirmation of Dominant Codes 126
Textually Mediated Discourse 130
Commodified Social Relations 131
Implications for Empowerment of Women 133
Practical Struggles 134
Limitations and Future Directions For Study 136

Notes 139
References 142
LIST OF TABLES

Table One: Space Devoted to Advertising and Features in Seventeen Magazine, 1992 78
Table Two: Types of Products Advertised in Seventeen Magazine, 1992 83
Table Three: Sex and Age of Models Shown in Advertising in Seventeen Magazine, 1991 85
Table Four: Representations of Ethnic/Racialized Identities in Seventeen Magazine, 1992 86
Table Five: Relationships Portrayed in Advertisements in Seventeen Magazine, 1992 87
Table Six: Comparison of Female and Male Activity Levels in Advertisements, Seventeen Magazine, 1992 90
Table Seven: Environments of Female Models in Advertisements Seventeen Magazine, 1992 91
Table Eight: Characteristics of Femininity: Recurring Themes in Seventeen Magazine Ads, 1992 92
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Maybelline Illegal Lengths Mascara 96
Figure 2: Soft n' Dri Antiperspirant 107
Figure 3: Covergirl Marathon Mascara 115
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION:

Advertising is no longer just a business expenditure assumed for the purpose of moving products off the shelves. Rather, it has become an inherent component of modern culture. In this century national product advertising has become less concerned with the communication of essential information about goods and services and more involved in the manipulation of social values and attitudes. It has become one of the great vehicles of social communication (Dyer, 1982; Leiss et. al., 1986). Advertisements make up the most consistent body of material in the mass media today and many people claim that advertisements are one of the most important influences in our lives (ibid.). Advertising images and messages saturate the fabric of daily life to the extent that our encounters with them have become routine. The pervasiveness of advertisements in modern consumer culture breeds a familiarity within which we take for granted the deep social assumptions which are embedded in them (Goldman, 1992:1).

When advertising underwent the shift from merely announcing the availability of goods and merchandise to attempting to define wants and needs, it went from being a part of business enterprise to becoming a social institution. It has become a central part of the culture of consumer society and by creating structures of meaning, advertising has in many ways replaced the functions traditionally fulfilled by art or religion (Berger, 1972; Williamson, 1978). Today advertisements are involved in the
transmission and acquisition of cultural values. Like religion or formal education, advertisements provide a framework for society by defining a set of roles and social identities. By serving as a source of authority, advertisements tell people not only who they are, but where they fit in. Furthermore, advertisements circulate a set of social values, transmit a normative standard against which behaviour can be judged, and portray goals and ideals to be pursued (Vinikas, 1992:vii).

Advertisements use the material of everyday life but they draw upon this material in a highly selective fashion. That which is chosen for inclusion is reintegrated into the signifying system of advertising where this material then provides the basis for the creation of new meanings. The result is the production of meanings and categories not found elsewhere (Leiss et. al., 1986:169). Advertisements do not therefore reflect the social world but re-create it, reconstitute it, and communicate this manipulated version to the audience.

GENDER AND ADVERTISING

In modern advertising gender is one of the social resources most often used by advertisers (Jhally, 1987:134). Gender is part of advertising's social structure and psychology (Barthel, 1988:6). Indeed, we are daily surrounded by hundreds of advertising images which address us along the lines of gender. Given the pervasiveness of advertisements in our culture and the representations of gender within them, it is not surprising that advertising has become a focus of analysis for feminist researchers.
concerned with the ways in which advertisements, as a discourse, produce forms of knowledge about femininity.

In the past decade feminist researchers have become increasingly concerned with the ways in which the subject 'woman' has been constructed in the discursive formations of the popular media (Young, 1989). Media representations work to constitute gender difference, rather than simply reflect or represent that difference. While femininity and masculinity are constructed via media representations, these constructions often appear as though they were direct knowledge of the social world - that is, representations of reality (Saco, 1992:25). As argued in Betterton (1987:7), "the visual is particularly important in the definition of femininity, both because of the significance attached to images in modern culture and because a woman's character and status are frequently judged by her appearance".

The images of femininity, as they appear in advertisements, have the power to narrowly define and construct the 'feminine'. Therefore feminist engagement in the analysis of these mass produced and mass circulated images has been an engagement in a struggle over meaning. This struggle has been motivated by a concern over the implications that definitions of 'femininity' have for women's lives. The importance of understanding media representations of women is that these "visual images, along with other cultural texts and practices, help to organize the ways in which we understand gender relations" (Betterton, 1987:8).

It has been claimed that advertising, as a central text of
popular culture, is one of the means by which dominant social meanings and relations are extended and maintained because advertisements are a cultural product which "construct a closed and fixed story of social cohesion" (Pleasance, 1991:70-71). As Williamson (1986b) argues, "most of the ideologies manifested in mass cultural 'texts' are dominant or hegemonic ideologies". Advertisements therefore can be understood as bearers of a dominant ideology of femininity which seeks to create closure and limit possible meanings. Advertisements "...help to define what forms of femininity are acceptable and desirable. In doing so, they exclude and deny experiences which contradict or simply do not fit with prevailing values in society" and thereby reinforce existing values and meanings (Betterton, 1987:10).

The importance of understanding the images of women in advertising and the power these images have to define what femininity means is to be found in the connection between these images and the wider social context within which they exist. Cultural texts such as advertisements, their production, distribution and uses "are a highly significant dimension of contemporary social organization. 'Femininity'... is a distinctively textual phenomenon" (Smith, 1988:38). Cultural texts are embedded in and organize social relations. 'Femininity', therefore, can be understood as "a social organization of relations among women and between women and men which is mediated by texts, that is, by the materially fixed forms of printed writing and images" (Smith, 1988:39). Texts not only mediate and organize the
activities of individual women across local sites but also coordinate this activity with the market for clothing, cosmetics and fashion accessories.

STUDYING ADVERTISING IMAGES OF WOMEN

Feminist criticism of advertising images is based upon the belief that the way in which advertising conveys images of women works to construct and reaffirm stereotyped and limiting views of women's lives and capabilities (Betterton, 1987:19). While agreement exists on this fundamental point, there is often less agreement upon how the representations of women work and on what ought to be done to change them.

An extensive amount of research has addressed the representation of women in print advertising within women's magazines. The conclusion of many such studies is that women are misrepresented - that is - the depictions of women in ads do not accurately reflect the roles and activities that women actually perform in society. In this view, supported by liberal feminists, advertising must be reformed via the depiction of more women in nontraditional roles. It is felt that these nontraditional depictions will provide more positive role models for women and ultimately allow women to fulfil their potential.

More recently, developments in cultural studies have led some researchers to posit that the representations of women within popular culture in general, and advertising more specifically, are not oppressive and limiting forces in women's lives. Rather, it is suggested that these images and representations offer moments of
resistance to the dominant discourse. This position is based upon the belief that the texts of popular culture lend themselves to evasive readings and meanings which are produced by people in the act of consuming them. These readings produce meanings that lie outside the dominant culture and thereby escape social discipline (Fiske, 1989).

The debates surrounding the role of mass culture in the reproduction of social relations has resulted in an increased interest in the investigation of the ways in which mass produced and mass consumed cultural texts work to produce meaning [1]. Certainly the 1992 circulation figures of a number of women's magazines attest to their popular appeal: Cosmopolitan enjoyed a circulation of 2,740,000; Glamour 2,130,148; Vogue 1,259,544; Mademoiselle 1,236,392; and Harper's Bazaar 720,863 (Katz and Sternberg Katz, 1992). These levels of popularity are interesting given that the images of women within these magazines are often charged with perpetuating harmful stereotypes of women. Despite these charges of sexism, women continue to consume these texts and a large consumer market for advertising endures.

While a considerable amount of research has addressed the content of the advertising in these magazines, the question of why their appeal persists remains to be answered. This question centres more specifically upon why the constructions of femininity in women's magazines persevere despite charges that these constructions impose a beauty standard that is not only unrealistic, but damaging to the self-esteem of women.
To move beyond the debates surrounding these questions, research must shift from analysis of the content of these images of women to an examination of the form these images take. In order to understand how fashion magazine advertisements present and work to define femininity requires a refocusing upon the ways in which the text constructs the meaning of femininity for readers and how the textual representations of women in advertising engage the viewer. The purpose of this study is to explore the definitions of femininity contained within Seventeen, a fashion magazine directed towards an adolescent female audience. It is important to research these particular textual constructions of femininity because their intended audience, adolescent girls, are at the peak of gender role differentiation. At no other point in the life cycle are pressures as strong for females to be feminine and males to be masculine (Mackie, 1987:147). The objective of this study is to develop a semiotic methodology which will provide insight into the ways in which advertisements, as one of the sources of definitions of femininity in our culture, work to construct femininity for adolescent readers. This research will focus both upon the content of the definitions and the ways in which these definitions are constructed within the text.

In chapter two previous studies in the area of gender and advertising will be summarized by reviewing studies that have employed content analysis, a predominant research methodology in the sociological study of advertising images. The findings of these studies and their conclusions will be discussed. Chapter
three will focus upon theoretical principles that have guided sociological studies of the communication of sex role stereotypes and then examine new perspectives which have developed in response to the inadequacies of traditional perspectives. More specifically the concept of 'textually mediated discourse' is discussed as an alternative theoretical approach. In chapter four methods used for analysis of texts will be examined through a discussion of assumptions underlying content analysis. This research methodology will then be compared with more recent methodologies which address advertisements as systems of significations. In this chapter a semiotic method for the study of how meaning is constructed in the text will be outlined. Both content analysis and semiotic decoding will be employed to answer the questions of how femininity is defined within contemporary advertising and how advertising texts work to construct these definitions. The findings will be summarized in chapter five. Finally, the implications that the findings have for the sociological study of representations of women will be considered in chapter six.
ADVERTISING AND SEX ROLE STEREOTYPING: CONTENT ANALYSIS STUDIES

In the early 1960's, Betty Friedan explored what she referred to as the "strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform, the image that I came to call the feminine mystique" (Friedan, 1963:9). In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan explored many aspects of women's lives and the levels of dissatisfaction and disillusionment with those lives. As part of her study, she researched women's magazines from the 1940's and 1950's, looking specifically at the ways in which women were portrayed along with their goals, aspirations and lifestyles. She found that through advertising, manufacturers had created an image of women as fulfilled and happy in their roles as housewives and mothers for the purpose of selling them products which would help them better perform these 'rewarding' roles. Friedan argued, "properly manipulated...American housewives can be given the sense of identity, purpose, creativity, the self-realization, even the sexual joy they lack - by buying things" (Friedan, 1963:208).

Advertisements gave the impression that "today one accepts as fact that the great majority of American women have no ambition other than to be housewives". The pervasiveness of images surrounding the feminine mystique, had been "seared into every woman's mind, and into the minds of her husband, her children, her neighbours. They had been made a part of her everyday life,
taunting her because she is not a better housewife, does not love her family enough, is growing old" (p. 228). Apart from offering valuable insight into the dissatisfaction many women were facing in their daily lives, Friedan's work was significant because she looked for the social definition of women's roles in the pages of women's magazines (Courtney and Whipple, 1983:3). In the depictions of women within advertisements, she saw a powerful force of influence on the way in which women were viewed in society - a view which, by and large, limited their opportunities.

Following Friedan's work, an interest in the depiction of women within advertising grew and it soon became a central focus of women's liberation organizations. The National Organization For Women, along with other women's groups, charged that advertising harmed women by supporting and re-enforcing the "sexist status quo" (Grant, 1970). Researchers from the social sciences, as well as from marketing and communication studies, began to systematically explore the ways in which women were depicted in print advertising. The images of women were studied primarily through the use of content analysis.

The first study of major importance was conducted by Courtney and Lockeretz in 1970. In their examination of 8 general interest magazines, they looked at the number of men and women appearing, the occupation and activities performed, and the types of products advertised. They concluded that four general stereotypes of women existed: Women's place is in the home, women do not make important decisions or do important things, women are dependent upon men and
need their protection, and men regard women primarily as sexual objects. Looking specifically at working and nonworking roles, only 9% of women were depicted as working outside the home whereas 90% were shown in nonworking roles. These nonworking roles consisted primarily of family roles, recreational roles and decorative roles.

The conclusions of Courtney and Lockeretz confirmed what was already suspected by many; namely, that advertisements did not present a full view of the wide variety of roles performed by women in society or accurately reflect women's real potential. Three years later, this study was replicated by Wagner and Banos (1973) in an attempt to determine whether or not changes in the depictions of women had occurred. The number of women shown in working roles had increased to 21% and, in nonworking roles, women were shown less often in family settings although this decrease was accompanied by an increase in the portrayals of women in decorative roles. Women were still depicted as dependent upon men in making purchases and were rarely shown interacting with each other. Despite evidence of a considerable level of negative stereotyping, these researchers were optimistic that some of their results were indicative of a cautious response to social change.

The studies that were to follow these initial investigations addressed many of the same themes, looking for changes and trends in the ways in which women were depicted. The categories which were emphasized in analyses included: occupational roles, nonoccupational roles, relationships, activities, goals, the
representation of ethnic minorities and the presence of the 'new woman'.

OCCUPATIONAL ROLES

In the early 1970's researchers looked for changes in the depictions of female occupations across time. It was hypothesized that when compared to those in the 1950's, advertisements from the 1970's should reflect the social changes which had been brought by the women's movement. A trend for an increasing portrayal of women in work-related roles was found although the occupational roles shown were primarily low status or traditional "women's work" (Sexton and Haberman, 1974; Belkaoui and Belkaoui, 1976). In a comparative study of general interest magazines from 1958, 1970 and 1972 it was found that, for the most part, stereotypes from the pre-women's movement had carried through to 1972. The percentage of women shown as workers increased from 13% to 21% but not a single woman in any of the three years was shown in a high level business executive position. It was not until 1972 that women were shown in professional occupations. The highest percentage of working women were found in nonprofessional white collar roles - that is - secretarial/clerical roles (Belkaoui and Belkaoui, 1976).

Findings from numerous studies indicated that, in general, women were rarely depicted in nontraditional roles or situations. For example, from 1950 through 1970, the number of ads showing women in nontraditional situations was only 16% (Sexton and Haberman, 1974). Similarly, during this same time period, women
were rarely depicted in leadership roles or roles that involved important decisions (ibid).

Despite the prevalence of traditional roles for women in advertising some studies have concluded that women have made certain gains in occupational representations (Belkaoui and Belkaoui, 1976; Cully and Bennett, 1976; Kerin et. al., 1978; O'Connor and Sullivan, 1988; Saunders and Stead, 1986; Weinberger et. al., 1979; Wagner and Banos, 1973). The proportion of women shown working outside the home has increased over time and gains have been made in the representation of women in middle level and high level managerial positions. While Weinberger et. al. (1979) found a downturn in the actual number of occupational roles portrayed by women, the working roles that were depicted indicated significant increases in portrayals of professional and middle level business positions. This gain came at the expense of portrayals of traditional occupations such as clerical and secretarial roles.

In a study of ads from the 1950's to the 1970's, Kerin et. al. (1979) found an increasing proportion of ads featuring women in roles other than that of housewife. It was projected that this trend of increasing role diversity could be expected to continue into the 1980's. There has been some evidence to support this prediction. For example, by examining the type of clothing women were shown wearing in work roles, Saunders and Stead (1986) concluded that, from 1963 to 1983, women were increasingly portrayed in managerial and professional roles and like their male
counterparts were attired in business suits. O'Connor and Sullivan (1988) compared the data of previous studies from 1958 and 1970 with 1983 data and found many changes in the depiction of women's occupational roles. Their findings included a marked increase in the employment status of women as compared to nonworking portrayals, with increasing portrayals of women as business executives, professionals, salespersons, and middle level managers. They concluded that the previously dominant stereotypes of women's place as being in the home and of women as unable to make important decisions were no longer prevalent.

In general, the conclusion was drawn in many studies that those responsible for creating advertisements were becoming more sensitive to the actual social and economic status of women and that, increasingly, advertisements were better capturing the diversity of women's actual social roles. On the other hand, sexist and stereotypical depictions were the predominant norm. Thus, while limited evidence of improvement was found, depictions of women in traditional roles, in particular the roles of housewife and mother, were prevalent (Courtney and Lockeretz, 1971; Fox, 1990). For example, women were more likely to be portrayed in the role of mother or housewife than employed outside of the home (Cully and Bennett, 1976). Advertisements from women's, men's, and general interest magazines in 1973 revealed that the number of advertisements in which women were associated with housework was eleven times greater than the number associating housework with men (Andrew et. al., 1978). In addition women were still less likely
to be shown in working roles when compared to men (Cully and Bennett, 1976). For instance, men in 1973 were three times as often as women associated with work outside the home (Andrew et. al., 1978).

NON-OCCUPATIONAL ROLES

Although more progressive depictions of women's occupational roles have appeared, the majority of depictions of women's roles fall under the category of non-working roles (Courtney and Lockeretz, 1971; Belkaoui and Belkaoui, 1973). In 1973, 69% of women shown in ads were depicted in nonworking roles (Cully and Bennett, 1976). The most prevalent role that women have been shown in has been that of sex object (Ferguson et. al., 1990; Pingree et. al., 1976; Sexton and Haberman, 1974; Sullivan and O'Connor, 1988; Venkatesan and Losco, 1975 ). Not only has this stereotype been prevalent, it has tended to increase over time (Sexton and Haberman, 1974). This increase often accompanies and counteracts declining representations of women in other stereotypical roles such as mother or housewife (Belkaoui and Belkaoui, 1976; Wagner and Banos, 1973). It seems that while women have been portrayed less traditionally, they have increasingly assumed the role of a sex object rather than a more positive or realistic role.

Kerin et. al. (1979) predicted that due to increasing sexual permissiveness in societal attitudes, this trend of sexual objectification could be expected to continue into the 1980's. This anticipated trend was qualified, however, by predicting that women would be used as sex objects in a narrower range of product
advertisements. Since this prediction was made researchers have noted that sexually explicit themes in advertisements have indeed increased. Soley and Reid (1988) tested the above prediction and concluded that nudity was more prevalent in magazines during 1984 than 1964. In addition, females were found wearing less clothing more often than their male counterparts. Duquin (1989) explored gender ideology surrounding images of women in sports related advertisements and found that when women were shown participating in sports, the images emphasized sexuality rather than athletic skills.

Posner (1982) explored the evolution of trends in advertising over time and noted the increase in sado masochistic images in advertisements apparent in the pervasiveness of aggressive facial expressions, body language, and S&M props. This led her to conclude that not only are sexually explicit themes increasing in advertising, there has been a transformation in the type of imagery. Seemingly innocuous displays of sex role stereotyping, characteristic of much magazine advertising, has increasingly transformed into depictions of sexually violent images against women.

ACTIVITIES

A number of studies have addressed the stereotype of women as passive by examining the kinds of activities in which women are portrayed as participants. Duquin (1989) studied ads in women's magazines containing images of women participating in sporting activities in both 1985 and 1988. The ads were coded according to
four levels of activity. It was found that the majority of women (72%) were shown as non-active compared to about half of men as non-active. While 36% of men were shown in relatively active roles, only 14% of women were depicted in this way. Posing in sport attire, as though anticipating activity, averaged 10% for both genders. The percentage of women shown in vigorous activities dropped from 8% in 1985 to 5% in 1988, while this level for men rose from 6% in 1985 to 11% in 1988. Overall, the findings show that men are more than twice as likely as women to be depicted as vigorously or relatively active.

