Representations, Multiculturalism, and Mass Media

Reality is never experienced directly but always through the cultural categories made available by a society.
—Stuart Hall

The concept representation is one of the primary ideas in cultural studies. Much is at stake in the discourse and skirmishes over ethnic and gender stereotyping in mass media. The cultural sphere of meaning is a central part of human social life. It is also a continuous course of confrontation and contention.

The primary objective of this book is to advance postmodern analysis by examining:

1. A semiotics of advertising as social life—deconstructing, decoding, and deciphering that which is manifest or on the surface. Ad deconstruction is the analysis of advertising in such a way as to reinterpret implied meanings as symbolic rituals of postmodern societies. The present work centers on developing tools to understand, critique, and resolve the ubiquitous advertising images that bombard our everyday life. I attempt to provide theoretical analysis at the cutting edge of mass media and multiculturalism. In doing so, I hope to contribute to the production of critical and enlightened readers who engage knowledgeably and vigilantly with the representations of cultural life. Critical reflection on media representations deprives the industry of its undisputed power.

2. Major issues of postmodern sociological theory that seem to be crucial to the empirical investigation of commercial advertising and consumerism, specifically, gender, ethnicity, culture, and language. Like Erving Goffman (1976), I am interested in the appearance of events and of material and nonmaterial objects. This necessitates determining and positing underlying structures of social stratification or examining power relations. I prefer a hermeneutic, dramaturgical approach that is grounded in larger structural parameters.

3. Conceptual questions connected to the representation of marginalized groups in advertising (women, blacks, Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, and gays and lesbians). Representations of such marginalized groups may be contrasted with the dominant producers of mainstream culture—a set of white, male, upper-middle- to upper-class, heterosexual ideologies. Target advertising correctly assumes that, despite their relative powerlessness, even these marginalized groups have a lot
of money to spend. Moreover, they have developed the fastest-growing national rates of disposable income. (This is discussed further in chapter 5.)

4. Methodological approaches to a critical, hermeneutic analysis of advertising. I offer a systematic methodology for a sociology of advertising:

a. Borrowing from the dramaturgy of Goffman (1976) and the human zoology (1986, 1996) and visual anthropology (1977; Morris et al. 1979) of Desmond Morris, deconstruct nonverbal behavior or body language, including a focus on facial expression, body posture, and both intended and unintentional gestures.

b. Using marketing analysis, examine the placement and target audience of the advertisement in relation to the product or service.

c. Render artistic composition analysis. Art includes “any graphics, photography, film, or video that offers visual information to a receiver” (O’Guinn, Allen, and Semenik 1998, 275). In postmodern image-oriented ads, the visual component is the main method for conveying meaning.

d. Using a critical, structural interpretation, deconstruct the ad as a product of status display and consumer culture. Provide narrative or “tell the story” to which the advertisement alludes. This includes a chronological deconstruction of events leading up to and following the frame frozen in the print advertisement.

e. Decode copy—“the verbal or written part of a message” (O’Guinn, Allen, and Semenik 1998, 275). Copy includes headlines, subheads, and all verbal or written descriptions intended to communicate a message to the consumer. In terms of linguistic analysis, evoke the implied or assumed message of the advertisement and distinguish it from its actual or literal meaning.

This model deciphers advertising in two different ways. First, of course, is the manifest function of advertising to persuade the consumer to purchase a particular brand of product or service. More important, the study of cultural objects, such as advertising, provides a pivotal and privileged entry to culture. Advertising is one of the most powerful mechanisms through which members of a society assimilate their cultural heritage and cultural ideologies of domination. Ideology refers to images, concepts, and premises that provide the frameworks through which we represent, interpret, understand, and try to understand some point of view of social life (Hall 1981). Ideologies synthesize ostensibly diverse elements into a distinctive set of meanings. For example, the depiction of ethnic relations to members of a society via advertising subtly colors understanding of status arrangements, social boundaries, and power. The transformation of cultural ideologies is a collective process, albeit often unconscious, not the result of individual consciousness or volition. Ideologies are often latent or unrecognized; they are taken for granted as real, commonsense, or natural. The structure of ethnic, gender, and class inequality is justified as being profoundly destined by nature.