The declining levels of activity associated with women in ads have also been noted by Bolla (1990). Her study of women's magazines indicates that 1974-1978 marked a high point in depictions of physical activity for women, declining thereafter. The dominant message communicated across 1964-1987 was that women's leisure is sedentary and usually involves the presence of a man. Similarly, in a study of ads in general interest as well as women's magazines, Poe (1976) enumerated the portrayal of women in active and non-active roles for the years 1928, 1956, and 1972. Results indicate that the highest levels of activity occurred in 1928, after which levels dropped with no significant difference in levels between 1956 and 1972. Once again, when women were shown in sporting roles, the imagery was of a sexual rather than athletic nature. When women were shown in ads with a sports motif, it was more often in a co-ed, recreational activity rather than in a same-
sex competitive sport. Ironically, the ads in 1928 contained the most favourable images, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

When shown as passive, women are often portrayed as alluring or decorative in relation to the product advertised and unengaged in activity. Women are often posed standing, lying or sitting next to the advertised product, while men are more often portrayed engaged in work or leisure activities (Duquin, 1989). As a nonworking role, the decorative role increased from 74.5% of nonworking women in 1958 to 94% in 1972 (Belkaoui and Belkaoui, 1976). During 1970-1971, in magazines from five different genres, over 30% of cigarette, beverage, automobile, and airline travel ads portrayed women as decorative and alluring (Sexton and Haberman, 1974).

From their comparative study of women's role portrayals for the years 1958, 1970 and 1983, Sullivan and O'Connor (1988) concluded that there had been a resurgence of women in decorative roles. However, they note that this is primarily characteristic of ads promoting women's products and that the use of alluring female models to sell men's products had decreased to a low level. More recent studies indicate that the passive/decorative stereotype may be decreasing, but in a somewhat contradictory fashion. Ferguson et. al. (1990) found that portrayals of women as subordinate to men or as merely passive/decorative decreased from 1973-1987. However during the same time period, ads increasingly portrayed women as outwardly alluring sex objects.
RELATIONSHIPS

In their relationships with men, women have characteristically been depicted as dependent. Women are more likely than men to be shown in the company of the other sex and are unlikely to be shown operating independently when making expensive purchases (Courtney and Lockeretz, 1971:94, Wagner and Banos, 1973). Between the years 1959-1971, a study of women's, men's and general interest magazines found that the highest percentage of ads in both men's and general interest magazines portrayed women as sexual objects dependent on men. Furthermore, in all magazines this depiction increased over time and has been found in almost one out of every four magazine advertisements containing at least one woman (Venkatesan and Losco, 1975). Similarly, depictions of women's leisure activities usually involve the presence of men re-enforcing the appearance of dependence (Bolla, 1990). In general, the depictions of women in advertisements have suggested that there are certain business and social activities which are inappropriate for women to perform on their own (Courtney and Lockeretz, 1971; Culley and Bennett, 1976).

The impression given by many ads that women are dependent is further implied by the isolation of women from their own sex. It has been found that women are rarely shown interacting with each other. For instance, in one study of ads in which women appeared, only 11% showed more than one woman (Courtney and Lockeretz, 1971). Similarly, in work situations, women were rarely seen interacting with their female co-workers (Wagner and Banos, 1973). Women have rarely been shown venturing out of the home either on
their own or with other women. They do smoke, drink, travel, drive in cars and use banks but usually do so in the company of men (Culley and Bennett, 1976). Despite its emphasis on women's collectivity, 52% of ads in MS magazine showed women alone (Ferguson, et. al., 1990).

In general, advertisements tend to offer the audience a world in which individuals are detached from others (Masse and Rosenblum, 1988). More recently however, Sullivan and O'Connor (1988) have noted that when compared with advertisements from earlier times, many ads in 1983 depicted images of independence for women. Although most ads in which women appeared tend to contain men, these men were not shown overseeing the activities of women. Instead, men and women were depicted as sharing lifestyles on an equal basis. Finally, although the presence of children in advertisements is rare, it has been found that their presence appears to be strongly related to the presence of women thereby emphasizing women's roles as mothers (Sexton and Haberman, 1974).

**WOMEN'S GOALS**

The two goals most emphasized in women's magazines advertisements have been attending to personal beauty and performing household tasks well (Andrew, 1978; Belkaouki and Belkaouki, 1976; Courtney and Lockeretz, 1971). Venkatesan and Losco (1975) found that in women's magazines, 61% of advertisements stressed women as being physically beautiful. This portrayal was more frequent in women's magazines than it was in either men's magazines or general interest magazines. Likewise, women's
magazines depicted women as overachieving housewives more often than other types of magazines.

Achieving physical beauty and domestic mastery have been presented as priorities in both American and British women's magazines. The dominant product categories in these magazines are for personal beauty products and housewares/food items respectively (Monk-Turner, 1990). The dominance of advertisements for personal beauty products in women's magazines has also been found in magazines oriented toward adolescent girls where beauty ads account for 21% of all advertising (Evans et. al., 1991). This finding reflects the message that women are to pursue 'eternal youth and beauty' in ads that hint at sexual inadequacy (Duquin, 1989). These types of hints in ads equate the failure to achieve physical beauty and domestic mastery with sexual inadequacy. By using the advertised products to become beautiful objects or better housewives, ads suggest that women can attain love and admiration (Warren, 1978).

In a study of advertisements for household goods over a period of seventy years, Fox (1990) found that despite household mechanization, advertisements continued to stress housework, work performance, and service to the family. These themes prevailed over the theme of liberation from housework which mechanization had made possible. Fox suggests that advertisers maintained an emphasis on the ideology of housework and women's dedication to it so as to ensure a continued market for their products at the expense of women's liberation. These findings become particularly
relevant in conjunction with findings which suggest that over the past 100 years print advertising in female-oriented magazines has increasingly emphasized social conformity by instilling sensitivity to the expectations and preferences of others (Zinkhan and Hayes, 1988).

WOMEN MINORITIES

Advertising has been criticized for the ways in which women minorities are presented. Minority women are vastly underrepresented in magazine advertising and, when they are shown, it is often in a negatively stereotypical fashion (Culley and Bennett, 1976). In a study of thirteen women's magazines, minority representation in advertisements was found to average only 3% of all ads (Duquin, 1989). Longitudinal change in such representations has been small. MacGregor (1989) evaluated images of women in ads from a general interest news magazine to see if changes in representations had occurred over time. In a period covering 1954 to 1984, visible minority women as a percentage of total persons pictured rose from 0.2% to only 1.5%, but the three roles held by minority women were reflective of negative stereotypes. Minority women were most likely to be shown as decorative/idle, as dancers, and as poor/idle. MacGregor concluded that over a 30 year period, minority women have been shown in extremely limited roles and associated with a very narrow range of goods and services. Roles depicted have not kept pace with the roles actually played by minority women in Canadian society.
THE 'NEW WOMAN'

One of the most common conclusions of studies done on the depictions of women in advertising is that advertising has been slow to make significant adjustments in the portrayal of women (Belkaoui and Belkaoui, 1976; MacGregor, 1989; Sexton and Haberman, 1974; Venkatesan and Losco, 1975). Even contemporary magazines that are geared towards the 'modern woman' lack positive portrayals. Despite efforts by publishers and editors to create magazines that meet the needs of contemporary women, the majority of ads in these magazines have shown women in stereotypical and sexist roles (Ortiz and Ortiz, 1989). When MS magazine was first published it espoused a strict policy regarding sexist or harmful product advertising. Despite this policy it was found that a substantial proportion of advertising in MS in the period of 1973 to 1987 promoted harmful products. For instance, cigarette and alcohol ads accounted for 30% of all advertising. In addition, women were found to be increasingly depicted as alluring sex objects (Ferguson, et.al., 1990).

Findings such as these support the charge that advertising has been rather successful in undermining feminist objections to sexist stereotyping through co-optation of liberation themes (Andrew, 1978; Fox, 1990:33). As argued by Masse and Rosenblum (1988:142), "an analysis of the 'new woman' advertisements, that most seem to answer our objections to earlier stereotypes, show that little has changed". Exploiting feminist concerns in order to sell a new version of the traditional American success ethic has arisen as a
new marketing strategy. These ads emphasize women's accomplishments and suggest that all women have scored an economic and emotional victory. The implication is that now women can relax in their collective struggle and concentrate on career advancement. Not surprisingly, this career advancement is linked to the consumption of wide array of products. It is argued that this kind of advertising exploits women as a consumer audience and discourages collective action to improve women's working lives (Gordon, 1980). Furthermore, this marketing strategy undermines the original goals of the women's movement by emphasizing social adaptation instead of social change. Advertising's liberated woman incorporates everything the women's movement has fought against.

"...these 'updated' models of women, while representing surface changes in appearance or activity, continue to operate within the same economic context and the relations of power remain intact. In fact, the idea of liberation has itself become one of the most effective advertising motifs." (Warren, 1978).

THEMATIC ANALYSES: VISUAL IMAGERY

In addition to studies which examine the depiction of women in advertisements through traditional content analysis, a number of studies examine stereotyping primarily from the analysis of visual imagery (Courtney and Whipple, 1983:11). Rather than draw a systematic sample of advertisements, these studies explore many ads for the purpose of summarizing the recurring themes in visual imagery. After studying the images of women in British magazine advertising, Trevor Millum (1975), developed an analytical scheme for the examination of visual imagery used to portray women in the
advertisements. He concluded that the most frequent images of women were: mannequin, narcissist, hostess, and wife/mother.

In another study of visual imagery, Dispenza (1975) argued that not only are advertisements one of the most accessible sources of cultural information regarding sex roles in our society, but that they work to reinforce sex role images. In order to discover which images were predominantly reinforced by ads, he conducted a thematic analysis of ads from more than 2000 copies of periodicals dating from 1900 up to 1975. He found six major themes: facial beauty; domesticity and women's relationship to the home as housewife; the progression from romance to courtship to marriage; women's body shape and fashion; 'spare parts' or focus on parts of women's bodies in isolation; and, finally, health and health products.

Perhaps the most complete and well known study of visual imagery in advertising is Erving Goffman's Gender Advertisements (1979). After an extensive examination of visual imagery in approximately five-hundred American print advertisements Goffman isolated several prevalent gender stereotypes which were transmitted through the physical positioning and bodily poses of the models. From examining the fine details of posture and positioning exhibited by male and female models he concluded that the stereotypes fell into six major categories. These six major areas of analysis were: relative size, the feminine touch, function ranking, the family, the ritualization of subordination, and licensed withdrawal.
Goffman found that women were most often shown in positions which relay sex stereotyped messages. For example, women were rarely shown as being taller than men and, more often than men, they were shown using their fingers and hands to cradle or caress objects. Women were depicted in subordinate occupational roles and were often shown in recumbent positions. In addition, women were often shown in childish poses and poses that suggested they were removed psychologically from the social situation at hand.

In order to interpret the images of woman in advertisements, Goffman used the parent/child relationship as an analogy for the relationship depicted between men and women within the ads, men being pictured in the role of parent and women pictured in the role of the child. He then asked why these ads, in which grown women were treated as children, do not look strange to us? To address this question, Goffman referred to the depictions of gender in the ads as representations of 'gender displays'. He explained gender displays as the culturally established correlates of biological sex. Drawing from social anthropology, Goffman interpreted gender displays as rituals: that is, actions or events which seek to give structure and stability to shared social life and communicate meaning. Gender displays function socially by communicating to participants how a person wishes to be identified. As rituals they are understood and read by members, thereby providing information about human beings as subjects.

Goffman's basic premise is that the performance of gender in social situations is analogous to the display of gender in media
texts. Advertisements are representations or reflections of the gender displays which are used in everyday life to guide perception and make sense of the world. Advertisements do not look strange to us because they draw on the same body of gender displays that are used to make sense of social life. While advertisements appear to contain photographs of male and female human beings, these photographs are actually depictions of masculinity and femininity which are fitted in such a way as to function socially (Gornick in Goffman, 1979:viii). As such, these depictions of gender display are part of the context and process within which we attempt to understand and define femininity and masculinity. Goffman noted however, that advertisements are often hyper-ritualizations because they emphasize certain aspects of gender over others.

Goffman himself did not apply these categories of gender displays systematically to a sample of advertisements. However a number of studies have incorporated Goffman's gender display categories in systematic content analyses to measure the extent to which they appear in advertising. The categories most often found have been the ritualization of subordination and feminine touch (Belknap and Leonard, 1991). Females are more likely than males to be shown as stance-subordinated and as displaying connection through smile, touch, and gaze (Masse and Rosenblum, 1988).

Goffman's work is significant because it concentrates on behaviours and postures which are perceived as natural for one of the sexes. Indeed, gender is held to be one of the most deeply seated traits of humans. Masculinity and femininity, therefore,
are believed to be, in a sense, prototypes of essential expression (Goffman, 1979:7). In this "doctrine of natural expression" there exists the tendency to account for what occurs in society by an appeal to our 'natures' - that is - a deep belief in our society that an object produces signs that are informing about itself (Goffman, 1979:6). In his study of advertisements, Goffman undermines the taken for granted 'naturalness' of behaviour associated with gender. By viewing these behaviours and expressions as cultural rather than essential, his work points to the need to place these portrayals in the context of a social and historical analysis (Goffman, 1979:3).

CONCLUSION

Twenty years of research into the depiction of women in print advertising reveals several dominant trends. Women have primarily been shown in traditional, low status occupational roles. While some evidence exists that a greater diversity of occupational roles has taken place, few women have been shown in high level professional occupations. In addition, women have been more likely to be shown working in the home than outside the home and, within the home, women are more likely to be shown engaged in housework than men. The dominant trend for women to be shown in non-occupational roles is most evident in the depiction of women as sex objects. The sexual objectification of women has increased as depictions of housewives/mothers has decreased. This sexual objectification and sexual imagery has also increasingly violent overtones. Advertising has consistently perpetuated the stereotype
of women as passive, non-instrumental objects through the
depictions of women as decorative sex objects.

Within advertising the relationships that women have with men
have been stressed over other relations and, within these
relationships, women are shown as dependant upon men. Despite
evidence that suggests depictions of female independence have
increased women are rarely shown together thus emphasizing the
centrality of male-female relationships. The primary goals for
women emphasized in advertising are the achievement of beauty and
domestic mastery. These goals tend to be presented in the context
of women's relationships by linking their attainment to social
approval. Although advertising has perpetuated and re-enforced
sexual stereotypes at a general level, stereotyping has been most
extreme in the representation of minority women. Minority women
are underrepresented in all categories and, when they do appear,
their roles are extremely limited and reflect not only sexist but
racist stereotypes.

Many of the findings of content analysis studies have been
confirmed by thematic analyses of visual imagery. Beauty,
domesticity, sexual objectification and heterosexual romance have
been found as recurring advertising themes. Additionally, women
are more often than men depicted in ways that relay sex stereotyped
messages. As the stereotypes present in advertising have been
challenged advertisers have responded by co-opting women's
liberation themes thereby making advertising resilient to criticism
and demands for change. This has contributed to an ongoing
challenge to the ways in which women are represented in advertising and to an ongoing concern with the ways in which these images and definitions of femininity effect the lives of women. The next chapter will discuss how sex-role stereotypes contribute to women's inequality from the theoretical standpoint of liberal feminism. The discussion will then shift to an examination of more recent theoretical work in the area of cultural representations looking specifically at femininity as a textually mediated discourse and advertising as ideology.
SEX ROLE STEREOTYPING

In the past, sociologists have analyzed representations of women in advertising by examining the communication of sexual stereotypes. From this perspective advertisements are one of the sources from within the mass media that provide and generate ideas about women. It is thought that advertisements not only sell the products that we consume, but that they also convey images regarding how we are to define ourselves, our relationships and our needs. In doing so, advertising communicates both implicit and explicit suggestions regarding the appropriate roles for women and men (Anderson, 1988:23-24).

The notion of "sex roles" refers to the behaviours, values, and attitudes which a culture defines as appropriate for males and females (Andersen, 1988:76; Weinreich, 1977:21). Through sex role socialization, different behaviours and attitudes are encouraged and discouraged in women and men. Social expectations regarding the appropriate fulfilment of one's sex role are transmitted in the socialization process by a complex and subtle set of socializing agents which includes parents, peers, teachers, the media, and advertising. These agents transmit sex appropriate behaviours, attitudes, roles and beliefs through direct proscription, by example, and by implicit expectation (Weinreich, 1977:18). It is assumed that the child internalizes the sex roles taught and that gender identity is established in the early years of life. Once
acquired, this identity is relatively resistant to substantial change.

It is often argued, however, that socializing agents hold stereotypical beliefs about what constitutes appropriate sex roles. Sex roles and sex role socialization are thus reflections of often unfounded beliefs regarding differences between the sexes (ibid.). Furthermore, these stereotypes reflect the assumptions of a male-dominant society (Stockard and Johnson, 1980:8). So, for example, the traditional female stereotype is characterized as passive, expressive, decorative, manipulative, non-combatant and non-competent outside domestic and nurturing situations (Weinreich, 1977:20).

The representations of women in advertising are thought to draw upon and mobilise existing social knowledge and cultural assumptions about women's sexuality, intellect, and abilities but in particular - that is - stereotypical ways. Sex role theory hypothesizes that sex stereotyped depictions of women in advertisements encourage role-modelling. Sexist stereotypes are problematic because they contribute to the socialization of women into narrowly defined roles which limit the fulfilment of their true potential.

THE LIBERAL FEMINIST CRITIQUE

The analysis of depictions of women in advertising using a sex role perspective has been closely bound up with the guiding assumptions of liberal feminism. The liberal feminist perspective addresses gender by focusing upon the acquisition and reinforcement
of sex roles through socialization (Peirce, 1990:492). Sexual stereotyping in advertising is problematic to liberal feminists because they feel that these depictions of women are misrepresentations. The stereotypical roles within which women are depicted do not accurately reflect changes which have taken place in modern society and print advertising has been slow in changing the traditional, demeaning roles of women (Belknap and Leonard II, 1991:104; Betterton, 1987:20; Venkatesan and Losco, 1971:49).

The central assumptions of liberal feminism revolve around a liberal philosophy that extends full civil rights to every individual. Liberal feminists stress the dysfunctional aspects of sexual inequality and feel that no particular segment of society benefits from its existence. Men are not seen as the originators or perpetrators of sexism. Rather, it is believed that most men would welcome and benefit from a nonsexist society. The problem of sexual inequality is perceived in terms of the need for attitudinal change. It is assumed that with proper education and nonsexist practices, sexual inequality will diminish. The strategy adopted by liberal feminists in their fight against sexism rests upon their assumption that political power is distributed throughout society in such a way that many different groups compete for the power to influence social policy. Women's organizations can compete for and gain the power needed to change sexual inequality (Nielsen, 1978:151). This approach takes on a reformist nature in which women are encouraged to bring about change by working collectively within the existing political structure.
Given this political philosophy, liberal feminists have advocated the reform of advertising content. These reforms involve replacing stereotypical portrayals of women with more representations of women in nontraditional roles. The presumption is that if sexist portrayals are removed and women are depicted in more realistic roles in advertisements, then women will be provided with role models that are not only more accurate, but more positive (Steeves, 1987).

However, an opposing viewpoint holds that advertisements are not transparent communicators of meaning, nor are they reflections of social reality. Against the position taken by liberal feminists this view holds that "simply to attack advertising imagery as misrepresentative and sexist does not adequately explain its power to shape our perceptions of social reality" (Betterton, 1987:21). The position of liberal feminists is fundamentally problematic because their criticism of images of women in advertising revolves around the extent to which these images are false when measured against reality. The liberal feminist position relies on the belief that there is a simple and better reality with which to replace stereotypes. Dyer (1982:114) points out that this kind of argument gets "bogged down in arguments about the extent to which such images are true or false and seeks to replace distorted images with representations of people and situations as they really are". In doing so, this position ignores the more important issue that advertisements are themselves a kind of reality which have their own effect.
The images of women in advertising influence how we see the female body and what it means to us (Betterton, 1987:8). Advertisements do not represent (or misrepresent) an external reality but instead, work to constitute a version of reality. They are ideological (Dyer, 1982; Wernick, 1991; Williamson, 1978). Challenging the ideological effect of advertising is not simply a matter of removing stereotypical sex role portrayals of women. Even if women are shown more realistically, it is not certain that this ensures a feminist transformation of imagery given that women remain restricted in the real world (Betterton, 1987:20).

Despite protests throughout the 1960's and 1970's against the communication of traditional stereotypes of women, it often seems today as though nothing has ever changed (Barthel, 1988:11). As we have seen in chapter one, over the past decade women in advertisements have more frequently been shown in a wider range of roles which more accurately reflect their actual activities. Yet, these depictions rarely break from traditional definitions of what it means to be feminine, nor do they offer alternative constructions of femininity. The 'liberated' female executive, for example, is still one who not only conforms to, but embraces, specific standards of 'beauty' and is shown as physically attractive and desirable.

In the post-women's movement era, traditional definitions of femininity have been incredibly resilient to change. The recuperation of feminism, the subversion of feminist challenges to sexist ideology and the rise of outright anti-feminism make the
study of advertisements particularly timely (Goldman, et. al., 1991). The mass media in general and the advertising industry more specifically have been rather successful in co-opting the challenges put forth by the women's movement (Andersen, 1988:28). For example, 'femininity' is often presented within advertisements in such a way that it acquires meaning not in its difference from masculinity, but in its opposition to the category of 'feminist'. Furthermore, the message is conveyed that today it is somehow a defiant choice to be 'feminine' (Williamson, 1986:21).

To address the way in which femininity is presented in advertising, feminists have questioned not just the content of advertising, but the way in which this content operates ideologically to create and reproduce traditional imagery. To better understand the part that advertising plays in defining and ultimately naturalizing a particular version of femininity requires an approach which is more sophisticated than the sex-roles focus of liberal feminism. Rather than view advertisements as misrepresentations of reality, what is required is an approach that can interpret the ways in which advertisements constitute social reality by constructing both meaning and the individual who is addressed by them.

THE RISE OF CULTURAL STUDIES

Recent approaches to the study of representations of women in the mass media have been influenced by theoretical and methodological developments within cultural studies. In the past decade, researchers have questioned traditional approaches to the
study of mass communication and have refocused attention on the ways in which ideological meanings are produced and reproduced. The development of new approaches has been motivated by dissatisfaction with the established approaches, particularly those that conceptualize various forms of mass communication as vehicles for dominant ideologies which are "swallowed whole by a passive audience of cultural dupes" (Brown and Schulze, 1990:89).

As a result, the focus has now shifted towards questions concerning how the text works to construct meaning and how this meaning is produced by the reader and text in interaction. These questions rest on the implicit assumption that the reader is an active agent, and not a passive victim exhibiting false consciousness. Similarly, the text itself is perceived as multi-levelled and not as a monolithic structure of meaning which is imposed upon the helpless reader.

The study of advertising, traditionally guided by sex-role theory, has assumed a passive role for the reader. In this perspective, the reader passively adopts the roles provided by the advertisement. However, if the texts of advertising can be understood as unstable rather than monolithic and the reader as an active agent, we begin to see that both the construction of femininity as well as the feminine subject is an ongoing process. Studying the representations of women in advertising then becomes a study of how the advertisements work to produce a particular version of what it means to be feminine.
FEMININITY AS DISCOURSE

The idea of discourse has been helpful in explaining how various cultural and social practices intersect to define femininity (Betterton, 1987:9). The term 'femininity' is used here to refer to a social construction rather than a natural and innate quality of the female sex. As such it implies a social process in which the female sex is attributed with specific qualities and characteristics. Similarly, femininity refers to the whole process through which an individual acquires a gendered identity (Betterton, 1987:7). In order to understand how femininity is produced and acquired it is useful to incorporate the concepts of discourse, discursive practices, and subject position.

Borrowing from the work of Foucault, femininity can be thought of as a discourse - that is - as a way of constituting knowledge about the female sex. The term 'discourse' has been defined variously as "...a domain of language-use, a particular way of talking (and writing and thinking)", involving "certain shared assumptions which appear in the formulations that characterise it" (Belsey, 1980:5). Discourse can be understood as an institutionalized use of language and language-like sign systems (Davies and Harre, 1990:45). Discourses exist in written as well as oral forms and in the social practices of everyday life (Weedon, 1987).

The concept of discourse is particularly useful because it carries with it an implicit relationship between power and knowledge. The dominant discourse has the power to constitute
knowledge in specific ways. This has implications for the subject who is produced through the discourses of 'self-knowledge'. These discourses are developed through the construction of social categories such as gender, so that discourses provide the basis for identity. As Frazer (1990) argues, "actors' understanding and experience of their social identity, the social world and their place in it, is discursively constructed. By this I mean that the...experience of gender, race, class,...personal-social identity, can only be expressed and understood through the categories available to them in discourse".

Discursive practices refer to the all of the ways in which people actively produce their social reality once positioned within a discourse. It is the learning and use of particular practices that generate an individual's subjectivity. Through participating in various discursive practices, individuals are constituted and reconstituted. Social identity is always an open question that depends upon the positions made available within one's own as well as other's discursive practices (Davies and Harre, 1990).

Understanding gendered identity as the product of discursive positioning requires that the concept of subject position replace the traditional concept of role. Roles are thought to be learned through the observation of others, then adopted by the social actor. This approach suggests that social action is a type of pre-determined, pre-structured play in which roles exist prior to the speaking and acting subject. The use of the concept subject position avoids such overdeterminism because it rests upon an
understanding of the subject as a choosing subject. The active subject can choose her location within a discourse according to her subjective lived history (Davies and Harre, 1990). One's identity is composed of the multiplicity of subjectivities which arise out of particular discourses. Identity, therefore, is never a fixed or unified whole but is constantly negotiated and renegotiated as the active subject participates in a range of different discursive practices (Saco, 1992). Femininity may be represented and experienced in contradictory ways because definitions of femininity can be found across various cultural discourses (Betterton, 1987:9).

At any given moment in time, an individual may be found at the intersection of competing and conflicting discourses.

"Persons as speakers acquire beliefs about themselves which do not necessarily form a unified, coherent whole. They shift from one to another way of thinking about themselves as the discourse shifts and as their positions within varying storylines are taken up. Each of these possible selves can be internally contradictory with other possible selves located in different story lines...The possibility of choice in a situation in which there are contradictory requirements provides people the possibility of acting agentically" (Davies and Harre, 1990:58-59).

Although the subject is socially constructed through discursive practices, the subject is always a thinking and acting agent and the existence of conflicting and competing subject positions and practices provide options for the subject. However, feminists have argued that "these options exist in a hierarchical network of antagonistic relations in which certain versions of femininity...have more social and institutional power than others"
The ways in which discourses seek to constitute individuals is always located within a wider network of power relations. While in principal the individual subject is open to all forms of subjectivity, in reality this access is limited by historically specific social factors and the various forces of power operating within a particular society. Discourses located within different social institutions and practices compete with each other for the allegiance of individual subjects. In order to be effective, a discourse requires a material base in established social institutions and practices (ibid.). Therefore the most powerful discourses in our society have firm institutional bases.

The dominant subject position places the reader in a position which implicitly endorses the meanings and values found in the text as simply being common sense. If we look at the meanings of femininity offered in cultural representations we soon see that they have specific implications for social power. To resist the dominant discourse is to resist a form of power that produces individual subjects and causes individuals to conceive of themselves in a limited and limiting way (Young, 1989:183).

Discourses work to privilege particular social values and meanings while excluding others. Advertisements are an example of one set of cultural texts which seek to inscribe the reader in particular ways. The structure of an advertisement works to construct a certain subject position for the reader. More often than not, advertisements address the reader as a gendered subject. In doing so, ads do not just create images of women, for example,
but seek to construct differences between men and women. These differences are not presented as constructions but are offered up as though they are real and natural (Betterton, 1987:23).

As Dyer (1982) points out, in order to understand the image of a woman in an advertisement, it is important to identify how she is signified and positioned within the advertisement as a female person, and to remember that any representation is also partially defined in relation to the economic, political and ideological position of women outside the advertisement within patriarchal social relations. This point highlights the need to place advertisements and their reading by individuals within a larger social context.

TEXTUALLY MEDIATED DISCOURSE

The work of Dorothy Smith (1990) provides a link between the activities of particular individuals in local sites and the social relations within the wider social organization. Rather than view femininity as a normative order, reproduced through socialization to which women are somehow subordinated, Smith proposes that femininity be explored as discourse (1990:163). In this conceptualization, discourse refers to actual social relations which are organized in and by the activities of actual people. Social relations are not fixed relations between statuses but are an organization of actual sequences of action in time. Material texts, such as magazine advertisements are significant in this process of social organization because as Smith argues, "...we are part of a world a major segment of the organization of which is
mediated by texts.." (1990:160). Advertising is one of many texts which provides the direct material organization of the discourse of femininity.

Femininity can be explored as the actual social relations of a discourse mediated by texts in which women are active as subjects and agents. This perspective draws attention to the organization of ongoing actual practices of actual women. In the discourse of femininity, for example, one such practice involves "the deployment of skills in producing personal appearance" (1990:164). To examine femininity, texts of or about femininity are important objects for analysis because these texts provide points of entry into the organization of the social relations of femininity.

It is important to remember that the texts which enter into and organize the practices of individuals at the local level have a material presence and are produced in an economic and social process which is part of a political economy. In the discourse of femininity, the activities of women are co-ordinated with the operation of very powerful cosmetics and fashion industries.

"Women are not just passive products of socialization; they are active; they create themselves. At the same time, their self-creation, their work, the uses of their skills, are co-ordinated with the market for clothes, makeup, shoes, accessories, etc., through print, film etc. The relations organizing this dialectic between the active and creative subject and the market and productive organization of capital are those of a textually mediated discourse." (1990:161).

Textually mediated discourse is a distinctively new type of social relation which arose with the development of movable type and the emergence of a mass market for books and magazines.
Whereas meaning had once been the product of particular lived processes at the local level, meaning came to appear in the material form of a text. Not only did meaning then become detached from lived processes but, in the form of material texts, it appeared uniform across a diverse spectrum of local settings with specific social processes. This was the advent of "a new kind of public arena...in which relations are mediated by objectified extra-local forms...It sets up simultaneous relations among actual local settings so that their local historical processes are mediated and transcended by impersonal and objectified forms" (Smith, 1990:168).

In the discourse of femininity, texts such as books on proper female conduct, popular magazines and novels came to provide a standpoint for the individual reader from which her own conduct and the conduct of others could be examined. As points of reference, texts not only organize the activities and relations of people scattered across diverse local settings, but co-ordinate them. The texts of femininity provide standardized images which women in diverse settings are to reproduce on their own bodies.

The text as a mediator of social relations is ideologically determined. The images of women in texts are inscribed by and determined by such ideology. The ideology of femininity acts as an interpretive schema for images of women as well as for the appearance of actual women. As such the text provides a powerful source of social organization.

"Ideologies and doctrines of femininity are explicit, publicly spoken and written. They enunciate
interpretations of the image and its embodied correlate in women's appearances. The discourse is a matrix of textually mediated relations linking ideologies of women's sexual passivity and subordination to men with the images and icons of the texts, and entered into the organization of the everyday world and its relations through the artful work of women in producing on their bodies the local expressions of the text" (Smith, 1990:171).

Advertisements in women's magazines provide a model or a standard against which to define femininity. These texts structure the actual activities of women as they work to create their own appearance in accordance with this definition but they also structure interpretation of the appearance of and by others. When women create themselves as expressions of the textual image they make themselves interpretable by the ideology of femininity which is inscribed in the textual image. Therefore, while women can control and create their appearance, "its intended meaning is established by discursive texts outside her control" (Smith, 1990:182).

The ideality of the textual image with its power to form the standards under which we are judged and read, and with which we judge and read others, also structures desire. When the ideal, standardized image exists across a gap from the actual bodies of real women in local settings, desire for that ideal is generated and then coordinated with the production of clothing, cosmetics, etc., so that "women are returned again and again as consumers to the retail outlets that will remedy their ever-renewed textually reflected imperfections" (Smith, 1990:208).
In the work of Dorothy Smith we begin to see how the activities that women undertake in creating themselves as feminine are part of social relations which are mediated by texts such as advertising. Advertising not only organizes the work of individual women but standardizes a definition of what it means to be feminine across multiple sites. On the basis of this process, the social relations of femininity are organized according to an ideologically grounded definition of what it means to be a woman. Women define themselves and are defined by others according to the ideality of the textual image. In an even wider context, Smith's work ties the textually mediated discourse of femininity to the operation of industries which have a vested interest in co-ordinating the activities of women with the consumption of commodities these industries produce.

ADVERTISING AS IDEOLOGY

Advertising is fundamentally ideological because it works to produce meanings and ideas. Borrowing from Stuart Hall's (1977) analysis of the ideological effect of the mass media in general, we can argue that advertising functions ideologically in three ways. Firstly, advertising works to provide and selectively construct social knowledge and social imagery "through which we perceive the 'worlds', the 'lived realities' of others, and imaginarily reconstruct their lives and ours into some intelligible 'world-of-the-whole', some 'lived totality'" (p.340-341). Secondly, advertising operates to classify and rank order different types of 'social knowledge' according to preferred meanings and
interpretations. In terms of constructing femininity, the ideological labour of advertising is to establish the rules and definitions of what femininity means and to further provide the 'maps and codes' which help us not simply to know more about what being a woman means, but to make sense of it. As Dorothy Smith has argued, the ideality of the textual image not only provides initial information but also a point of reference for future and further interpretation. Thirdly, the ideological functioning of advertising works to "organize, orchestrate and bring together that which it has selectively represented and selectively classified" in such a way that, despite fragmentation and plurality of meanings, imaginary coherence and unities are produced. Through this negotiation, consensus and consent seemingly emerge (p.342). These three operations describe the general ideological functioning of advertising. The more specific ideological processes by which advertising works to create meaning include the appropriation and reformulation of cultural knowledge, the naturalization of constructed meanings, and the management of contradictions via the appearance of choice and difference. These processes will each be discussed in turn.

The meanings and ideas we find within advertisements are not generated in isolation but are the end products of a process in which meanings and ideas already existing within a given culture are drawn upon. Within an advertisement cultural knowledge is rearranged and recombined in such a way that new meanings are created, but because these new meanings rely on pre-existing
meanings, they appear as natural. This process of appropriation and reformulation is motivated by the desire to sell products. As Judith Williamson (1978:12) argues, "Advertisements must take into account not only the inherent qualities and attributes of the products they are trying to sell, but also the way in which they can make those properties mean something to us". For this reason, "Advertising, more than any other form of cultural endeavour perhaps, represents the logic of colonization. Cultural material is taken from a plethora of sources, and is reorganized for the purposes of selling products. The original, or previous meanings are recruited for a specific purpose: the buying (and consumption) of a product" (Pleasance, 1991:73).

Within this process of appropriation, objects - that is material products - are made meaningful in terms of ourselves as social beings in our different social relationships (Dyer, 1982:116). Advertisements seek to create a structure in which statements about objects are transformed into statements about human relationships. In the process, objects and people become interchangeable and in doing so, "advertisements are selling us something besides consumer goods: in providing us with a structure in which we, and those goods, are interchangeable, they are selling us ourselves" (Williamson, 1978:12-13).

It is because advertisements are able to selectively extract existing meanings from their historical context and use them to create new meanings that critics often talk of images in advertisements as re-presentations (Saco, 1992:25; Williamson, 1978:177.) To speak of images of women in advertisements as re-presentations draws attention to the way in which advertisements
actively work to constitute gender difference and construct femininity. However, this construction is presented as if it were constituted through direct knowledge of real objects - as if it were a representation of the way women really are (Saco, 1992:25).

This naturalization of femininity demonstrates the insidious ideological processes of advertising in which a phenomenon is treated "...as so self-evident and natural as to exempt it completely from critical inspection and to render it inevitable" (Vestergaard and Schroder, 1985:145). Beliefs about what it means to be feminine - a woman - remain unquestioned because they are presented as unquestionable; as natural and by implication, normal. These re-presentations take on the form of common sense and in doing so "...do not simply try to arrest or reverse on-going social change, but presuppose that such change is impossible". Advertising, through its ideological functioning, works to retard or prevent the revision of the basic principles of the social order both at the macro and micro levels (ibid).

As Stuart Hall points out, ideology must be understood not as that which is hidden and concealed, but that which is most open, apparent, and manifest, taking place on the surface and in full view.

"It is precisely its 'spontaneous' quality, its transparency, its 'naturalness', its refusal to be made to examine the premises on which it is founded, its resistance to change or to correction, its effect of instant recognition, and the closed circle in which it moves which makes common sense, at one and the same time, 'spontaneous', ideological and unconscious. You cannot learn, through common sense, how things are: you can only discover where they fit into the existing scheme of things." (Hall, 1977:325).
The taken-for-grantedness of the narrow definition of femininity within advertising is augmented by the appearance that this narrow version is really one in which women have a wide variety of choices. Advertisements contain a seemingly endless array of choices - that is - ways to be different, but this appearance of difference masks the real differences between the goals of feminism and an objectified, sexualized femininity. As Judith Williamson (1986b:100) points out, hegemonic ideologies function to contain differences or antagonism. She argues that "the whole drive of society is toward displaying as much difference as possible within it while eliminating where at all possible what is different from it: the supreme trick of bourgeois ideology is to be able to produce its opposite out of its own hat".

In advertisements feminine identity is presented as an endless series of choices in which women can differentiate themselves both as a group and as individuals. On the surface these choices appear to about self-definition and personal freedom (Pleasance, 1991:77). Products are offered as a way for women to transform their identities and appearances, but the possibilities of such self-transformation and self-creation are channelled and ultimately limited by the structure of advertisements because advertisements substitute a series of products for a truly different self-image. Women are sold their images in the form of commodities (Betterton, 1987:13). These images, while appearing as the products of choice and self-differentiation, must be located within a dominant
ideology which seeks to constitute femininity in narrow and limited ways.

"The endless production of new and different femininities through increasing possibilities of consumption can thus be read as a particularly powerful form of closure...Consumption is a form through which dominant power relations have been articulated and maintained. For feminists, the particular incorporation of women and construction of femininity through these relations of power becomes an important point of closure" (Pleasance, 1991:78-83).

Raymond Williams (1973) argues that "in any particular period there is a central system of practices, meanings and values which we can properly call dominant and effective...which are organized and lived" and exist not as a static structure, but as a process -a process of incorporation. The dominant ideology, which seeks to constitute femininity in limited ways, must continually make and remake itself so as to contain meanings and values which lie outside of the dominant version. Advertisements are one site in which the dominant ideology of femininity is produced, but this production is also one in which the oppositional and excluded meanings must be contained and managed. The goal of ideology is to make the definitions of what it means to be feminine, in terms of meanings, values, practices and behaviours, come to constitute the primary 'lived reality' of women across multiple sites.

The success that advertising has had in creating closure is especially reflected in its ability to subvert competing discourses. In the case of femininity as a construction, this closure has come at the expense of feminism and its challenge to traditional definitions of femininity. Advertising has been
resilient to this criticism and such challenges because its very structure is one in which almost any meaning can be appropriated and recuperated. By doing so, contradictions are contained and managed.

The capacity to appropriate hostile counter ideologies and contain antagonisms has made the advertising industry immune to much of the criticism directed at it for the ways in which it depicts women (Dyer, 1982:185).

"...advertisements will always escape any criticism of them which bases its argument on their deceitfulness or even their harm in being 'capitalist', 'sexist', etc. Not that these criticisms are invalid: but they by-pass the ideology of the way in which ads work" (Williamson, 1978:175).