Advertising

Has there ever been an institution so reviled as modern advertising, so hectored, so blamed for the ills of society?
Yet has there ever been an institution so responsible for conveying . . . the most al-
luring, the most sensitive, and the most filled with human yearning?
—James B. Twitchell, *Adcult USA*

Advertising. It’s not a bad word, but it has often been viewed as a bad thing. Here’s a
sampling of what some well-known writers have penned about advertising. Herman
Wouk: “Advertising blasts everything that is good and beautiful in this land with a hor-
rid spreading mildew.” F. Scott Fitzgerald: “Advertising’s contribution to humanity is
exactly minus zero.” And, finally, Sinclair Lewis: “Advertising is the cheapest way of
selling goods, particularly if the goods are worthless.”

Advertising has been credited with improving the quality of life for Americans,
boosting the economy, and encouraging competition (Woods 1995). Yet it has also
been blamed for subliminally urging people to purchase products and services that
they do not need or even want, constructing false expectations, and adulterating
language.

*Advertising* may be defined as “a paid, mass-mediated attempt to persuade”
(O’Guinn, Allen, and Semenik 1998, 577). An *advertisement* is “a specific message that
an organization has placed to persuade an audience” (577). Or more simply, an adver-
tisement is *a message that has been called to the attention of a public audience, especially by
paid announcement*.

The study of consumer behavior became recognized as a science in the late 1940s
(Woods 1995). Since then, an impressive body of literature on target marketing, demo-
graphics, and social segmentation has emerged. The marketing research on ethnic sub-
cultures is less impr
essive. Motivational research (i.e., the latent reasons why people buy
particular brands of goods and services) developed in the 1950s, while greater in-depth
psychological research developed in the 1960s (Woods 1995).

During the early years of consumer research, ethnic consumers were all but ignored.
Instead, researchers were trying to tap into the “average American”—a label not applied
to ethnic minority populations. Even while ethnic minority populations grew at a record
pace, marketing researchers continued to overlook them. Now consumer research has in-
dicated that blacks respond differently to advertising than whites (Hunter and Associ-

Advertising, more than art, literature, or editorials, allows us to track our sociologi-
ical history: the rise and fall of fads, crazes, and social movements; political issues of the
times; changing interests and tastes in clothes, entertainment, vices, and food; and
scenes of social life as they were lived. The only institution comparable in scope and mag-
nitude was the Roman Catholic Church of the early Renaissance (Twitchell 1996, 229). Ad-
vertising is a powerful social force that commands the public’s attention to, and faith in,
a particular style of consciousness and consumption.

“The culture of consumption has replaced the culture of contrition” (Twitchell 1996,
230). Like Christianity, advertising afflicts the comfortable and comforts the afflicted. Ad-
vertising has become so absorbed by society that it has become the dominant culture. The
culture of consumption was not always so pervasive. In the agrarian-based society that
predated an economic system established on industry, other institutions such as family,
community, ethnicity, and religion were the dominant mediators and creators of cultural
forms (Jhally 1990). Their control dissolved in the shift first to industrial society and then
to consumer society.
Branding

Branding—the process of differentiation—is at the core of advertising. What distinguishes similar products is not ingredients but packaging and brand names. Most shampoos, for example, are made by two or three manufacturers (Vinikas 1992). The major thrust of advertising is to remind shoppers to seek out and purchase a particular brand. Branding seeks to nullify or compensate for the fact that products are otherwise fundamentally interchangeable. Tests have shown that consumers cannot distinguish their own brand of soap, beer, cigarette, water, cola, shampoo, gasoline from others. In a sense, advertising is like holding up two identical photographs and persuading you that they are different—in fact, that one is better than the other.

Brand extension is introducing goods by adding the familiarity of a proven brand. Branding and brand extension have permitted discount retail outlets to “cannibalize the value of cooperative advertising” (Twitchell 1996, 251). These stores do little, if any, brand advertising (everyone already knows and can recall the brand products); rather, what little advertising they do is focused on claims to provide brand products at the lowest prices. They make their profits by buying and selling in large volumes.

Spending on Advertising

Advertising deconstruction is not trivial. Advertising is now a $180-billion-per-year industry (Moreno 1997, 57). Television commercials often cost as much as $264,000 to produce (Jhally 1988). Advertising spending in 1950 was approximately $6.5 billion; by 1970, $40 billion; by 1980, $56 billion (Kellner 1988). Advertising expenditures nearly doubled from 1980 to 1986, suggesting a shocking development of advertising during the 1980s. All revenues for television and radio programming come from advertising. Eighty percent of newspaper and half of magazine revenues come from advertising (Jhally 1990).

Advertising has colonized professional sports. Corporations spend almost $2.3 billion annually on sporting events (Twitchell 1996). (It’s no wonder that they insist on dressing the athletes!) The average adult consumer is bombarded with at least 500 advertising messages daily (Bovee and Arens 1989). Other estimates are 1,500 (Kilbourne 1989), 3,000 (Landler et al. 1991), and 3,600 ads a day (Jhally 1990). This makes advertising perhaps the most powerful educational source in society. In fact, we spend more money on advertising (at least 2 percent of our gross national product, according to the Association of National Advertisers [1988, 4]) than on public education (Kellner 1988).

In 1997, former NBA basketball superstar Michael Jordan of the Chicago Bulls was the best-paid and most recognizable product endorser in professional sports. He made approximately $40 million. Jordan was recognizable to 35.8 percent of the sampled individuals. That same year, Tiger Woods was the second-most-recognizable product pusher in professional sports; he earned about $20 million from endorsements. The 1997 Masters champion was recognized as a sports endorser by 8 percent of people surveyed by telephone over an eleven-week period, according to data compiled by Stamford, Connecticut-based Sponsorship Research International and the Sports Marketing Letter. By 2004, the incomes of some of the most recognizable professional athletes came primarily from endorsements rather than salary or winnings. Tiger Woods had $6 million in winnings and made $70 million from endorsements, Andre Agassi had $2.5 million in winnings and made $24.5 million from endorsements, and Lebron James had a salary of $4 million and made $35 million from endorsements.
The cost of a thirty-second commercial during the 2007 Super Bowl was $1.6 million. (In 1967, the cost was $42,000.) Moreover, numerous corporations opine it is no longer enough to simply market their wares and services on television’s most watched event. People in more than 42.6 million homes watched the exciting Super Bowl in 2002, according to Nielsen Media Research. A typical two-month pre-Super Bowl public-relations project can cost advertisers about $150,000 to $200,000, in addition to the cost of commercial airtime (Vranica and O’Connell 2003). This tells us that advertising is very serious business. Although the amount of money is astounding, Super Bowl commercials are cost effective for reaching the estimated 140 million to 800 million viewers worldwide, many of whom watch only to preview the new commercials.

The advertising industry almost exclusively underwrites the mass media in the United States. “Newspapers obtain about 75 percent of their revenues from advertisers, general-circulation magazines about 50 percent, and broadcasters almost 100 percent” (Herman 1990, 70). It is clear that advertising is the economic lifeblood of the media (Kilbourne 1989). Companies that purchase advertising space and time affect to varying degrees the ideological content of all media forms (Dines and Humez 1995).

Corporate profits began to plunge in the early 1990s, and with the dive in profits came a decrease in advertising spending (Woods 1995). In 1991, network ad spending fell more than 7 percent over 1990 figures (Television Bureau of Advertising, in Woods 1995). Newspaper ad spending dropped by the same amount during the same period (Newspaper Advertising Bureau, in Woods 1995), and magazine ad budgets fell 5 percent (Landler et al. 1991, 67). Advertising may never again experience the boom that it enjoyed in the 1970s and 1980s, when revenues grew faster than the overall economy.