For these reasons, sociologist have become aware that it is not just the content of advertising that needs to be studied, but the structure of advertisements themselves. It is within the structure of the advertisements that meanings are created in a complex, interactive process. Critical analysis of this process of signification is necessary for the development of an understanding of how representations of women in advertisements work to define femininity. By exposing such definitions as ideologically produced, these representations can be critically challenged and transformed (Betterton, 1987:24).

CONCLUSION

Recent theoretical developments in cultural studies have led sociologists to question traditional approaches to the study of cultural representations. Within the study of advertisements images of women have been viewed as sexist stereotypes that
misrepresent women's actual roles. This approach has not addressed the power that advertisements have to shape perceptions of social reality, however, and does not adequately explain how advertisements work to constitute a particular version of reality. As a result the approach of 'femininity as the passive adoption of sex roles' needs to be replaced with the approach of femininity as the actual relations of a discourse mediated by texts in which women are active as subjects and agents. Advertisements, as texts which mediate social relations, must be studied as ideology. The ideological processes through which femininity is defined are the appropriation and reformulation of cultural knowledge, the naturalization of constructed meanings and the management of contradictions via the appearance of difference and choice. To address these processes analysis must shift from the study of content to a critical analysis of the processes of signification in advertising. The next chapter will examine the assumptions underlying content analysis, a traditional research method and then outline semiotics, a more sophisticated method of textual analysis which enables one to uncover the ways in which advertising works to construct femininity.
THE ANALYSIS OF TEXTS: QUANTITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

Social scientists have addressed the representation of women in advertising primarily through the use of quantitative content analysis as a research methodology.

"Content analysis is a long and well established tradition in social science research. It relies upon categories and counting, checks and doublechecks through multiple scorers. It has been viewed as our most reliable method of obtaining the truth from documents ranging from works of fiction to newspapers, from television serials to advertisements" (Barthel, 1988:32-33).

Content analysis allows for the "...objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication..." (Berelson, 1952:18). Four major research claims arise from this definition. The objective nature of content analysis implies that different readers or coders would agree upon the interpretation of the material under analysis. Therefore, it is assumed that the method would be highly reliable. Secondly, the "systematic description" of content implies that the same set of criteria would be applied to all of the material under examination. These criteria or descriptive categories are developed and subsequently applied to all of the material within a preselected sample of advertisements. Thirdly, the measurement of categories of content is made in terms of numeric frequencies. This allows for precision of measurement as well as standardization and meaningful comparison of data. Lastly, this method is explicitly restricted to the measurement of manifest content and
excludes any interpretation of underlying meaning. Only that which is evident at the surface level of the advertisement is analyzed (Leiss, et. al., 1986:169-170).

CRITICISMS OF CONTENT ANALYSIS

Recently the sufficiency of content analysis as a research technique for studying the production of meaning has been questioned and a number of criticisms have been raised. For example, frequency counts of surface content provide for reliability and objectivity, but often at the expense of validity. For the sake of the criterion of objectivity, one may inadvertently miss the more significant and important latent content. This is particularly relevant in the study of advertising because the individual advertisement signifies much more than is apparent on the surface (Barthel, 1988:32).

Similarly, in content analysis, a pretested schema is applied by coders to all advertisements equally. This practice is problematic because it rests upon the assumption that all advertisements in the sample carry equal weight or significance. When this assumption is set aside, we can see that advertisements vary in their qualitative complexity and impact (Barthel, 1988:32). Content analysis cannot address these types of differences meaningfully.

A third criticism of content analysis is based upon its lack of a theory of signification. It is important to recognize that the meanings contained within an advertisement are products of interaction among parts of the whole. The sum of the parts of any
advertisement is of greater significance than the impact of the parts in isolation. When the advertisement is broken down into discrete categories of overt content, the meaning becomes lost because the meaning of any single element is dependant upon the position of that element within an entire system of signs. To simply account for the frequency with which an element appears within a sample does not provide a meaningful context for that element. As a consequence, it becomes difficult to understand what any one isolated fragment of content means.

"What an ad means depends on how it operates, how signs and its 'ideological' effect are organized internally (within the text) and externally (in relation to its production, circulation and consumption and in relation to technological, economic, legal and social relations)...'scientific' content analysis... assumes that the meaning of an ad is evident in its overt, manifest content and ignores the form that the content takes..." (Dyer, 1982:115).

This criticism of content analysis as a research technique is important given that much of advertising today works at a connotative level of communication via multiple levels of meaning. Furthermore, most advertisements have a latent meaning that the reader is expected to fill in and thereby complete the process of signification (Leiss, et. al., 1986:174). Thus, one significant problem with content analysis is that as a methodology, it lacks a theory of signification. The assumptions are made that what exists at the denotative level is significant and, further, that significance is measurable in terms of repetition. This notion of 'significance as repetition' gives no knowledge of that which is being repeated.
"The absence of a theory of signs, signification and significance renders content analysis absurd because its key concept [significance of repetition] is left unsupported and that concept gives it no knowledge of its avowed object, the content! The concept that holds content analysis together, the significance of repetition, is in itself a nonsense. In fact, therefore, content analysis is an incorrect label: 'repetition speculation' would be more accurate, since its practitioners are merely speculating about the significance of repetition" (Sumner, 1979:69).

In short, content analysis is limited not only because it lacks a theory of significance, but also because it fails to examine how meaning is constituted or to address the social relations of signification which give signifying units their signified, social meanings (Sumner, 1979:98).

The study of how advertisements work ideologically to define femininity requires a shift in focus from the manifest content of advertisements, to analysis of the form content takes and to the processes of signification. As such, research methodology must shift away from quantitative content analysis to a more sophisticated textual analysis.

STUDYING ADVERTISING AS SIGNIFICATION

Meaning is not located in the text itself but is produced in the space of interaction between reader and text. Reading is not an act in which the reader receives meaning from the text in a static and straightforward manner. Instead, the reader actively fills in the spaces of a text in a dynamic process. It is important to recognize this in order to understand how the text operates ideologically. As Fiske (1982:144) points out, "the reader and text together produce the preferred meaning, and in so
doing the reader is constituted as someone with a particular set of relationships to the dominant value-system and to the rest of society. This is ideology at work".

Ideology is not a static set of values or ways of seeing the world but a practice. By participating in the signifying practices of a particular culture, the participant becomes the means by which ideology maintains itself. The meanings found by a reader in a sign derive from the ideology within which both the sign and the reader exist. By finding these meanings the reader defines her/himself in relation to the ideology and in relation to her/his society (Fiske, 1982:151).

The ideology of advertising is particularly insidious because, as Judith Williamson (1978:41) points out, ideology works through us, not at us. It is kept hidden from us because we are active in it, we do not receive it from above; we constantly re-create it. We must understand that when we speak of ideology, we are also referring to the creation of the subject.

"We are not participants in an ideology until we are active within its very creation; paradoxically, ideology means that we are participants, subjects, i.e. 'initiators of action' in accordance with 'freely held ideas'. But as these values which we hold only emerge in their being assumed as already existing, so similarly we only function as subjects in being addressed by the ad as already subjects: 'appellated'" (Williamson, 1978:44).

SEMIOTICS AND DECODING ADVERTISEMENTS

To read advertisements as ideology and ultimately understand the role that they play in our society requires a methodology which will allow the researcher to address several questions. For instance, how do advertisements organize and construct reality?
How do advertisements produce ideology and meaning? Why are certain images used in advertisements while others are not, and why do advertising images appear as they do as opposed to alternative constructions? (Dyer, 1982:114). Many researchers have turned to semiotics for answers to these questions (Barthes, 1977; Chapman and Egger, 1983; Dyer, 1982; Jamieson, 1985; Noth, 1990; Williamson, 1978) [2].

Despite considerable usage in research, the field of semiotics lacks coherent and universal agreement on how it is to be used and applied to the study of advertising. Rather, the term 'semiotics' tends to refer to a body of work that is concerned with the study of signs. As such, this body of work is comprised of numerous conceptual tools and devices which are not necessarily used in any systematic method or in any standardized fashion. This research project will rely primarily upon developments made in the field of semiotics through the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes.

Saussure's work in structural linguistics provides a framework for the analysis of advertisements because "...semiologists have taken 'language' as a model for all forms of cultural 'discourse', that is coded meaning systems in culture, such as advertising" (Sinclair, 1987:44). The analytical principles developed by Saussure in his study of language have been extended to other cultural systems of signs including speech, myth, folktales, novels, drama, comedy, mime, paintings, cinema, news items, and comics (Dyer, 1982:115). Using language as a basic model,
advertisements can be analyzed similarly as signifying systems and structures of signs.

PRINCIPLES OF THE SEMIOTIC METHOD

From the semiotic perspective, meaning is a relational phenomenon, resulting from the play of difference among signs in a given field. Signs are not positively defined by their content but negatively by their relations with other terms in the system. A sign means what it does because of what it does not mean. To think of meaning as relational contrasts with thinking of meaning as referential - that is - produced by reference to objects existing in the 'real world'. With this idea Saussure undermined the correspondence theory of language which maintained that every sign refers to a particular object or external referent. Similarly, the development of this approach marked a significant departure from positivist and empiricist traditions which had limited earlier studies of culture (Franklin et. al., 1991:179).

As Williamson (1978:17) argues, "We can only understand what advertisements mean by finding out how they mean, and analyzing the way in which they work". In the study of advertisements as systems of signs, the relationships among the signs present become the central focus, for it is in the interaction between signs that meaning is produced. To study these structural relationships, the system - that is the individual advertisement - must be broken down into smaller units of analysis. This step in decoding works to reveal the significance of what is included within the
advertisement's structure and helps one to understand why an advertisement contains the signs that it does.

**Signs:**

Each element present within an advertisement can be thought of as a sign. This includes the objects shown, the models present, the written text, etc. In effect, a sign is anything which stands in for something else. Once the advertisement is broken down into component signs, these signs can be further broken down into signifiers and signifieds. The signifier refers to the image, the material vehicle. The signified is the mental concept to which the signifier refers. This will be a broad concept common to all members of the same culture who share the same language. The sign is the associative total of the signifier and signified. Although the signifier and signified are materially inseparable, it is useful to distinguish between them for the purpose of analysis. Doing so enables one to better examine how the sign works.

**Signifier and Signified Relationships:**

Signs can vary in both nature and form depending upon the relationships between signifier and signified. This relationship can be any one of three types (Peirce, 1940). In an iconic relationship the sign actually looks like its object. The signifier and signified relationship is one of resemblance or likeness. An example would be a photograph of the product in an advertisement. The photograph, as a sign, stands in for the actual product and resembles the actual product very closely.
Some signs go beyond this level of straightforward depiction and indicate a further or additional meaning. These signs are said to be indexical. The relationship between signifier and signified is one of causality. Smoke for instance, is an indexical sign when used to indicate fire. In advertising, a woman is often represented indexically by body parts - hips, eyes, head, hands, or legs - all signify not only the actual body parts (iconic signs) but also signify her whole being and 'femininity' in general (Dyer, 1982:124).

The third type of sign is a symbol. The relationship between signifier and signified is not due to resemblance or causality but is a matter of convention. The relationship is purely arbitrary but is culturally determined and used on the basis of shared understandings. Basic examples include words and numbers. An example from an advertisement for perfume could be roses which are used as symbols of romantic love. In this instance roses do not resemble love (iconic) nor do they cause love (indexical) (Dyer, 1982:125). However when used to signify love, the relationship is understood to make sense by members of our culture even though the connection is arbitrary.

It is important to recognize that in most advertisements iconic, indexical, and symbolic signs coincide and invariably overlap. Understanding that the signifier/signified relationship varies in form and nature in the ways discussed above allows one to begin to see how signs can be used to produce meaning in ways that are not always straightforward and obvious. Furthermore, by using
a method which deconstructs the signifier/signified relationship, the transparency that advertisements work to display in their presentation of a one-to-one relationships between signifier and signified is undermined. It is "demystified". When advertisements present the signifier/signified relationship as one of direct correspondence, they seem to be simply representing what is already true and this is essential to their ideological functioning (Williamson, 1978:73-74).

The Organization of Signs:

Once the individual elements of an advertisement have been examined in isolation, it is important to look at how they are organized within the structure of the advertisement. Signs acquire their meaning only in relation to the other signs present within the advertisement. The structural relationships in advertisements are not arbitrary. There is a logic to their structure that reflects conventions within language in general and within print advertising more specifically. Obvious conventions of communication must be followed if the reader is going to interpret the advertising message, for example, structuring the ad so that it reads left to right and top to bottom. It is important to recognize that advertising messages are 'motivated' messages and the message can be structured in certain ways so as to encourage certain readings. In an attempt to create preferred readings, advertisers rely on a number of structural conventions. For example, text and image are often structured so that the reader is 'drawn' towards a picture of the product (see Goldman, 1992).
Signs are combined in within advertisements in ways such that in interaction, certain meanings are produced. For this reason, it is necessary to examine how the signs are organized. To do this, a number of conceptual devices can be employed. For Saussure and many other linguists, the key to understanding signs was to understand their structural relationships. There are two types of structural relationships - paradigmatic and syntagmatic (Fiske, 1982:63). Paradigmatic relations are relations of choice while syntagmatic relations are a matter of combination. All advertisements involve the selection of particular elements from paradigms and combination of these elements into sytagms.

Paradigms refer to a set of signs in which all individual units or signs have something in common, share certain characteristics, or are functionally similar. Although membership is dependent upon similarity, each sign is distinguishable from others in the same set. Every time we communicate, we must select units from a paradigm. Within the paradigm, meaning is relational such that the meaning of a sign we chose to use in communicating a particular meaning is determined by the meanings of the signs not chosen. For example, in an advertisement for Marlboro cigarettes, a stallion may be one of the signs which can be isolated for analysis. The stallion can be classified according to its paradigmatic relations with similar objects including ponies, donkeys, mules, horses, foals, mares, and so on. The significance of choosing a stallion to appear in the advertisement is because, as a sign, the stallion recalls meanings beyond the way it appears.
within the advertisement (Dyer, 1982:127). If the stallion was replaced with a functionally similar object from the same paradigm, such as a donkey, the meanings within the advertisement would be significantly altered.

Syntagmatic relations refer to the ways in which elements chosen from paradigms may permissibly combine together in a chain of discourse (ie. a syntagm). These are horizontal relations, whereas paradigmatic relations can be conceptualized in vertical terms. The individual advertisement can be thought of as a syntagm. Once combined into a syntagm, the meanings of the paradigmatic units are determined in part by the relationships with other signs in that syntagm. Within the Marlboro advertisement, the ad itself is a syntagm composed of a chain of signifiers that might include a stallion, a rough looking cowboy, and a wide open landscape. Combined together, these signifiers work to signify virile masculinity, rugged individuality, and freedom.

Syntagms are not arbitrary combinations of paradigmatic units but are combined according to rules and conventions. These rules and conventions follow cultural codes. Cultural codes not only allow signs to combine in a meaningful way within an advertisement, they allow members of a particular culture to read and understand these structures of meaning.

Codes:

If the relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary then we cannot know what a sign means naturally. We must learn what it means. Codes are forms of social knowledge derived
from social practices and beliefs which organize our understanding of the world in terms of dominant meaning patterns (Dyer, 192:135). More specifically, codes are systems into which signs are organized. These systems are governed by rules that are shared by members of a particular community. The assumption is made that agreement exists between members of a culture on what meanings can be assigned to a certain sign. The communication of meaning in an advertising text depends upon the knowledge of denoted codes and connoted associations which readers brings with them from their cultural world outside the advertisement. The reader must supply this cultural knowledge in order to achieve an interpretation of the text's meaning (Sinclair, 1987:46). Communication relies upon this kind of shared cultural background. Codes therefore may be conceptualized as the social dimension of communication. It is through the application of cultural codes that the correlation between signifier and signified is established and utilised (Jamieson, 1985:54). Codes are used as interpretive devices.

Codes are especially relevant to the interpretation of arbitrary signs where the relationship between signifier and signified is due entirely to convention. Membership in a particular culture or community allows an individual to interpret these arbitrary signs and respond correctly. These abilities depend upon past experience of cultural conventions. Conversely, interpretation of signs which are highly iconic - they closely resemble the object which they signify - rely less on the use of cultural codes. Finally, "aberrant decoding" may take place when
the code of a message does not fit the forms of knowledge that have
grown out of the audience members' own experience of their social
reality (Sinclair, 1987:38). Different cultural backgrounds may
therefore result in the modification of the preferred meaning
according to the reader's own experience.

Despite the potential for aberrant decoding and the production
of oppositional or modified readings, advertisements, perhaps more
than any other media form, are structured via rationalized formats
to achieve "preferred readings" (Goldman, 1992:79). As Barthes
(1977:193) explains, the signs in advertisements are "formed with
a view to the optimum reading: the advertising image is frank, or
at least emphatic". Advertisements are structured so as to direct
the reader towards preferred readings while shutting out other
possible interpretations. When considered in isolation, the
signifiers of an advertisement are 'polysemic' - that is, they
imply a "floating chain of signifieds"; however, the formal
arrangement of signs within the advertisement works to limit
possible interpretations. One such structuring device is the
linguistic message which "fixes the floating chain of signifieds"
and "limits the projective power of the image". By anchoring
images, the linguistic message "holds the connoted meanings from
proliferating" and performs an essentially ideological function by
directing "the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing
him to avoid some and receive others; by means of an often subtle
dispatching, it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in
advance" (Barthes, 1977:197-98). Given that advertisements are
largely determined by a motivation to sell products, the content contained within the ad as well as the values and orientations appealed to by the ad will be biased towards the conventional and the most widely defused (Wernick, 1991:42). Advertisements are mass produced for mass consumption and therefore rely upon dominant codes of the mainstream culture [3].

Advertising relies on many different cultural codes, however, because it draws its material from many areas. Examining how femininity is constructed within advertisements requires that the advertisements be read via the cultural code of gender. This code consists of the cultural understandings regarding what it means to be feminine as opposed to masculine [4]. In order to read and understand an advertisement, the reader must be familiar with the conventions of the culture which provides the larger context for meaning within the advertisement. For example, in an advertisement for shampoo, a photograph of long blonde hair appears. Read through the code of femininity, the reader can interpret this as a sign of femininity but, even further, this sign can be read as a particular type of femininity - sexually attractive. Long blonde hair is not only associated with women in our culture but we have a cultural convention in which long blonde hair is commonly associated with a sexually attractive woman. The operation of the code is apparent if we take the same advertisement and replace the long blonde hair with short, curly black hair. The product for sale is still shampoo but the meaning changes: short, curly black
hair does not mean the same thing as long, blonde hair in our culture.

The codes and conventions of a particular society constitute the shared centre of any culture's experiences. As individuals we are located within a culture and its codes and conventions. Not only do they allow us to understand our social existence but they allow us to locate ourselves within our culture. Communication requires that people actively participate in the codes and conventions of a particular society. Without active participants, the meanings contained within an advertisement cannot exist. The ad requires an active reader to fill in the structures of signs and make connections via cultural knowledge. Advertisements assume a knowing subject and are oriented to this subject.

Appellation:

A sign "...can only mean if it has someone to mean to. Therefore, all signs depend for their signifying process on the existence of specific, concrete receivers, people for whom and in whose systems of belief, they have a meaning" (Williamson, 1978:40). The reader is not a passive receiver of meaning but the active creator of meaning. Meanings are produced when the active subject is drawn into the space between the signifier and the signified and makes exchanges of meaning. In order to draw the reader into the structure of the advertisement to make transfers of meaning, advertisements must engage the reader. Part of the decoding of an advertisement involves the examination of how the
reader is appelled and drawn into the structure of the advertisement.