There are numerous reasons for the precipitous decline in advertising spending. Consumers are exposed to so many ads that they are conditioned to attend selectively to some ads while ignoring others. Consumers are remembering fewer ads. In one longitudinal study, viewer retention of ads dropped from 64 percent to 48 percent in four years (Landler et al. 1991).

### Modernism and Postmodernism

Advertising doesn’t mirror how people are acting but how they are dreaming.

—Jerry Goodis, advertising executive

Modernism has been characterized by an ideology that promotes control over nature and society, an illusion of rational order, the notion that constant change is inevitable and must be positively embraced, and increasing division and fragmentation. Modernism is dialectical, even paradoxical: unity versus disunity, standardization versus diversity, and centralization versus decentralization (Rojek 1995, 101). The essence of modernism is escape, disorder, restlessness, perpetual change, division, and uncertainty.

Some aspects of modernism are apparent in postmodernism: transition, fragmentation, circulation, instability, and discontinuity. Postmodernism may be either affirmative, signaling social responsibility and ethical open-mindedness (Bauman 1993), or nihilistic, bea- cooning primitive culture (Baudrillard 1988) or pathos and destruction (Jameson 1991). While modernism tries to impose rational control over the social and physical world, the proliferation of simulated environments (see Baudrillard 1988) indicates the accentuated appearance of fantasy and false elements in postmodern culture. Authenticity and meaning have vanished.
Bakhtin (1984) suggests temporary liberation from prevailing “truth” and established order and suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions; dogmas and pomposity of official culture are ridiculed. It is worthwhile to make a distinction between postmodernity and postmodernism. “Postmodernity” refers to generalized change in social conditions. “Postmodernism” refers to generalized change in social consciousness. Rojek (1995) highlights the major events or developments that have contributed to postmodernism:

1. The rise of feminism, which challenged conventional authority structures installed under the male order of modernity
2. The expansion of the international tourism industry of mass communications (including advertising)
3. The transfer of cheap labor to the core industrial economies and the development in metropolitan areas of distinct ethnic enclaves that signify difference, contrast, and cosmopolitanism
4. The politicization of gays and lesbians, which exposed the restrictions of the heterosexual power order of modernity
5. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, which refutes the belief that social change can be rationally planned and managed
6. The development of ecological consciousness, or the belief that economic and industrial growth jeopardizes the ecological necessity of human survival, refuting the expansionist dynamic of modernity
7. The failure of world economic powers to manage effectively the global economy and combine high employment rates with low inflation and sustained economic growth
8. The explosion of information technology, which has increased the mobility and flexibility of data-retrieval systems and improved the speed and accuracy of communicating through networking and electronic mail systems. Technology has also dramatically altered the way in which some products and services are marketed. Computerized market research supplies detailed information about target audiences (e.g., ethnic minorities, college students, and women). Names, addresses, and telephone numbers can be matched with consumer habits.

Advertising as Culture Industry

The invisibility of Whiteness masks Whiteness itself as a category.

—Richard Dyer

*Culture industry* refers to the collection of entertainment industries dedicated to amusing the populace in their nonwork time: music, film, television, radio, and magazines (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972). Marcuse (1964) maintains that the masses are no longer able to distinguish personal freedom from manipulation. However, one could argue that they are able to oppose, subvert, and neutralize codes of manipulation.
Rojek (1995, 117) identifies four sources of dissatisfaction (i.e., wishing, not having) in the psychology of the postmodern consumer:

1. Incompleteness of market commodities on display (merely a sample of infinite possibilities)
2. Arbitrariness of choice (commodities with no lasting value purchased by impulse, not free choice). “Food shoppers make almost two-thirds of their buying decisions when they set foot in the aisle” (Twitchell 1996, 57).
3. Fragmentation. The individual experiences the world in fragments. There are fragmented relationships in private life.
4. Indifference. The consumer becomes indifferent to commodity choice. “With more than fifteen hundred new items introduced to supermarkets each month, the need to inform and convince the querulous shopper is intense” (Twitchell 1996, 57).

The nostalgia industry is based on the embellishment or re-creation of the past by the use of artifice (device, deceit, ingenuity) for commercial purposes. Nostalgic representations (see figures 1.1 and 1.2) have nothing to do with history; they are merely “symptoms of the waning of our historicity” (Jameson 1991). “Advertising is not treated as epiphenomena of natural production but as the dream machines of everyday life” (Rojek 1995, 88).

The nostalgia industry represents one of the most opaque masks of white cultural dominance. The nostalgic illustrations of Norman Rockwell staged a comeback in 1989 mainstream commercial images to sell breakfast cereal and station wagons. These images appear to show whiteness as lost innocence. Rockwell’s compositions (see figure 1.3) symbolize some of the chief components of nostalgic mythology in the United States: small towns, family rituals, mischievous boys, flirtatious girls, and mainstream institutions such as the Boy Scouts, the pre-integration school, and church. The only problem is that everyone is white.
Postmodern Advertising

Magical thinking is at the heart of both religion and advertising.
—James B. Twitchell, *Adcult USA*

Advertising promises instant access to desire and love; consequently advertising seems to assume a belief in magic. Postmodern advertising—characterized by a rapid succession of visually appealing images (the speed-up effect), repetition, and high-volume, mood-setting music (see chapter 6)—is much more symbolic and persuasive than informative. Advertising is an arena in which conspicuous role display and reversal, preening, and symbolically enticing situations are evident.

Direct marketing has left its pejorative status as junk mail, expanding in scope and often contending directly with advertising. Direct marketing has the advantage that it is more focused or targeted than advertising. Specialized magazines, cable television, and new media markets make it possible to cut the target market into narrow and more clearly delineated slices (Woods 1995).

While modern advertising presented itself as an unquestionable authority figure—a high priest of sorts—postmodern advertising presents itself as an insider, an ally of the common person. Modern advertising used a paternalistic model; like your physician, it knows what is best for you. Now advertising is trading in the semblance of godlike knowledge for the role of a funny, self-deprecatory chum. Often there is self-parody (Twitchell 1996). The point of parody, to be sure, is that the viewer detects the dupe so well that it does not have to be explicitly revealed. Sometimes there is even the suggestion of a secret agreement between the viewer and the advertising agency.

Postmodern advertising admits something to the public that its antecedents would never have dreamed of admitting: that its goal is to grab our attention in order to persuade us to buy its brand. Advertising agencies have begun to acknowledge their true raison d’être. Postmodern advertising is admitting that it can no longer manipulate consumers as its predecessors once did. This is highly significant because it demonstrates that consumers interpret ads; they do not just accept them at face value. The public is no longer “con” friendly; rather, it is more skeptical, cautious, savvy, and educated. Advertisers are starting to admit what Kuhnian scholars have known all along: you cannot separate your “objective” judgments from your value-laden experiences.

In modern advertising, the image of the advertising executive was that of a manipulative liar or an evil seducer of the innocent. Now in postmodern advertising, the image is that of a slightly crazed fool. Nevertheless, this underestimation of the ad exec by the consumer guarantees the advertiser’s success and makes advertising a very powerful social force.
Advertising has been stripped of its mystic authority. Postmodern advertising has recognized this and is now flaunting it as a technique to sell to those who have been sold out by the empty promises of advertising (e.g., if you buy the car, the sexy young woman comes with it; if you use our makeup, you become the perfect provocateur: youthful, beautiful, and, of course, sexy). The consumer has become very distrustful of the hard sell.