In the exchange of meanings within an advertisement the product gains meaning, but in turn, the product is made to give meaning back to the reader. The reader becomes one of the things signified and in the process is given the status of an object. In this same process the reader/subject is addressed as 'you' and is then constituted as a specific type of person defined through the product. 'You' recognize yourself in the ad. Advertisements assume and speak to an imaginary subject and the reader is required to exchange her/himself for this subject.

"Every ad necessarily assumes a particular spectator: it projects into the space out in front of it an imaginary person composed in terms of the relationships between the elements within the ad" (Williamson, 1978:50).

THE SECOND ORDER OF SIGNIFICATION

In order to understand how an advertisement operates ideologically to produce meanings and values it is important to recognize that every advertisement operates at two different levels of meanings - denotative and connotative. The work of Roland Barthes has been pivotal in showing how signification relies upon interaction between these two levels of meaning. He argued that although both of these levels are perceived simultaneously by the reader, analytically we can see that an advertisement both denotes a literal image and connotes an ideological meaning (Sinclair, 1987:46).

The first level of meaning is denotative and lies within the manifest content. This is the surface level where meaning is
literal, objective, and easily recognized. At the denotative level a signifier means or denotes a specific signified (Williamson, 1978:99). The relationship described by denotation is between the signifier and the signified within the sign, and of the sign with its referent in external reality. For example, a photograph of a woman denotes that specific woman.

All advertisements denote a straightforward and direct relationship between signifier and signified. However, they almost always allude to other meanings at the same time. This allusion is connotation, the signification of further or secondary meanings in addition to the obvious, denoted meanings. This second order of signification goes beyond the denotative level but is dependent upon it.

"Connotation, so to speak, uses the building blocks provided by denotation, relying on already established relationships or signs. In the context of society, such building blocks are given, in the same way that words in a dictionary have established meanings. From the store of denoted or primary meanings, the persuader has at his command a ready-made resource for 'triggering -off' connoted or secondary meanings" (Jamieson, 1985:57).

This second order of signification is referred to by Barthes as 'myth' and is dependent upon the first order because the signifiers of the second order are made up of signs of the first. Myth is constructed on the basis of a semiotic chain which exists before it. That which had the status of a sign (the associative total of signifier and signified) in the first system (denotation) becomes a mere signifier in the second (Barthes, 1972:123). The mechanism by which the first order of signification becomes one of the second order is "emptying". Myth operates by taking a
previously established sign which is full of signification, and then "drains" it until this sign becomes an "empty" signifier, impoverished and void of its historical origins (Barthes, 1972:127).

Myth - that is - second order signification, operates to naturalize what is in fact a distorted relationship between signifier and signified.

"Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them: simply, it purifies them, its makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact...In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves" (Barthes, 1972:156).

It is important to recognize that although denotation and connotation exist simultaneously in advertising, it is the denoted image that naturalizes the symbolic, connoted message. It "...innocents the semantic artifice of connotation, which is extremely dense, especially in advertising (Barthes, 1977:201). Advertisements seek to represent relationships between products, people and objects as though these relationships were natural. The ideology of advertising rests upon a false assumption "...namely that because things are as they are (in this case, because certain things are shown as connected in ads, placed together, etc.) this state of affairs is somehow natural, and must 'make sense' simply because it exists" (Williamson, 1978:29). The structure of
advertisements is not obvious and often goes unquestioned leading the reader take for granted the 'sense' of the message.

Naturalization in advertising occurs regularly via the myth of photographic 'naturalness'. Photographic images are often read as records of that which already exists in the external world. They are read as denotation when in fact what lies underneath this innocent surface is connotation. As Barthes (1977:200-201) explains, "...Man's [sic] interventions in the photograph (framing, distance, lighting, focus, speed) all effectively belong to the plane of connotation...This is without doubt an important historical paradox: the more technology develops the diffusion of information (and notably images), the more it provides the means of masking the constructed meaning under the appearance of the given meaning".

The activation of a connotative reading relies upon the reader who brings to that reading social codes and conventions. These codes and conventions allow the reader to understand the meanings which are implied by advertisements through that which appears at the denoted, surface level. Because contemporary advertisements most often work at the connotative level, the reader is required to cross the gap between the first order of signification and the second. Advertisements assume a knowing subject. However, because connotation works at the subjective level, the reader often is not consciously aware of its operation and is led to believe that what an advertisement connotes is in fact a depiction of reality.
Connotative values are mistaken for denotative facts because the connotative hides beneath the denotative.

"...imagistic advertising may build on the values, desires and symbologies that are already out there, but by no means does it simply reflect them. It typifies what is diverse, filters out what is antagonistic or depressing, and naturalizes the role and standpoint of consumption as such. The picture of the world it presents, accordingly, is flat, one dimensional, incorporative and normalized" (Wernick, 1991:42).

The aim of semiotic analysis is to provide an analytical tool that will guard against misreading these messages as natural depictions of reality (Fiske, 1982:92). Semiotic analysis is particularly useful because it works to make visible the ideological meanings that lie unacknowledged and to expose that which appears natural as arbitrary. For these reasons, "semiotic analysis is, must necessarily be, a political act" (Fiske, 1982:153).

OUTLINE OF THE CURRENT STUDY

The purpose of the current research is to examine how femininity as a social construction - that is - as the cultural correlate of biological sex, is presented and defined in magazine advertising. Within the larger context of gender, femininity is constructed in opposition to masculinity. Based upon and built around biological differences, femininity and masculinity as normative categories have come to encompass a whole system of differences between men and women which are often perceived as natural and essential. As a social construction, the term femininity implies a social process in which the female sex is attributed with specific qualities and characteristics. Similarly,
femininity refers to the entire process through which an individual acquires a gendered identity (Betterton, 1987:7). This research aims at examining how femininity, as a social construction rather than as something intrinsic to women, is presented as something natural and to be taken for granted in magazine advertising.

If we want to know what it means to be feminine within our culture, we can look to cultural representations of women as a source of information. These images create meaning, circulate ideologies and define femininity in specific ways. Central to the study of images of women is the belief that femininity, as defined in western culture, is bound up closely with the way in which the female body is perceived and represented (ibid.). Therefore, examining what femininity means in our culture involves looking at images of women appearing in cultural texts which include film, television, paintings, and magazines [5].

Dorothy Smith (1990) points out that femininity is also something that women actively practice, for instance in the creation of their appearance. This activity is organized and mediated by texts such as fashion magazines. Women's magazines are a major source of information about changing images, new tools, material and instructions. These magazines contain various articles and advertisements which provide models of femininity to be reproduced by the reader. Young women learn both the arts and practices of a particular version of femininity from these texts. For these reasons, advertisements for fashion and beauty products can be viewed as an important source of definitions for femininity.
The specific focus of this study is on the ways in which print advertising, as a particular discourse within fashion magazines, currently works to construct femininity for adolescent readers - a femininity that can be reproduced on readers' own bodies. Although extensive research has addressed advertising in woman's magazines, no comparable level of work has analyzed magazines for a female adolescent audience (Evans et al., 1991:100; Peirce, 1990:496). Research in this area is significant because adolescence is a period for young girls during which they begin to negotiate their identity as gendered subjects. The strain and difficulties associated with this process are reflected in the levels of dissatisfaction expressed by young girls with regards to their physical appearance. A recent study of Canadian girls indicated that 47% of 11-year-olds and 55% of 15-year-olds reported that "if they could, they would change the way they looked". Similarly, 37% of 11-year-olds and 48% of 15-year-olds indicated that they wanted to lose weight (King and Coles, 1992). This study found that Canadian girls experience a significant amount of strain in their relationships with their parents and with peers. The authors concluded that this strain may be related to adjustment problems adolescent girls experience with career aspirations, body image, and dealing with the traditional values associated with marriage and family.

Data on eating disorders further reflects the serious problems that young women face. The American Anorexia and Bulimia Association states that anorexia and bulimia strikes a million
American woman every year and that 150,000 women die each year from anorexia (as quoted in Wolf, 1991:181). In one survey of 33,000 women, respondents chose "losing ten to fifteen pounds" above "success in work or love" as their most desired goal. These same researchers concluded that concern with weight loss leads to "a ritual collapse of self-esteem and sense of effectiveness" (Wooley and Wooley, 1984). These figures and findings are even more alarming in light of the fact that a generation ago the average fashion model weighed 8% less than the average American woman, while today she weighs 23% less (Wolf, 1991:184).

To address the lack of research on adolescents this study will focus specifically on Seventeen magazine, a fashion magazine explicitly produced for an adolescent female audience. Although the definition of femininity is an historical, and therefore shifting process, this research is concerned with current constructions. For this reason, analysis will be confined to 1992, the most current year of publication. First published in 1944, this magazine stands as the most firmly established teenage fashion magazine and, with a circulation of 1.8 million, it is the undisputed leader amongst similarly marketed fashion magazines. According to the managing editor, in addition to a strong focus upon fashion and beauty, the general philosophy of Seventeen is to inform, entertain, and give teenage girls the information that they need to make sound choices in their lives. The fashion and beauty sections purportedly help to make girls feel good about themselves (Peirce, 1990:496-497).
Although content analysis as a research methodology has limitations, it is useful in the collection of systematic information. Thus content analysis was used in this study to obtain general descriptive data pertaining to the composition of the magazine itself. An enumeration of the amount of space devoted to advertising and feature content reveals the extent to which advertising comprises the total content of the magazine.

**TABLE ONE: SPACE DEVOTED TO ADVERTISING AND FEATURES IN SEVENTEEN MAGAZINE, 1992**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TOTAL PAGES</th>
<th>% OF WHOLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADVERTISEMENTS:</td>
<td>853.25</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEATURES:</td>
<td>906.75</td>
<td>50.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MISCELLANEOUS:</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1801.0</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES: TOTAL NUMBER OF ADVERTISEMENTS = 725  
TOTAL NUMBER OF FEATURE ARTICLES = 456  
TOTAL NUMBER OF MAGAZINES = 12  
Pages with 5 or more advertisements were excluded from the analysis. [6]

The data in table one indicate that advertising comprises a significant amount of the overall content of Seventeen. Nearly half of the content in the 1992 issues was devoted to advertising. This substantial presence of advertising is important given that advertiser's often are able to influence the editorial content of women's magazines (Earnshaw, 1984; Steinem, 1990). Indeed, in the
1992 issues of Seventeen there is a blending of advertising and feature articles such that, in many ways, these two categories of content are somewhat indistinguishable. The above data also reveal the extensive amount of advertising a reader is exposed to by consuming the magazine. The presence of advertising is so great that one would expect that it would be almost impossible for the reader to ignore it over the feature content. It is also evident that without advertisements there would be little content at all.

Content analysis was further employed to obtain a systematic and quantitative description of the ways in which femininity is presented and defined at the denotative level of meaning. Each of the twelve 1992 issues were coded for content pertaining to: types of products advertised, sex and age groups of models shown, representation of racial/ethnic groups, types of relationships depicted, levels of activity models are engaged in, and the environments within which female models are depicted. Finally, the advertisements were analyzed in terms of the dominant themes surrounding the characteristics of femininity.

In order to ensure that the categories used for coding the advertisement content were reliable and that data would not be the result of idiosyncratic readings, inter-rater reliability was checked (Babbie, 1986:109). The independent codings of a trained undergraduate, research assistant were compared to my own codings and it was found that there was a high level of agreement between our codings, thus indicating that the categories were clear and comprehensive. The thematic categories were developed through the
compilation of lists of words used in all of the advertisements to describe femininity. These words were then collapsed into categories according to similar thematic content. Again, this process was conducted in conjunction with another independent coder to ensure that the categories developed accurately reflected the themes contained within the ads.

This stage of data analysis established a quantitative base for further qualitative analysis of the how femininity is given meaning within the structure of advertisements. Here the analysis shifted from the denotative level of meaning to the connotative level. An analysis of the signification practices of advertisements was achieved through a semiotic decoding of three advertisements [7]. The decoding of these advertisements focused upon second order signification. Therefore these advertisements were chosen for analysis on the basis of their 'richness', for some advertisements rely more heavily than others on the manipulation of signification and contain more complex representations. While content analysis provided insight into how femininity overtly appears, this stage of analysis provided a more detailed understanding of how 'femininity' is textually constructed in order to convey specific meanings to readers of Seventeen.

The systematic decoding of the advertisements was based upon a series of stages which included: the isolation of primary signs within the advertisement, the division of individual signs into signifier and signified, identification of relationships between signifier and signified, analysis of structural relationships
between signs, identification of dominant interpretive cultural codes elicited, examination of the means of appellation, and finally, an analysis of the interaction between the denotative and connotative levels of signification (first and second order signs). In general, the goal behind these steps is to sift through the layers of meaning in order to understand what lies beneath the somewhat obvious surface of each individual advertisement. This process at times seems awkward as the layers of meaning exist simultaneously and are intricately intertwined.

Although few studies have included both quantitative content analysis and qualitative textual analysis as research methods, it has been recognized that when used in conjunction, the strengths of both methods compliment each other and yield a highly useful "middle-range" methodology (Leiss, et. al., 1986:175). While content analysis provides a rigorous and systematic overview of the broad content under investigation, semiotic decoding is able to provide a more sensitive access to the various layers of meaning contained within an individual advertisement thus revealing how the advertisement works to construct meaning.

Although meanings may be indeterminate according to individual readings, advertisements explicitly intend to convey particular meanings to readers. In so doing they use images, notions, concepts, and myths in an attempt to fix meaning. Advertisements must work for a closure of meaning in order to subvert competing discourses. It is through a closure of meaning that advertisements
naturalize that which is in fact an arbitrary cultural construction.

The data collected in this research will be discussed giving consideration to the dominant themes and patterns which arise. The dominant definitions of femininity will also be discussed in terms of their political significance.
CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

CONTENT ANALYSIS

In this chapter the findings obtained through content analysis of the advertisements in Seventeen for 1992 will be presented and discussed. These data give an overall description of the characteristics of the advertisements contained within the study and reveals some of the ways in which femininity is generally represented. Following the examination of these general findings three specific advertisements will each be decoded according to the systematic method previously outlined. These decodings will give a more in depth understanding of the ways in which the meaning of femininity is constituted.

TABLE TWO: TYPES OF PRODUCTS ADVERTISED IN SEVENTEEN MAGAZINE, 1992

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRODUCT TYPE</th>
<th>% OF PRODUCTS ADVERTISED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEAUTY PRODUCTS</td>
<td>49.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FASHION</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDUCATION/CAREER</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENTERTAINMENT</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOUSEHOLD RELATED</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOOD</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEDICAL/HEALTH</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MORE THAN ONE TYPE</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MISCELLANEOUS</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Pages with 5 or more ads were excluded from analysis. Inter-rater Reliability 94%.

It is evident that an overwhelming amount of the advertising content in Seventeen is devoted to beauty products and fashion. Together these products comprise 79.2% of the total products
advertised. It therefore appears that the overall emphasis of the advertising concerns physical appearance and the construction of appearance via the consumption of the products advertised. All other categories are significantly marginal in comparison. The predominance of fashion and beauty products in Seventeen reflects the conclusion drawn in many previous studies, namely, that the primary goal emphasized in advertisements directed at women is attending to personal beauty (Andrew, 1978; Belkaoui and Belkaoui, 1976; Courtney and Lockeretz, 1971; Evans, et. al., 1991; Monk-Turner, 1990).

In 76.1% of the advertisements analyzed products were pictured with humans present. The high percentage of ads with humans present is significant because the inclusion of humans is one of the ways in which advertisements address the audience, for instance, through smiles and eye contact. The people seen in advertising also serve as a point of reference for the reader by providing a tangible ideal to be emulated. Furthermore, the presence of humans in ads works to give meaning to the product in terms of social relations.

From the data presented in Table Three, we can see that advertisers in Seventeen offer to the audience a world in which youth is the norm and standard for both males and females. Young people account for 94% of the people appearing in the advertisements. No other age category approaches the frequency of the category of youth. The major emphasis is upon young women who comprise 77.9% of all people pictured in the advertisements.
TABLE THREE: SEX AND AGE GROUP OF MODELS SHOWN IN ADVERTISING, SEVENTEEN MAGAZINE, 1992

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>% of Total Persons (n = 1137)</th>
<th>% of Sex Category (n = 906 females)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADOLESCENT/YOUNG ADULT</td>
<td>93.6</td>
<td>97.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>97.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>79.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIDDLE AGE</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHILDREN</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELDERLY</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAN'T CLASSIFY</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Pages with 5 or more ads were excluded from analysis. Pictures with more than 6 people were excluded. [8] Inter-rater Reliability 86%.

It is interesting to note that following the category of adolescent/young adult, the next most frequent category is middle aged males. Middle aged males often appear as authority figures in advertisements where they endorse a product or explain a product's properties. Middle aged males appear much more frequently that middle aged females.

Children rarely appear but when they do, male and females appear almost equally. The elderly also make rare appearances but the frequency of these appearances is so low that it is almost negligible. In the entire sample, only one elderly female appeared.
while only 5 elderly males appeared. One must conclude that outside of young people, there is very little representation of the range of ages which actually exists in the world.

**TABLE FOUR: REPRESENTATION OF ETHNIC/RACIALIZED IDENTITIES IN SEVENTEEN MAGAZINE, 1992**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>% OF PEOPLE PICTURED (N = 970)</th>
<th>% OF SEX CATEGORY (N = 970 MALES)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAUCASIAN</td>
<td>88.3</td>
<td>88.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FEMALE: 70.1</td>
<td>88.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MALE: 18.2</td>
<td>88.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLACK/AFROAMERICAN</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FEMALE: 5.7</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MALE: 0.5</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HISPANIC ORIGIN</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FEMALE: 1.5</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MALE: 1.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASIAN</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FEMALE: 1.4</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MALE: 0.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAST INDIAN</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FEMALE: 0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MALE: 0.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIRST NATIONS/</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABORIGINAL</td>
<td>FEMALE: 0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MALE: 0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAN'T CLASSIFY</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FEMALE: 0.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MALE: 0.3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL** 100.0

**NOTES:** Categories are taken from MacGregor, 1989. Pages with 5 or more ads were excluded from analysis. Pictures with more than 6 people were excluded. Inter-rater Reliability 89%
The most significant finding in Table Four is that racial and ethnic minorities are underrepresented in the advertising in Seventeen [9]. Visible minorities account for only 12% of all people pictured. Visible minority women account for only 9.2% of all people pictured and, while this figure is quite low, it is higher than levels found previously in general interest magazines (see MacGregor, 1989). The lack of ethnic and racial diversity in the advertisements indicates that a distorted norm is being created and imposed. This is especially relevant when one considers that 79.2% of all advertisements in the 1992 issues are devoted to beauty and fashion products. These types of advertisements promote a beauty standard that is not only unrealistic, but one that is an exclusionary discourse constructed around a white ideal.

TABLE FIVE: RELATIONSHIPS PORTRAYED IN ADVERTISEMENTS, SEVENTEEN MAGAZINE, 1992

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% OF TOTAL PICTURES CONTAINING PEOPLE (N = 847)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE ALONE:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HETEROSEXUAL COUPLE:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE TOGETHER:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALE ALONE:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE PARTIAL:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIXED PEER GROUP:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHILDREN, MALE/FEMALE:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAMILY:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADULT/CHILD:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALE PARTIAL:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALE TOGETHER:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAN'T CLASS:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: One relationship counted per picture. Pages with 5 or more ads were excluded from analysis. Pages with 5 or more pictures were excluded. [10] Totals do not equal 100% due to rounding. Inter-rater Reliability 97%
The findings in Table Five indicate that women are overwhelmingly depicted in isolation from others. In just over half of the 847 pictures containing people, women were seen alone. This finding is characteristic of studies done throughout the past three decades (Courtney and Lockeretz, 1971; Wagner and Banos, 1973; Masse and Rosenblum, 1988; Ferguson, et. al., 1990). This finding also supports the charge that advertising represents an asocial world void of either conflict or community; a utopian world which sustains an idealized, narcissistic self in which we are satisfyingly alone with our objects, realized through and sated by consumables (Masse and Rosenblum, 1988:131).