Now, in order to market a brand, advertisers usually have to use a very soft sell. It is so soft that the product is not the focus and is, in fact, often jettisonable. It is not that advertising no longer wishes to be authoritative; rather, ads and commercials get the consumer’s attention by proclaiming their presence or participation and matter-of-factly admitting their ulterior motive—to sell their brand merchandise. When the Energizer Bunny trots through the logos of other brand products, he is essentially saying, “Let’s come clean; we know that you know that this is just a commercial!”

Advertising, again like early Christianity, was always at its purest, its most vital, when it was countercultural and confrontational (Twitchell 1996). Christianity was never a greater social force than when in conflict with another culture. “It has never been as vigorous as when it tangled with the Romans” (Twitchell 1996, 235). Advertising’s new emphasis on self-mockery seems to take precedence over its mission to sell—and this may cause advertising to lose its competitive edge.

Advertising is no longer viewed as the manipulative villain. Instead, it has become the boy next door. In the process of shedding its depraved image, it has also oversaturated the public, leaving the consumer bored and unstimulated. In a tongue-in-cheek analysis of postmodern advertising, renowned copyeditor Howard Gossage comments: “The object of ... advertising should not be to communicate with your consumers and prospects at all, but to terrorize your competition copywriters.”

Since consumers know that material consumption does not bring happiness, successful advertisers connect their commodities to the elements of a valued social life (e.g., warm and happy family relationships, romance and love, meaningful friendships, relaxing leisure time, high self-esteem). Yet advertising pushes us to material consumption and pulls us away from meaningful relationships for happiness. Alternative strategies and values are not presented.

The Benetton Controversy Continues

The old law of an eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind.
—Martin Luther King Jr.

We are still human. We still have feelings.
—Edgar Ace Hope (death-row inmate)

I am not ready to die.
—Joseph Amrine (death-row inmate)

Benetton, a popular Italian clothing manufacturer, has created controversy through its graphic advertising, often depicting emotional scenes and contemporary social issues. In January 2000, Benetton, in a magazine-sized institutional advertisement, “We, On
Death Row,” published photos of and essays on death-row inmates, some of whom had already been executed (see figure 1.4). Critics maintained that Benetton has exploited powerless inmates for profit. Nevertheless, two of the two-year project’s contributors, Speedy Rice and Williman B. Moffitt, defend it for “bringing a human face to the individuals on death row.”

Benetton has used “United Colors of Benetton” in its advertising campaigns since 1983. This appeals to racial harmony and a “global village” look (see figure 1.5). This type of ad displays people from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds to reflect society’s greater acceptance of racial and ethnic diversity. (See the cultural attitudes model in chapter 4.)

Many of Benetton’s ads do not even show its products. Instead, the photographs attempt to capture social issues that are on the cutting edge. Benetton has a reputation for provocative advertising, with shocking visuals to attract the reader’s attention.

Postmodernity is a restless age in which new ideologies contest established traditions, making even more uncertain the highly uncertain environment (Hirsch 1972) that cultural producers, such as advertisers, face. The unspoken rules—a “business as usual” mentality of what is acceptable and appealing to the public, what consumers buy, and what award panels choose as “distinguished”—are often exposed and held up to scrutiny during times of social change (Pescosolido, Grauerholz, and Milkie 1997). Attempts to rearrange power, which are reflected in ethnic conflict, change the way in which cultural gatekeepers use their cultural “tool kits” (Swidler 1986). This is precisely what Benetton has done and continues to do in its advertising images.

Some of Benetton’s ads are so controversial that they have been banned from publication. Take, for example, the ad (figure 1.6)
showing a black woman nursing a white baby. This attention-grabbing photograph was considered too provocative for print advertising in the United States and Great Britain. The image harkens back to the antebellum era when house slaves often served as wet nurses for the babies of slave masters.

HIV and AIDS is a topic that is certainly socially relevant, political, timely, and controversial. The ad in figure 1.7 taps into this; the “H.I.V. positive” stamp shows us the stigma borne by persons who are HIV positive or have AIDS. Once a person has been labeled HIV positive, he or she is symbolically branded with a new identity. This cultural representation is negative and often carries with it prejudice and discriminatory treatment. Does it perpetuate the myth that AIDS is transmitted only through anal sex or does it expose the belief as a myth?

The ad in figure 1.8 portrays a white man and a black man handcuffed together. The men are wearing identical apparel: denim jeans and jean jackets and light-blue shirts. This ad was published in the United States but was later pulled after civil rights organizations protested that the photo was racist because it implied that the black man was a criminal. But it is not clear in the ad which man is the criminal—the black man, the white man, or both.

Benetton continues to publish ads that tend to evoke emotional responses from viewers. For example, figure 1.9 shows a blood-stained T-shirt and camouflage pants. Figure 1.10 shows a priest and nun kissing.
Benetton’s advertising provides a great example of the contested ideologies of post-modernism. The objective is still bottom-line profit. The method, however, is indirect: the product or service is ignored in favor of photographs that are controversial.

**Advertising as Social Life**

In a postmodern image culture . . . advertising becomes an important and overlooked mechanism of socialization as well as manager of consumer demand.

—Douglas Kellner

The advertising industry essentially produces propaganda for commodities. Satisfaction is guaranteed with a purchase. Not only do advertising images try to sell a product by associating it with particular socially efficacious characteristics, but also they sell nothing less than an expansive worldview, a lifestyle, and system of values consistent with the imperatives of consumer capitalism (Kellner 1988).

Symbolic images in advertising develop a link between the product or service offered and socially desirable and meaningful traits to persuade the consumer that the product or service will produce a highly coveted lifestyle. Advertising obfuscates the manner in which a capitalistic system of economics creates and maintains a class-based society in which only a few can really afford to consume at the level depicted as the ideal in ads (Dines and Humez 1995).

“In the preindustrial world the object of advertising was often events, not objects” (Twitchell 1996, 9). Advertising sections of newspapers proclaimed the arrival of ships bearing new merchandise. In the modern world this process became commercialized. In the postmodern world there are now fifteen-second video ads while we wait for our cash transactions. Advertising is everywhere: on television and radio, in magazines, newspapers, and the mail; on billboards, buses, trucks, and subways—even in urinals. We are totally immersed in the messages—the pictures and words—of advertising. In postmodernity, advertising is pervasive. It fills up the spaces of our existence and is in the air that we breathe (Jhally 1990). We mistakenly tend to view advertising as a natural reflection of everyday social life. In decoding advertising imagery, I hope to attack the virtual invulnerability of the advertising industry in our society.

In our capitalist economy, profit is the vital pulse behind the production, distribution, and consumption of products and services. “Advertising legitimizes and even sacralizes consumption as a way of social life” (Dines and Humez 1995, 71). The major commodity being bought and sold is the audience for advertising, segmented along gender, ethnic, class, and age lines. Thus, any analysis of the role of mass media within a capitalist economic commodity system necessitates a look at advertising not only as an industry per se but also as discourse about cultural objects.

Advertising is indeed a very powerful social force. Nevertheless, it is clear to me that advertising caters to mass consumers much more than it actually changes their attitudes and behavior. Advertising does not function by formulating values and attitudes on its own; rather, it draws upon and redirects issues that the target audience or common culture already shares. Advertising packages our emotions and sells them back to us. It other words, advertising reflects (not affects) beliefs, values, and ideologies (cultural beliefs that serve to justify social stratification). Researchers in advertising agencies attempt to dis-
cover and expose our attitudes, moral judgments, and, sometimes, how we interact with others.

Ads then use images of these same attitudes, moral judgments, and social acts as cues to sell to us—sort of a cultural judo throw, using our psychological needs and desires and moral ideas to the advertiser’s advantage. In other words, advertising uses elements of popular culture to which we are already sympathetic and empathetic. “Goods are knitted into the fabric of social life and cultural significance” (Jhally 1990, 80). In a sense, consumers participate in their own manipulation.