Following the category of females alone, the next most frequent category is heterosexual couples. This is the most frequent relationship shown. This finding suggests that for females, the primary relationship with others is found within the context of heterosexual romance. The depiction of the centrality of males in the lives of women is one that has been noted in past studies of advertising (Wagner and Banos, 1973; Bolla, 1990). The centrality of heterosexual relationships can be interpreted as dependence of women on men because without this relationship, women are shown as being isolated and alone. The centrality of heterosexual couples in the advertisements also carries a strong normative proscription.

In relation to the other categories used in this study, it is a positive finding that the category of females together was almost as frequent as heterosexual couples. However the frequency of this
relationship was relatively low and reflects similarly low levels in previous studies. In 1971, Courtney and Lockeretz found that women were rarely shown interacting with other women and that of the ads showing just women, only 11% showed more than one.

With regards to the use of partials - that is pictures showing only part of a body - it is important to note that female partials are more often used than male partials. Female partials appeared 32 times whereas male partials were seen only twice. This is significant when we consider the argument that partial figures may be interpreted as fragmentation of an integrated self or as dissociation of the self (Masse and Rosenblum, 1988:131-132).

Overall, 65% of the people pictured in the advertisements are shown as non-active (see Table Six). This level of activity is the most frequent for both males and females. The large number of females shown in non-active poses reinforces the female stereotype of passivity found also in Poe (1976), Duquin (1989), and Bolla, (1990). While non-active depictions rank number one for both males and females, the percentages within sex categories reveal that men are more often seen as relatively active, vigorously active as well as posed for activity than their female counterparts. These findings also reflect Goffman's (1979) argument that men in advertisements more often exhibit behaviours which are instrumental in nature, while women are seen more often as passive bystanders.
TABLE SIX: COMPARISON OF FEMALE AND MALE ACTIVITY LEVELS IN ADVERTISEMENTS IN SEVENTEEN MAGAZINE, 1992

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Level</th>
<th>% of Total People (N = 1191)</th>
<th>% of Sex Category (N = 952 Females, N = 233 Males)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Active</strong></td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female:</td>
<td>55.7</td>
<td>69.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male:</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>45.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relatively Active</strong></td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female:</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male:</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vigorously Active</strong></td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female:</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male:</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Posed for Activity</strong></td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female:</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male:</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Can't Classify</strong></td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Pages with 5 or more ads were excluded from analysis. Pictures with more than 6 people were excluded. Categories are based upon Duquin (1989:99-100). Inter-rater Reliability 95%.

Women in the advertisements were most often shown in fictional settings (see Table Seven). These depictions do not locate women in the real world but in fantasy-like situations or, alternately, in blank voids which give the impression of the model being nowhere and everywhere. It is interesting that the next most frequent setting for models was non-home, outdoor settings. Examples of these settings are the beach and parks but the street was also a common setting. This finding contrasts with the relatively low percentage of domestic settings found. The lack of home-related
settings compared to the non-home settings undermines the traditional stereotype of female domesticity. The unclassifiable settings were often not discernible due to an emphasis being placed upon a model's face/body (in beauty ads) or upon a model's clothing (fashion ads).

TABLE SEVEN: ENVIRONMENTS OF FEMALE MODELS IN ADVERTISEMENTS, SEVENTEEN MAGAZINE, 1992

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>% of All Environments Shown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fictional Settings</td>
<td>42.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Home Outdoors</td>
<td>32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclassifiable</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home (indoors and outdoors)</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Home indoors</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Pages with 5 or more ads were excluded from analysis. Unclassifiable refers to pictures in which the background is evident but not discernible. Inter-rater Reliability 88%.

The categories of characteristics shown in Table Eight reflect the range of themes which surround descriptions of femininity contained within the advertising in the 1992 issues of Seventeen. These characteristics are the ones referenced in the advertisements as being the ideal qualities a woman should possess, or in the case that she doesn't, the ideal qualities that she can gain by using
the product. These characteristics can therefore be conceptualized as being the normative standard presented to the reader.

TABLE EIGHT: CHARACTERISTICS OF FEMININITY: RECURRING THEMES IN SEVENTEEN MAGAZINE ADVERTISEMENTS, 1992

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th># OF TIMES APPEARING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEAUTIFUL/PHYSICALLY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTRACTIVE:</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRESH/CLEAN:</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROBLEMATIC/NEGATIVE THEMES:</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HETEROSEXUAL:</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOFT/SMOOTH:</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATURAL:</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODERN/HIP:</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEEDS TO BE CARED FOR:</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEALTHY:</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUTGOING:</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GETS NOTICED BY OTHERS:</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLAYFUL/SILLY/CHILDLIKE:</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRUE TO SELF/AUTHENTIC:</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERFECTION/FLAWLESS:</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONFIDENT/BOLD:</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLOWING/SHINING:</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YOUTH/INNOCENCE:</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXCITING/DRAMATIC:</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTHER:</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL THEMES:</td>
<td>1070</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL ADVERTISEMENTS:</td>
<td>725</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTES: Pages with 5 or more ads were excluded from analysis. Themes refer to written text as well as visual imagery. The categories are not mutually exclusive. More than one theme per ad is possible. Themes reflect the direct references made to femininity and not references made to products.

There arises from the data a normative profile of 'ideal femininity' composed of the five most frequent themes. The primary characteristic emphasized above all others is that to be feminine is to be beautiful in a physical sense. When the theme of beauty appears in the advertisements it is almost always a descriptor of
the way a woman looks, not a deeper reference to who she is. Following the standard of beautiful looks, a woman is always to be fresh and clean. There is an element of sterility contained within this theme which suggests a necessary purity and this leads further to the implication that ideally femininity is untainted, uncontaminated, immaculate and chaste.

The theme of cleanliness, while setting a standard of what is acceptable, also problematizes the female body. The hair and face are never clean enough; deodorants are needed for the breath, underarms, feet, and of course to combat 'feminine odour'; and then there is the whole range of problems surrounding menstruation. It is not surprising that the third most frequent theme found in the advertisements pertains to some aspect of the female body as problematic. Words such as 'remedy', 'control', 'treatment', 'protection', and 'therapy' are consistently used in conjunction with negative body imagery.

The findings also show that the ideal femininity is unquestionably heterosexual. Heterosexual romance provides a predominant context for the consumption of beauty and fashion products. Being physically attractive to a man is offered as a primary motivator for the consumption of products which will remedy her lack of what the advertisements dictate as being necessary qualities. An underlying theme of anxiety can be found intermingled with the focus on the problematic body and the implications of such problems for a woman's relationships (see Warren, 1978).
The last dominant characteristic which arises out of the findings is that femininity is soft, smooth, sensitive, silky, and delicate. All of these themes reference traditionally established, normative feminine qualities. Although femininity is presented in the advertisements in contradictory ways, the advertisements do tend to reinforce many age-old standards and qualities which have long been associated with the 'fairer sex'.

Content analysis of the advertising in Seventeen has yielded an overall description of the ways in which femininity is presented. This has been achieved by breaking down the substance of the advertisements into discrete categories of content. This gives some insight into what the components of 'femininity' are, however, no insight is given into the ways in which these discrete categories are organized within advertisements. Only by examining the advertisement as a totality can we begin to understand how each element within the ad interacts with other parts to create meanings. Content analysis has provided a surface description of femininity but the ways in which the meaning of 'femininity' is constituted depends upon processes of signification, most significantly, second-order signification. These processes will now be examined through the semiotic decoding of three advertisements looking specifically at the structural relationships within advertisement and the meanings produced according to the systematic method outlined in chapter three.
In this advertisement, several primary signs can be isolated (see Figure 1). These include a female person, a striped shirt, two containers of mascara, and written text that varies according to size and colour. To break each of these signs into signifier and signified is rather straightforward. The female person, the striped shirt and the containers of mascara exist as photographic images. These images are the material vehicle - that is signifiers. The signifieds respectively are a woman (more specifically, 'supermodel' Christy Turlington), an article of clothing, and a cosmetic product which is applied to the eyelashes.

The written text also exists as a series of signifiers and signifieds. At the micro level of analysis, the individual letters, composed of various lines and shapes, are signifiers which signify particular letters of the alphabet. These letters combine to form words (signifiers) which have corresponding mental concepts (signifieds). Each word of the written text in this advertisement is a signifier which communicates a particular signified. Rather than analyze each word in terms of the signifiers (the printed text) and the signifieds (the mental concept of each signifier) it is more useful to look specifically at a few central words which are each related in terms of the mental concepts that they elicit. Unlawful, strong, dangerous, rule-breaker, and illegal are all signifiers of concepts which are thematically related. Each of
Figure 1: Maybelline Illegal Lengths Mascara
SEVENTEEN, September 1992

Are there limits? Not for some lashes.
No way.

So unlawfully long

Or their

So remarkably strong

They're almost ducal.
A born rule-breaker.

Illegal Lengths
Mascara by Maybelline

Lash Extending Brush lengths.
Conditioning Formula strengthens.

MAYBE SHE'S BORN WITH IT.
MAYBE IT'S MAYBELLINE.
these printed words within the text together evoke a theme of illicitness.

Within each of the signs contained in this advertisement the signifiers and signifieds exist in iconic, indexical and symbolic relationships. The images used in the advertisement are the product of photography and are highly iconic signs, meaning that the relationship of signifier and signified is one of resemblance. These signs look very much like the actual objects that they are standing in for. For example, if drawings had been used instead of photography, the relationship would be less iconic. The photograph of the woman, however, serves as more than just the material vehicle used to signify an actual woman. It is a signifier that signifies a further meaning and therefore the relationship is also indexical. The photograph is of a woman who is very beautiful by our cultural standards and, for a more specialized audience, this is a photograph of a famous and currently fashionable 'supermodel'. The meaning, therefore, which is being signified is more than just a woman, it is the ideal of beauty and success embodied in an authority of high fashion glamour.

Falling across the face of the woman photographed, there is a pattern of shadows. These shadows are iconic as they stand in for the actual shadows that fell across the woman's face when she was photographed but these same shadows are also an indexical sign because they indicate the presence of something else. Given the theme of illegality apparent throughout the advertisement, these shadows indicate the existence of bars.
Besides iconic and indexical relationships, several signs exhibit and transmit meaning via symbolic relationships. In the written text, the relationship between signifiers and signifieds is completely symbolic because language is purely arbitrary. The specific words used in this advertisement mean something to the reader only because the meanings of the signs which compose language are predetermined culturally and are used on the basis of shared understandings. Certain words are used by advertisers to convey specific meanings that the reader is expected to understand. In this advertisement, the theme of danger and illicitness is expected to be relayed to the reader.

The stripes on the shirt that the model is wearing are a sign that has an iconic relationship between signifier and signified - that is - the stripes in the photograph directly resemble the actual stripes on the real shirt. However, the stripes are also a sign in which the signifier and signified exhibit a symbolic relationship. Within our culture there is a convention that striped clothing is symbolic of prisoner's uniforms. This link is totally arbitrary but is commonly understood by members of our culture. Thus, the visual imagery works to reinforce the central theme conveyed through the written text.

The signs contained within this advertisement are relatively meaningless when considered in isolation but of course they do not exist in isolation from each other within the structure of the advertisement. These structural relationships reveal much of what each sign signifies. First we must consider the paradigmatic
relations of each sign. Each sign used within this advertisement was selected from a range of functionally similar signs. Rather than use supermodel Christy Turlington, a lesser known model could have appeared or a woman who is not a model or one who is not even 'beautiful' by our skewed cultural standards. Rather than use a model's face in whole, a single eyeball could have been used. Rather than the striped shirt, any functionally similar article of clothing could have been used. For instance a blouse, a jacket, a tank top, a housecoat, and so on. Furthermore, the pattern on the shirt could have been plaid, checkered, plain, houndstooth or polka dot. Any of these substitutions would alter the overall meaning conveyed.

As discussed earlier, the written text contains several words which have been draw from the same paradigm to convey a consistent theme although similar words could have been used, such as illegitimate, violator, offensive, transgression, menacing and wrongful. The point of analyzing the signs in terms of their relations to other signs within their respective paradigms is to understand that the signs used within this advertisement were chosen specifically over other signs. For example, Christy Turlington signifies ultimate beauty and glamour largely because of what she does not signify. Meaning is relational within the paradigm. We could replace any one of the signs contained in this advertisement with a functionally similar sign from within its paradigm and the overall meaning would be altered.
In constructing an advertisement, signs chosen from their respective paradigms are combined together in a chain of discourse—a syntagm. The signs from each paradigm are not combined in an arbitrary fashion but are combined according to convention. Often within advertising, the structure of the advertisement relies upon such taken-for-granted conventions. In our culture, we have a convention of reading from top to bottom, and left to right. When this advertisement is read following this convention, the reader inevitably is drawn into the space of the product in the lower right-hand corner. In this way, the entire advertisement is structured around the product and the product is made the key to understanding the theme of illicitness. We also can see at the bottom of the advertisement two boxes (one white, the other black) containing text. Reading from left to right, we are taken from the space dominated by the model into a space set aside for the product. The significance of this structure is that the reader could assume that one need be born with the qualities of beauty exhibited by the model but as the text is read, the reader moves into the space dominated by the product thus the reader is told that it is the mascara that has created beauty, not genetics. The underlying message is that 'you', the reader, can use the product to achieve desirable qualities that you were not born with. This structure facilitates the transfer of meaning from the model to the product to you.

The relationships of signs within a syntagm further determine the meaning of each individual sign. For example, the striped
shirt could be just a striped shirt but because the written text contains words which signify illegality, the reader is expected to make a mental exchange of meaning. The stripes identify the woman as a rule-breaker and by implication, a user of the 'illegal' mascara. The woman is a highly successful and glamorous model. She is also a user of the mascara and so the qualities belonging to this woman, most notably success and beauty, are exchanged with the qualities of the product. Like the mascara, she has no limits and the mascara will deliver glamour and beauty onto the user. The mascara remains a sign within the advertisement but promises to create what it represents.

Via the exchange of meanings the mascara becomes more than a cosmetic product and can offer more to the reader than other mascaras because this particular mascara is "illegal" or "contraband" - a status that confers upon the product forbidden qualities unavailable in other 'legitimate' brands. The desire for the forbidden, for the prohibited, is both elicited and fulfilled by the product.

The written text also acquires its particular meaning in relation to the image of the woman. The words unlawful, strong, dangerous, illegal and rule-breaker are combined with an image of a beautiful woman and the exchange that occurs between them is mutually determining. In short, the qualities become interchangeable. The illicit qualities referenced may potentially have negative associations but instead are associated with beauty and glamour. Meanwhile, beauty and glamour in general become
characterised more specifically by the theme of illicitness. The mascara can be used to defy the constraints of regular standards of beauty and achieve an ideal outside of the norm. When we begin to examine the exchange of signifiers within the structure of an advertisement we begin to appreciate the richness of the layers of meaning that are not immediately recognized.

Much of the meaning which is conveyed to the reader by the advertiser via the actual advertisement is dependent upon a mutual cultural code. In order to 'understand' this advertisement, the reader must come to the moment of reading with past experiences and beliefs which will enable the reader to interpret the ad. The dominant theme of this advertisement is beauty and danger. Read through the cultural code of femininity, the reader understands that a particular type of femininity can be created through the use of the mascara - the femme fatale. Words such as strong, unlawful, dangerous, rule-breaker and illegal are not words conventionally used to describe femininity, however, the reader is able to draw upon a predetermined repertoire and find the femme fatale as a cultural sign of dangerously irresistible, feminine beauty - a beauty ideal that the female reader is encouraged to emulate both within and outside the advertisement. If the reader did not have the 'femme fatale' as an interpretive tool, the theme of danger and illegality might instead be used to interpret the type of woman shown as criminal, psychotic, violent and so on.

Much of the meaning contained within the advertisement would not exist without the work of the reader. Signs have no meaning
until deciphered. This deciphering requires the reader to make exchanges between signifiers and transfer meanings especially between the product and the other signs used. For Williamson (1978:43) "things mean to us and we give this meaning to the product, on the basis of an irrational mental leap invited by the form of the advertisement". In order to do this, the reader must be drawn into the advertisement through appellation. In this particular advertisement, the reader as subject becomes one of the things signified and, by implication, one of the things exchanged. We have already established that the woman is beautiful, glamorous, successful, dangerously irresistible and therefore strong and powerful. She also uses the mascara to which many of her desirable qualities are attributable. While the product gives meaning to her, it is also made to give meaning to us if we insert ourselves into the advertisement. One of the ways in which this happens is by the setting up of two groups of women: "Are there limits? Not for some women...". This dichotomy creates two distinct groups of women. One group is like the woman pictured in the advertisement. They have no limits, they are remarkably strong, irresistibly beautiful, powerful, successful and in control of their lives. The other group however, is none of these things. The meaning of each type of woman is determined in relation to the other. Desire is immediately channelled by the structure of the advertisement such that the reader is already constituted as one who belongs to the 'in' group of women.

"...the more subtle level on which the advertisement works is that of 'alreadyness'... you do not simply buy
the product in order to become a part of the group it represents; you must feel that you already, naturally, belong to that group and therefore you will buy it". (Williamson, 1978:47).

The reader is invited to insert herself into the advertisement as a rulebreaker after all, she needn't be born one but merely dare to join in and use the 'illegal' mascara. The reader is never addressed directly as 'you' but instead must objectify herself and think of herself not as 'me' but in the third person as 'she' - another self to be created by using the mascara.

Finally, in decoding this advertisement we must examine the interaction between the first (denotative) and second (connotative) orders of signification. This advertisement can quite easily be read at the surface level at which meaning would be taken literally. We could read that some women have lashes which are so long that they are unlawful and so remarkably strong that they are almost dangerous but this literal meaning seems absurd as there is no such thing as a law against long eyelashes. The meaning of this part of the written text is meant to work at another level - connotation. Indeed, if we insist upon reading the advertisement at the strictly denotative level, it is unlikely to make sense. Perhaps the only part of the advertisement that is 'innocent' and is meant to be read literally is the text which reads, "Lash extending brush lengthens. Conditioning Formula strengthens" (whether or not this claim is true of course). Every other sign works to signify meanings additional and further to the obvious, denoted ones.
At the denotative level, this advertisement contains a seemingly innocuous message about a cosmetic product - mascara. However, the advertisement relays little straightforward information about the product. Most of the meaning contained within the advertisement occurs via connoted meanings which have very little to do with the mascara in terms of product information (cost, qualities, colours, application procedures, etc). Instead the use of the product is made to mean ideal beauty and glamour, seduction and illicit excitement. All this and more is offered to the consumer who need not be born with the 'right' qualities. She need only insert herself into the advertisement as the 'right' kind of woman.

One of the most interesting aspects of the connotative message is that this advertisement contains many words that suggest qualities not usually associated with the beauty standard of our culture (strong, dangerous, illegal) hence, a potentially subversive and powerful form of femininity is suggested. However, the structure of the advertisement and the interplay of various signs works to recuperate this powerful imagery and redefine feminine power in terms of an old beauty myth - the femme fatale. This message is reinforced on the plane of connotation by the use of black and white photography which takes the reader back to Hollywood circa 1930 and the glamour of big screen movie stars. Thus the imagery used to accompany the theme of danger is one which is still a beauty ideal and one that women are encouraged to emulate. The advertisement links potentially empowering qualities
to the use of mascara for the achievement of beauty and in the process empties these qualities of any political significance. The use of mascara after all has nothing to do with pushing the real boundaries that limit the lives of real women. Instead the advertisement reproduces the myth that women are to seek empowerment, self-esteem, success and social worth via physical attractiveness.

This advertisement is only one among many which "still present objectified female sexuality (the appearance given off by carefully tended body parts) as personal achievement. Personal strength (physical or social) which can be seen as an avenue to female independence, a feminist goal, is repeatedly refigured as a means to attaining sexual attractiveness" (Goldman et. al., 1991:338).

This advertisement also works to discursively reproduce traditional femininity while offering the theme of subversiveness to the reader. This is especially relevant given the intended audience are adolescents. As argued in Pleasance (1991:74):

"Within marketing there is the knowledge that teenagers want rebellious identities, and instead of fighting that impulse it has been harnessed, so that rebellion now takes place on the terms of the market with the help of its products. The market has realized the potential of its products to tell the story of youthful rebellion. In this way, resistance, difference and rebellion can be recouped within dominant relations."

DECODING #2: SOFT AND DRI ANTIPERSPIRANT

The primary signs in this advertisement exist as a combination of printed text and visual images (see Figure 2). In the act of reading the advertisement the reader unites the visual images and text (signifiers) with mental concepts (signifieds). The written
Figure 2: Soft n' Dri Antiperspirant
SEVENTEEN, July 1992

SHE'S NOBODY'S BABY.

SHE'S NOBODY'S FOOL.

SHE KNOWS WHAT SHE WANTS.

Your style is unmistakably
confident with Soft & Dri Solid.
With the hardest working odor
and wetness fighters available.
Also in Aerosol and Roll-on.

SHE JUST STAYS COOL. SOFT & DRI'
text which varies according to size, colour and boldness, suggests a consistent theme - confidence and success. The visual images serve as signifiers for the following signifieds: a smiling woman, a hot pink jacket, newspapers, a shoe shine stand, an older man, two men dressed in business suits and a product.

For each of the signs present within the photographic image, the relationship between signifier and signified is meant to be read as iconic because the scene in the shoe shine stand is intended to be a direct representation of reality even though it has been specifically contrived for the purposes of advertising a product. The scene is meant to be read as a woman having her shoes shined alongside two men while they read their newspapers. The image of the product is also an iconic sign as the image represents the real product.

Despite the intentions of the advertisers to create a seemingly simple scene, the shoe shine scene carries many further meanings. The image of the shoe shine stand itself is an indexical sign. To sit on the stand and have one's shoes shined indicates status and success. The newspapers serve to indicate that these people have a need to be informed of the day's news, that they are active 'players' in the here and now. The man who kneels to shine the woman's shoes indicates a lower status not only by the job he performs in relation to the other people but by the physical positioning of the man. He is lower than the others in their shared space and he kneels. This man's grey hair indicates his age
and this too implies that this man has a different status than the people sitting above him in the stand.

The scene is thick with symbolic signs as well. The colour of the woman's jacket is bright pink. This symbolizes femininity and identifies the woman as traditionally feminine. The pink flower on the product serves also a symbol of femininity and identifies the product as exclusively feminine. The business suits worn by the woman's male counterparts symbolize status, success, respect, power and identify the men as influential professionals. The shoe shine stand symbolizes a traditionally defined male space and can be read as a symbol of all such male dominated and controlled social domains. The stand itself places the people in a symbolic relationship in which the people having their shoes shined sit above the person performing the service. This physical positioning is symbolic of the 'superior' and 'inferior' power relationship. The man performing the service is kneeling at the feet of his cliental. This also symbolizes servitude. The act of reading the newspaper serves as a symbol for traditional male activities especially reading the business sections, the stock market reports, and the sports sections.

Although language exists as a symbolic system of purely arbitrary signs, a consistent theme is communicated to the reader by the written text in this advertisement. The copy contains phrases like "nobody's baby", "nobody's fool", "knows what she wants", "unmistakably confident", and "stays cool". These phrases elicit a set of desired values such as self-assured confidence and
success. It is interesting that most of the written text is devoted to communicating this theme rather than relating concrete product information.

It is important to remember that each of the signs contained in this advertisement exist in relation to other signs within the same paradigm. These relations reveal the significance of the signs chosen to appear in the advertisement. After all, very little happens by accident within an advertisement. Within paradigms signs are often arranged hierarchically according to value. This advertisement carries the implicit theme of status and success so the signs chosen for the advertisement are taken from the upper levels within their respective paradigms where higher valued signs are located.

For instance, the business suit exists within a paradigm of men's clothing but in relation to other functionally similar articles of clothing such as pyjamas, jogging suits, jeans and t-shirts, the business suit carries with it specifically higher values. Likewise, the newspapers could be romance novels, textbooks, or fashion magazines. The newspapers attain their significance because they are not romance novels, textbooks or fashion magazines. Any one of these alternative signs would alter the message intended by the use of the newspapers as a sign within this advertisement. Finally, the woman seen in the shoe shine stand is defined in relation to what she is not: fat, old, short, a visible minority and so on. Each of her physical characteristics place her in the higher valued end of a structural paradigm.
Even the language chosen is read as favourable because within their paradigm these words carry more favourable meanings in relation to other words from the same thematic paradigm including brass, arrogant, presumptive, or cocky. The positive meaning of the words chosen for the advertisement are reinforced by the visual signs and their positive connotations. Simultaneously, the text anchors the visual image and allows the reader to interpret the meaning of the scene depicted. Following the convention of reading left to right and top to bottom, the text and the image are structured so that the reader is led to the product, the key to understanding why this woman is confident and successful.

Within this same structure, the signs mutually determine their meanings through the exchange of signifieds. The primary exchange occurs between the product and the woman who has been linked to positive values. The product is hard working and so is the woman. She is successful. The product is soft and so is the woman — that is — feminine as indicated by the pink jacket. The women is distinctly modern. She has successfully gained entry to a traditionally exclusive male space. She uses the product so it is distinctly modern.

The dominant codes that are activated in the reading of this advertisement are the cultural codes of femininity and masculinity. The pink jacket, pink text, and pink flower on the product elicit 'the feminine'. The newspapers, the business suits, the shoe shine stand, and the predominance of males in the scene elicit masculinity. The placement of traditional femininity within a
masculine context provides for an interesting contrast. The result of this contrast is that the woman is read as unconventionally feminine - that is as the liberated woman - who is also traditionally feminine as indicated by the pink, soft theme.

The reader is appelled in this advertisement via the movement from the description of the woman pictured (her) to a description of 'you' as unmistakably confident in style. This places 'you' in the shoe shine stand via the product, as a self-assured, poised, successful, liberated woman. 'You' are linked via the pink text to the woman's pink jacket and the pink label of the product. This structure works to constitute the individual reader as a subject. The reader must exchange herself for the person 'spoken to', the spectator assumed by the advertisement (Williamson, 1978:50). The assumed subject not only is a woman who would use the product but is one who remains traditionally feminine despite her 'liberation. 'You' become constituted as this kind of woman. Appellation is further achieved by the gaze of the model which meets and connects with the gaze of the reader.

If this advertisement were to be read at the strictly denotative level, the meaning evoked would simply be a woman having her shoes shined while reading a paper. The structural relationships however provide for further connotations beyond this seemingly innocent scene. When we consider these connotations we find that while the advertisement appears to be about equality between men and woman, it in fact perpetuates male and female difference and defines femininity in traditionally narrow terms.
This woman has presumably been successful in gaining entry to the male domain of power and prestige. She participates in traditionally male activities as an equal (she has a newspaper and is having her shoes shined just like the two men beside her). This woman has challenged the boundaries and won suggesting that today, a woman can 'have it all' if she chooses. Although the description of the woman relies on values borrowed directly from the women's movement, the scene contains only one woman thus the political emphasis of the women's movement on collectivity is reduced to the attainment of individual goals. Who needs feminism? Advertisers tell women that now that equality has been achieved women can relax in their collective struggles and concentrate on the real work ahead - individual goals (Gordon, 1980). In this case, the obtainment of individual goals is linked to the use of a particular brand of antiperspirant - Soft and Dri. The message is also relayed that certain aspects of traditional femininity should not be sacrificed in the process of achieving equality. For example, a woman should be physically beautiful and soft. Thus the confines of traditional femininity remain intact despite the rhetoric of equality.

This advertisement is a good example of the way in which women have been shown in less traditional roles, in this instance competing alongside men in the business world. However, this competition still rests upon the way in which a women looks i.e. whether or not she is 'feminine'. Although advertisers...
new-found 'freedoms' and life-chances, those new roles are made no less contingent on the same old scenario for gaining power - using appearance to simulate, and stimulate desire" (Goldman, 1992:123). DECODING #3: COVERGIRL MARATHON MASCARA

The primary signs in this advertisement are: written text which varies according to size and boldness; a woman's face enclosed in a superimposed box; the woman's clothing; the handles of ski poles; a container of mascara; water droplets; and a white and blue backdrop (see Figure 3). The text signifies the theme of endurance and vitality. The visual images signify a woman who is skiing and a cosmetic product that is applied to eyelashes to make them "long, dark and beautiful". In these instances, the relationship between signifier and signified is simply iconic. However like in most advertisements, the text and visual images serve as vehicles for the communication of further meanings.

The clothing worn by the woman indicates that she is outgoing and has a healthy, active lifestyle. The ski poles indicate that she is currently engaged in downhill skiing and this further reinforces that she is an energetic and vibrant person. Her windblown hair indicates that she is outdoors, enduring the elements. The blue backdrop as an indicator of the sky also locates the woman outdoors while the water droplets surrounding the product further indicate natural elements.

The box superimposed on the woman's face indicates that she is a 'covergirl'. The box is meant to represent the cover of magazine. To be a covergirl is sign of success and so this model's
LONG-DISTANCE LASHES:
The mascara that lasts as long as you do.

Marathon Mascara
really goes the distance.
Keeping lashes long, dark
and beautiful, no matter
what you do! So go
ahead, put it to the test.
Marathon looks just
put on, 'til you take it off.

Marathon Mascara

Figure 3: Covergirl Marathon Mascara
SEVENTEEN, April 1992

REDEFINING BEAUTIFUL
success is made known. Her success as a professional 'cover girl' allows her stand as a figure of authority. The text located at the bottom of the advertisements indicates that in this advertisement, beauty is being redefined. Thus it is implied that this is the latest definition, a new and improved kind of beauty appearing for the first time. Finally, the word 'marathon' in our culture has come to symbolize the ultimate test for stamina and endurance and often the word is used to describe any event which lasts a long period of time. The name of the product 'Marathon' mascara, suggests that the mascara has great strength, incredible endurance and will last a long time. The use of the marathon theme of course is not surprising since in relation to other sports, the marathon stands as one of the most challenging and demanding. This confers upon the sport more prestige and respect than other sports such as badminton or bowling. Again, we see that advertisers will often choose from within paradigms those signs which are located at or near the top of their paradigmatic hierarchies.

Despite the imagery created by using words like marathon, long-distance, and long lasting the advertisement is really about beauty. In order to maintain this underlying theme specific signs have been chosen for inclusion. This is best recognized by exploring the paradigmatic relations of several signs. The woman who appears has been designated as a 'covergirl' - that is - a professional model who enjoys success in this particular profession. The use of her name within the advertisement contributes to her status and even elevates her to celebrity
status. Given the outwardly obvious marathon theme in this advertisement it may seem more appropriate that the woman pictured be a woman who enjoys the status of a professional athlete rather than a professional model. The most obvious choices would be a female marathoner or given that the woman is pictured skiing, a real female downhill racer.

Rather than show this particular image of a model skiing, the overt theme of the advertisement suggests that a picture of an actual woman running the last mile of a marathon would be more appropriate. Of course this image would not be one so fresh and lovely.

Similarly, the clothing that the woman is wearing contributes to the beauty and glamour theme of the advertisement. Functionally similar garments such as a hooded parka or a snowmobile suit could stand in for her attire as these garments could accommodate the need to keep warm while skiing but they would not create a contemporary, fashionable image.

The primary signs exchange signifiers in such a way that the theme of beauty becomes the main determinant of the overall meaning of the advertisement's message. The theme of endurance mingles with the theme of beauty creating the message that what must endure is the woman's beauty and not her physical strength. In the text we read that the product really goes the distance and so do you. Your qualities and the qualities of the product are interchangeable. Covergirl Renee Jeffus also goes the distance (as illustrated by the photograph) and she is wearing the mascara while
doing so. Therefore a further exchange takes place in which 'you' can exchange yourself for Renee Jeffus as someone who is young, active and outgoing. Renee Jeffus is not a professional skier but a professional covergirl and as a professional 'beauty' this is the quality that the product works to sustain, not physical endurance. Her quality of beauty exchanges with the mascara and determines its meaning as a means of achieving the beauty exhibited by her. The identification of the product as a beauty creator and sustainer is further reinforced by the way in which the green and blue label of the mascara and the green and blue fashion of the model are interchangeable. Finally, the advertiser tells us that in this advertisement beauty is redefined but it is defined via the product. Beauty can now last even longer than ever before if you use the mascara.

If this advertisement is interpreted by using the cultural code of femininity the qualities referenced may seem somewhat unconventional. Femininity has long been associated with passivity and it is relatively recent that women have competed in marathons and more physically rugged sports. In this regard, the femininity pictured in this advertisement is distinctly modern. However the active imagery is recuperated and made to serve the theme of beauty - an ideal quality long associated with femininity. This traditional aspect of the definition of femininity is reinforced despite allowing for more contemporary qualities. This is most evident in the text that reads, "Keeping lashes long, dark and beautiful no matter what you do". Thus beauty is the primary
concern. The code of femininity is required if this advertisement is going to be interpreted, for if the advertisement were interpreted as an advertisement for a type of mascara that would serve as an aid for winning marathons or downhill skiing races, it simply would not make sense.

This advertisement is structured in a way that the reader is appalled directly throughout. The subject presumed by the advertisement is 'you' and 'you' are constituted as an active, outgoing, contemporary woman who needs to be beautiful "no matter what you do". Therefore you need the product, a mascara that lasts as long as you do. Once the reader is inscribed with these needs and qualities, the advertisement invites the reader to redefine herself via the product and inject herself into the box surrounding the model's face as a 'covergirl'.

On the plane of connotation, this advertisement communicates the message that while women today are physically active and capable of participating in strenuous exercise, they would not want to do so without ensuring that they could be beautiful at the same time. Presumably, if the woman pictured could not ensure her beauty while skiing, she would not enjoy it as much and may even decline to go. One of the implications of the message is that women should feel as though they must always look their best and anything less is unacceptable because they can rely on products like 'marathon' mascara to achieve this. Remaining beautiful under any condition is the real goal to be pursued and this goal is exemplified by the professional model who serves as the object of
achievement. Thus the advertisement communicates an oppressive normative standard: you should be beautiful no matter what you do! Despite the claim made by the advertiser that they are 'redefining beautiful' a standardized beauty ideal is being applied and reproduced by the advertisement.

In this advertisement the importance placed upon a woman's appearance, "no matter what she does", reinforces an ideology in which women gain social power through their appearance - that is, through the approving, or envious, gaze of others. Through her "commodity-mediated appearance", a woman is "...able to elicit desire via presentation of self as a valued commodity - valued by her rareness/availability - the more powerful she feels (Goldman, 1992:124).

All three of the advertisements decoded here offer up depictions of women which are "updated" in several aspects. Femininity appears in the form of women who are self-determining rulebreakers, who have broken through boundaries and are reaping the benefits of their individual success. However, in the process of decoding these ads, we discover that these "updated" versions of femininity are merely surfaces for an underlying version of traditional femininity.
The findings of this study reveal that the advertisements contained within the 1992 issues of Seventeen magazine define femininity in narrow and limited terms. Many of the dominant trends found in this study reflect findings of studies done throughout the 1970's and 1980's thus revealing that stereotypical representations persist in the 1990's. The analysis of the content of advertising in this study reveals that the dominant definition of femininity includes an emphasis on beauty and fashion, youth, predominance of caucasian racial origin, the isolation of women from each other, the centrality of heterosexuality, female passivity, and the placement of women in fantasy-like contexts. These components of the dominant definition of femininity are again reflected in the themes which surround the description of ideal feminine qualities. In particular beauty, heterosexual romance and the problematization of the feminine body appear as recurring themes.

Despite the reproduction of the traditional definitions of femininity evident in these advertisements, this study reveals that current constructions of femininity today incorporate certain characteristics that have previously fallen outside of the female sex role. Traits such as confident, bold, outgoing, strong and independent appear as part of the current constructions of femininity. If these themes had been uncovered through the use of content analysis only, they might be interpreted as positive signs.
of changes within the definitions of femininity. However, through semiotic decoding, further investigation into the context within which these non-traditional themes appear reveals that these signifiers have been emptied and reworked into the dominant discourse such that the traditional versions of femininity, to which feminism has so vehemently objected, are reinforced and reproduced.

This demonstrates the value of developing a semiotic methodology for the study of cultural representations. Semiotic decoding allows for a clearer understanding of the ways in which the text works to construct preferred meanings. Therefore, while the results of this study confirm, via content analysis, that stereotypical portrayals of women persist, insight is also given into the ways in which the advertisements work to construct these stereotyped definitions of femininity. While past research has concentrated on the depiction of women in sex-stereotyped roles, most of this research has focused exclusively upon the denotative level of meaning.

In this study, analysis of the ways in which femininity is defined within advertising moves beyond the denotative level of meaning to an analysis of the production of meaning at the connotative level. Analysis of second order signification has demonstrated the importance of understanding the form that the content of advertisements take. The development of a semiotic methodology makes possible a better understanding of the ways in which women are portrayed in advertising and how these portrayals
work to define femininity. Thus this study has made a significant contribution to the study of representations of women in advertising. The significance of the use of semiotics, however, extends beyond the scope of this particular study. The systematic semiotic method developed in this study provides a research method that can help researchers develop more sophisticated analyses of the signifying practices of other forms of cultural representations.

THE OPERATION OF IDEOLOGY IN ADVERTISING

The semiotic methodology used in this study is important because it allows for a greater understanding of the ways in which advertising operates ideologically to define femininity. More specifically, the semiotic decodings have revealed how femininity is defined via the appropriation and reformulation of cultural knowledge, the naturalization of constructed meanings, and the management of contradictions via the appearance of choice and difference. For instance, the Soft n' Dri ad (Figure 2) appropriates from cultural knowledge the ideals of feminism; confidence, independence, and equality. These ideals are then reformulated and given to the product which if consumed will in turn bestow the named qualities onto the consumer. These qualities are thus emptied of their historical context and significance.

"To study ads is to study the framing of meanings. All meanings and activities exist in a social context - meanings is always relational and contextual. Remove an activity from its context and its meaning changes. Advertisements photographically isolate meaningful moments, remove them from their lived context and place them in the ad framework where their meaning is recontextualized and thus changed. Every image that
appears in advertisements has thus been framed. It could not be otherwise." (Goldman, 1992:5).

Signs of femininity are linked to objects which will then give meaning to the individual. Thus modern advertising teaches the reader to consume not the product, but its sign, what it stands for - in this instance ideal femininity (Goldman, 1992:19). In this way meaning becomes a possibility only through the consumption of commodities.

This appropriation and reformulation of cultural values results in definitions of femininity that are arbitrary constructions. However, rather than appear as though constructed, these definitions are made to appear as though natural because they draw upon what is often taken for granted to be common sense knowledge. The myths of femininity produced by advertisements operate to naturalize what is in fact a distorted relationship between signifier and signified, making the representations of femininity seem innocent, pure and natural (Barthes, 1972:156). In all three advertisements decoded in this study an oppressive beauty standard is reproduced by the creation of a message that ties being female to being beautiful. This equation of femininity and beauty is presented as the natural ideal regardless of the specific type of femininity presented. Whether a woman wants to be dangerously exciting, confidently liberated or athletically aggressive, the message remains that she would naturally want to be beautiful throughout. This message is presented as though it were simply common sense.
The management of contradictions in the definitions of femininity present within advertisements is apparent in the linkage of particular 'feminine qualities' such as beautiful, perfect, fresh, clean, healthy and so on to the use of products to attain these qualities. While these qualities are presented as natural aspects of 'the feminine' and therefore normative, their achievement is always tied to the consumption of products. This process is riddled with contradictions. For instance, in many advertisements a quality such as beauty is linked to nature—hence, "natural beauty". The connotations of this linkage lead to a spiralling, circular logic: Women are naturally beautiful thus beauty becomes a normative quality, something that women should be. Following from this norm of beauty, all women naturally want to be beautiful, i.e. normal. Inserted into this desire is the product which will confer upon the user the quality of beauty. Since women naturally want to be beautiful, a quality that is a natural part of being feminine, it is natural that they would use the product to attain this essential quality. This naturalization of femininity is also reinforced by modes of appellation through which the reader is constituted as a woman who exists already as the kind of woman described in the ad hence someone who would naturally use the product. Not only is a particular version of femininity naturalized but the act of consuming ever more goods.

On the surface, the definitions of femininity in Seventeen advertisements seem to offer many choices to its young readers. As seen in the decoded ads readers can choose to be dangerously
beautiful and defiant, modern and self-assured, or outgoing and sporty - each identity to be tried on in the form of a cosmetic product. The appearance of a seemingly endless range of choices masks the fact that a narrow range of possibilities for self-definition are offered to young women in these ads supporting the charge that "the choices and freedoms apparently offered by consumption hide the lack of material choice for women" (Pleasance, 1991:77). Within the structure of advertising messages the culturally contradictory relations of traditional femininity and feminism have been reconciled in a seemingly unproblematic fashion. Signifiers of femininity and signifiers of feminism co-exist and intermingle such that a woman can emulate traditional beauty standards yet be a defiant rule-breaker. She can be soft and wear pink clothes yet be tough and confident. She can compete alongside her male counterparts yet not have to sacrifice her most valuable feminine qualities. The incorporation of feminist political/social goals into advertisements for fashion and beauty products is an expression of expanding commodity logic. Advertising has continually colonized and incorporated new cultural material for the purpose of giving cultural currency to commodities and to extend commodity relations (Goldman, 1992; Wernick, 1991).

**AFFIRMATION OF DOMINANT CODES**

The findings of this study show that the discourse of advertising is a discourse of power, characterised by the maintenance of capitalist economic and patriarchal relations despite surface changes in the depiction of women as "liberated"
and self-determining (Warren, 1978). The maintenance of the status quo, however, must be understood as the result of a dialectical process in which advertising messages continually draw upon and react to the cultural climate.

Since the early 1970's advertisers have paid greater attention to what women want to hear about themselves. By the 1980's advertisers had to adapt the ways in which they addressed women in order to recapture the interest of estranged readers (Goldman, 1992:133). In order to appeal to women consumers, advertisers have addressed their target audiences through the selective incorporation of the actual cultural/demographic characteristics of the audience into the advertising message. In doing so advertisements invite the audience to identify with a commercialised image of themselves. The attributes of the consumer and the attributes of the commodity are made to match.

"All advertising has to do, surely, is to bring its proffered attributions into line with the actual self-identifications, needs, and values which consumers experience as their own. But the inevitable selectivity of typification (is that really me?), plus the need to ensure a two-way fit between consumer subjectivity and brand image, rules out a purely passive approach. The circular logic of attribution masks the leap of faith the reader must make to get into the picture. Potential consumers must be positively induced to embrace what the product is made to mean. On the plane of ideological orientation, as on that of wants and needs, symbolic advertising has at the very least to affirm the code of values to which it makes appeal." (Wernick, 1991:38).

When audience members identify with the appeal of an advertising message directed toward them they are taking the preferred ideological meaning structured into the message, that of
the 'dominant' culture (Sinclair, 1987:38). The appeal of many advertisements is structured such that the reader is 'positioned' within the dominant ideology.

Advertising in Seventeen produces definitions of femininity that are not outwardly degrading or offensive to readers but that are instead positive and complementary because these ads draw upon cultural signs which already have currency. The incorporation and depoliticization of feminism via second order signification within advertising serves to illustrate how dominant social codes are affirmed and reproduced at the expense of alternate or oppositional codes. Positively coded signs and the already established cultural power of such signs are appropriated and co-opted into the signifying practices of advertising. It is not the real content of the signs that is being appropriated as much as the positive sign value they already hold. For example goals of the women's movement and liberation themes are co-opted in the Soft n' Dri ad because they already have cultural currency. In their incorporation into the advertisement's signifying system, however, the content of these themes are emptied of their political significance because they have been removed from the historical context of women's struggle for equality and placed within the apolitical/ahistorical context of consumption. These themes have additional currency given that the political/social climate today can be seen as 'postfeminist' implying that many young women perceive themselves as liberated, taking for granted the struggles of feminism to win the right to equality (Rapp, 1988; Stacey, 1987). Many
advertisements for cosmetics and fashion draw upon the reader's self-concept as liberated.

In terms of advertising's ideological role Wernick (1991:45) points out that, "...In the images promotionally given to products, advertising produces a continual stream of totemic, market unifying, second-order cultural messages. It does so, however, in constant interaction with the shifting moods, codes and cross-currents of the culture that surrounds it, so that advertising reprocesses and, where necessary, reconciles whatever core values and symbols have currency". It is not the oppositional discourse of feminism that is being affirmed in advertising but traditional femininity. The cultural currency of feminism is used to give value to the dominant code of traditional femininity through an exchange of signifiers within the advertisement's structural relationships.

The ideological definitions of femininity in advertisements must be understood as the products of a dialectical relationship between the structure of advertisements and the larger culture within which they exist. The discourse of femininity is continually reworked and modified at the local level by the women who actively participate in it. Advertising responds to such changes, ready to expropriate that which has acquired cultural currency. While the structure of advertising may work to affirm the dominant culture, it's influence cannot be seen as completely determinate.

"There is an ongoing dialectic between women's freedom to express themselves stylistically within discourse, to
make choices, among them to choose specifically 'unfeminine' styles, and the strain of the fashion industry and its media towards a controlled and continually changing orthodoxy of both appearance and interpretation which would fully regulate desire as demand. "Such closure is never attained" (Smith, 1990:205).

TEXTUALLY MEDIATED DISCOURSE

The definition of femininity via the operation of ideological processes within advertisements must be placed within the larger social context. Advertisements insert themselves into the practical organization of achieving femininity as a presentation of self within the local, historical process of everyday life. However, the effects of this textual definition of femininity extend beyond the structuring of the local level of actions and practices of individual women as they create themselves in relation to the ideality of the text. The textual definition of femininity within advertisements remains uniform across multiple sites of human interaction. This is because the norms and interpretations of appearances across multiple sites are governed by the standardized definition of femininity as manifest in the text. As argued by Smith (1990:203), "Women are caught up in the circle of appearances and interpretation established publicly in the discursive texts. Though they can, with the body and resources available to them, choose a 'look', the relation between that look and its interpretation, and therefore how the look they have chosen signifies, are pre-given in discourse".

Advertisements further structure social relations by organizing local social relationships as a relationship to a market
selling fashion commodities (ibid). Fashion magazine advertisements not only standardize the definition of femininity but standardize desire to coincide with the mass production of commodities which include clothing, cosmetics, and beauty industry services.

"The discursive relations of femininity are vested in texts designed for and distributed on a mass market, and the production and distribution of those texts coordinates, differentiates, and regulates the market and production of clothes, cosmetics, etc. The relation between the standardized ideality of the discursive images of femininity and the imperfect body generates that perpetual renewal of desire into which texts tying desire to commodity are inserted" (Smith, 1990:208).

COMMODIFIED SOCIAL RELATIONS

Understanding the signifying practices of advertisements is important because "...advertisements set forth a reified social logic that is culturally reproduced via the advertising form" (Goldman, 1992:35). This reified social logic is apparent in the ways in which social relations are shown as the products of relationships with commodities. Within advertisements, objects/commodities are made to mean something in terms of social relations, and commodified social relations are represented as though authentic. This logic is reflected in the Marathon Mascara ad (Figure 3) in which the relationship between the object/mascara and the subject/woman is one in which the characteristics of the acting subject/woman are attributed to the object/mascara. In all three ads decoded in this study human qualities are given over to objects. Mascara becomes remarkably strong and dangerous or able to run marathons, while anti-perspirant is confident and modern.
"Advertisements thus separate the intrinsic qualities of being human from actual living humans. The link can be restored only by the purchase of the commodity. Human qualities must be bought back, reappropriated by means of consuming..." (Goldman, 1992:31-32).

Products are given agency while humans take on the status of object. The definition of femininity as manifest in the ideality of the advertising image sets up a practical relation of a woman to herself as object to be made in relation to the textual definition. As Smith (1990:50) explains, "The 'structure' of the relationship of subject to herself is tripartite: the distance between herself as subject and her body, which becomes the object of her work, is created by the textual image through which she becomes conscious of its defects". A woman's body becomes an object upon which she can act to bring it into correspondence with the 'unchanging perfection of the text'. Women are sold their images in the form of commodities and become commodities themselves - that is, a product constructed through the consumption and use of fashion and cosmetic commodities.

Within the structure of advertising a "consumerist address imprisons the subject in a totally commodified ontology"; needs become defined in relation to the world of objects; being is reduced to having, desire reduced to lack (Wernick, 1991:35). Needs arise in advertising only in so far as a particular commodity can be presented for their satisfaction. The findings of this study reflect the ways in which gender relations have been recast in terms of commodity consumption. As argued in Goldman (1992:107), "Redressing the power imbalance in gender relations was invariably
cast in terms of commodity consumption and personal appearance: change occurs not through politics, or strikes, or challenges to the legal system, but through individuated commodity consumption. Self-determination, independence, and success are attainable as a style, created through the consumption of the right products.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

The advertisements which have been decoded in this study contain a model of social power in which women attain power through commodity mediated appearances and commodified body images. The attainment of control over one's life and relationships is presented as the outcome of the "commodified articulation of feminine appearance" (Goldman, 1992:108). This avenue to empowerment for women fundamentally differs from avenues available to men. As argued by Winship (1978:146), "The achievement of individuality, through the narcissistic construction of you, the particular loved object, relies not on work at the point of production as it does for men, but on work at the point of consumption".

In this model of social power autonomy and control are obtained through voluntary self-fetishization. A woman's social power is constituted through a fetishism of appearances, however, this power is contingent upon others because it rests upon the ability to become an object of desire. The commodified self relies upon the judgement of others. Goldman (1992:117) points out, "by emphasizing the fetishized self as the conduit of power and control, the ad obscures the fact that feelings of control gained
through impression management are literally purchased at the cost of self-alienation".

Within this model of social power problems are defined and located within the attitudes of individual women and not in the unequal conditions of commodity production and consumption (Goldman et. al., 1991:335). Feminist social goals are reduced to individual lifestyle and the potentially subversive ideological force of feminism is "channelled into the commodity form so that it threatens neither patriarchal nor capitalist hegemony" (Goldman, 1992:131; Rapp, 1988:32). The redefinition of feminism through commodities obliterates the origin of feminism in a critique of unequal social, economic and political relations.

PRACTICAL STRUGGLES

Semiotic analysis, when compared to content analysis, allows a more sophisticated understanding of the ways in which advertisements operate to define femininity. On a practical level these more sophisticated analyses contribute to an understanding of the ways in which meanings are ideologically produced and may, therefore, contribute to the development of new strategies to address sexism in advertising. Insight into new strategies to combat sexism is derived through a better understanding of why previous strategies have failed. Semiotic analyses are useful because they reveal how sexism in advertising has continued despite the calls for reforms and regulation through laws. For instance, the decoding of ads in this study demonstrates why the critique of advertising made by liberal feminists does not adequately address

134
the problem of sexism. Advocating the reform of stereotypical representations through the incorporation of non-traditional imagery does not ensure a positive direction for the transformation of imagery. For instance in Figure 1 the woman is strong and dangerous but not because of the possession of real social power but because of her 'devastating' beauty. In Figure 2 a woman appears as the equal of her male counterparts but she is still defined as 'soft'. In Figure 3 the woman pictured is athleticism aggressive but is primarily concerned with being beautiful no matter what she does. In all three of these advertisements traditional femininity is reinforced through the appropriation of feminist ideals and identity is defined through consumption.

As long as the production of images of women in advertising is motivated by the desire to sell commodities, these images will be controlled by commodity logic. This precludes the possibility of women controlled images.

"...the realities of national advertising campaigns, the advertising industry and magazine publication moot the possibility of any true female voice behind the ad: these are extensively male worlds. The ads we view in women's magazines are not statements by women for women: they are constructs of women made predominantly by men for women. The woman seen in women's magazines is doubly Other, the projection of a hegemonically masculine sender" (Masse and Rosenblum, 1988:140). [11]

Rather than advocate censorship or regulation of content of images, some feminists have instead focused upon the need for the creation of new texts, produced by and for women, in which alternative constructions of the feminine and a wider range of possibilities for women's lives appear. However the potential for
establishing and sustaining such texts within the existing relations and conditions of production has proven to be nearly impossible as evident in the struggles to launch MS magazine as a source of alternate discourses (Steinem, 1990).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR STUDY

Although semiotic analysis provides a greater understanding of the ways in which the text works, this method is restricted in a number of ways. Firstly, this study is restricted to the examination of only one particular source of definitions — advertisements in Seventeen. The study of more definitions from both different magazines and from different forms of cultural representations are needed in order to understand the intertextual nature of these images.

Secondly, semiotic analysis is conducted entirely at the textual level. Critics have pointed out that primacy is given to the text at the expense of analyzing the wider historical and material context. In the past semiotics has been used in isolation from the conditions and relations of production in which the text is produced and consumed (see Jaddou and Williams, 1981). In the future, this context could be provided through ethnographic research on the process through which the text is produced. This would include analysis of the organization of the advertising industry and the magazine industry in order to understand the processes through which the images of women are created and disseminated throughout our culture.
Thirdly, ethnographic research is also needed to explore the context of readers' lives in which advertising images are consumed. Given the insights provided by semiotics into the workings of the text, further research is now needed in the area of audience reception. Cultural analysis has yet to develop a coherent theory of audience response to advertising or to address the questions of how and why people consume mass cultural products (Myers, 1983). Further research in the area of audience reception will begin to unravel the complexities expressed in the mass culture debate over whether consumption is to be understood as a form through which dominant power relations are articulated and maintained or whether consumption of dominant cultural forms in fact provides openings in which dominance is evaded (Pleasance, 1991).

Research that focuses upon the text in isolation relies upon the researcher's use of a particular code. In this study the text has been decoded through the dominant code of femininity, however, this level of analysis does not reveal how contradictions expressed within the text are read. This would involve an analysis of the ways in which sex, age, class, race and ethnicity intersect with the dominant discourse to produce oppositional or negotiated readings (see Brown and Schulze, 1990). Ethnographic research could begin to address these issues and, by focusing upon lived experiences, link mass communicated images and ideology to the contexts in which it occurs.
For feminist critical practice these issues are of central concern for "...understanding how popular culture functions both for women and for a patriarchal culture is important if women are to gain control over their own identities and change both social mythologies and social relations. Feminism, as a critique of existing social relations, assumes that change is not only desirable but necessary" (Rakow, 1986:23).
NOTES

1 The study of advertising can be placed within the context of cultural studies and the debate over the status ascribed to dominant culture. In one theoretical framework dominant culture is seen as a site where dominant power relations are both successfully extended and reinforced. In the opposing viewpoint, dominant culture is conceptualized as a site of conflict and struggle where dominant power relations are continually challenged and never fully secured. For a discussion of this debate in relation to popular magazines see Pleasance (1991). The roots of this debate are located within the critique of mass culture as decline and domination, instigated by the Frankfurt School, and responses to this critique. See Horkheimer and Adorno (1944) and Marcuse (1964).

2 It should be noted that the study of advertising involves three potential areas for analysis: the production of ads within the advertising industry, the individual ad as an isolated entity and the audience's reading and interaction with the ad. Semiotics focuses upon the structural relationships within individual ads giving consideration to the larger social context within which the ad exists, however, this type of analysis does not claim to account for the explicit intentions of the advertiser/producer or for the actual readings of audience members. These concerns could most adequately be addressed through ethnographic research. For an analysis of the advertising industry see Sinclair (1987) or Vinikas (1992). For an analysis of the rise of modern advertising as a direct response to the needs of mass industrial capitalism see Ewen (1976).

3 Although an argument can be made for the existence of "preferred readings" the extent to which advertisers are explicitly or rationally aware of the structural relationships present within ads remains questionable without ethnographic research. This issue is beyond the scope of this study, however, rather than posit a 'conspiracy theory' it seems more reasonable to surmise that the direction towards privileged meanings is loose rather than completely determined. As argued in Sinclair (1987:39), "In a sense there is a struggle to control culture, a continuous, though intuitive rather than conspiratorial effort on the part of the dominant institutions of capitalism to ensure that all definitions of how life is to be lived remain within their hegemony".

4 The code of femininity reflects cultural conventions regarding what is and what is not 'feminine'. As such the code governs the interpretation of signs as being feminine/not feminine.
This interpretive code is based upon the meanings that are assigned to femininity and masculinity. Each culture creates its own meanings for these categories and these meanings involve expectations regarding general characteristics such as personality traits, social roles, social positions, and physical characteristics (See discussions in Basow, 1992 and Mackie, 1987). Empirical evidence for what constitutes the dominant code of femininity within our culture was established within the findings of the content analysis studies of sex role stereotypes reviewed in chapter one. These studies offer insight into which characteristics are 'read' as feminine based upon shared cultural knowledge. For example, passivity, physical beauty, sexual attractiveness, domesticity, dependence, and subordination to males are recurring themes which are repeatedly associated with the female sex role. Further evidence for the degree to which certain characteristics are commonly assigned to females as compared to males is discussed in extensive detail in Williams and Best, 1990.

5 Although cultural texts offer a point of entry into the social relations that they are embedded in and organize, it is important to understand that the relationship between texts, such as advertisements, and the reader/consumer is never unilateral but is instead dialectic. The relationship is mutually determining. For a discussion of this dialectical relationship see Smith (1991:202).

6 In each table of this study pages with five or more advertisements were excluded from the analysis in order to eliminate a "classified ad" type segment located in the final pages of the magazine. The majority of such ads are very small and therefore lack images or substantial content. In general, the ads that were eliminated did not reflect the format of the majority of ads which were included in the analysis.

7 Decoding will be limited to three advertisements for the purposes of analyzing second order signification and the ways in which connotation operates above and beyond the denoted image. The intention is to illustrate instances of the constitution of 'femininity' and is not intended to be an exhaustive semiotic analysis of the entire content of advertising in Seventeen. Limitation of analysis to three ads is adequate given the specific scope of this study.

8 In each of the tables data pertains to pictures which contain less than six people. This was done in order to avoid crowd scenes which are difficult to code with any degree of accuracy. The majority of pictures in the ads contained less than six people.
9 Census data for the population of the United States in 1990 indicates the following figures for racial/hispanic origin (as percentages of the base population of 248,709,873):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>80.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian Indian</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other race</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


10 Pages with five or more pictures were excluded from analysis in order to eliminate pages that were composed of "collages". This format contains pictures that are often too small to render accurate codings.

11 As argued by Masse and Rosenblum (1988:140-41) this is not to say that the projector of these images is necessarily male. Women are involved in the construction of advertising and can also incorporate and replicate the ideology contained within the ads.
REFERENCES


148