Advertising and Dramaturgy

Erving Goffman (1976) has studied gender images in advertising. He borrows terms from the theater (e.g., actor, role, cue, script, performance, offstage, onstage) in his dramaturgical model, which emphasizes the little details of daily life. Goffman’s focus on social life as theater fits perfectly with a sociology of advertising. Goffman’s work pointed sociology toward a focus on interaction rituals and the self. His 1976 study of gender stratification in advertising, Gender Advertisements, reveals how gender distinctions inform our ceremonial life. Specifically, ads are highly manipulated representations of recognizable or institutional scenes from “real life.” Ads tell us a lot about ourselves, about the link between fashioned image and “natural behavior.” Ads tell us about the way self-image is developed and socially determined. Advertisements affirm existing social arrangements. In a social or public setting, the minutest behavior has meaning. Gesture, expression, and posture not only expose how we feel about ourselves but also construct a scene that embodies cultural values (Goffman 1976). Goffman’s focus on gesture, expression, and posture ideally suits advertising analysis.

Model-development institutes teach models techniques with posture, facial expressions, body gestures, foot placement, and eye contact. These methods are designed to improve runway body movement and posing for still photographs. The institutes offer workshops on fashion, makeup, and hair design under the assumption that high fashion is both trendy and theatrical. Students must first pay the fee (approximately $100 for a several-hour course) because it is also claimed that a certain technique is required to accomplish this look. Other workshops are specifically designed to help models create several different appearances.

Ads try to tell us who we are and who we should be. Although advertisements appear to display real people, they are actually displaying depictions of ethnic and gender relations as they function socially. There are two basic points concerning gender here. First, ads tell us that there is a big distinction between appropriate behavior for men or boys and that for women or girls. Second, advertising and other mass media reinforce the notion that men are dominant and that women are passive and subordinate. In chapter 3, I use examples from a children’s book to show how rigid and exclusive gender roles are set in early childhood. Moreover, while the masculine role is valued, the feminine counterpart is devalued.

Ads sell much more than products. They sell moral values and cultural images, such as concepts of success, love, and sexuality. Jean Kilbourne argues that advertising is a very powerful social force that should be taken seriously. Her videos (e.g., Killing Us Softly: Advertising Images of Women; Still Killing Us Softly; and Calling the Shots: Women and
Public and Private Pictures

Photographs are either private or public (Goffman 1976). Private pictures are those designed for display within an intimate social circle of friends, especially those featured in them. They commemorate occasions and rituals, relationships, achievements, and life-turning points in relationships, families, groups, and organizations. Private pictures are taken by hobbyists, enthusiasts, amateurs, or dabblers, not professionals. Public pictures are those intended to attract an extensive audience—an anonymous assemblage of individuals unconnected to one another by social relationships and social interaction, although they fall within the same market or political jurisdiction or have the same interests. Public pictures are mass produced in newspapers, magazines, books, leaflets, or posters. Public pictures are diverse in function and character. There are commercial pictures designed to sell a product or a service for an advertiser. There are also news photos related to matters held to be of current social, political, or scientific importance (see figure 1.11). There are instructional pictures—for example, illustrations in medical textbooks. Human interest pictures, anonymous and often candid, display otherwise un-noteworthy individuals who articulately (and presumably unintentionally) show some response, such as anger, fear, surprise, or puzzlement, or some inner state, such as hopelessness, innocence, or joy, or how we look and what we do when we think no one sees us. This type of picture, if done with sensitivity, acumen, and skill, is timeless and aesthetically appealing. Personal publicity pictures are designed to bring before the public an unusual or intimate portrait of a celebrity in some arena—political, religious, military, sporting, theatrical, literary, or social—where a class elite still functions. These photos are often taken by the paparazzi, who have come under increasingly sharp criticism after the death of Princess Diana. In short, public pictures are photographs or illustrations that are intended for display to public audiences. Finally, portrayals of people in children’s books fit the definition of advertising that I borrow from Goffman (1976): something that is brought to the attention of the public, especially by paid announcement (see chapter 4).

With the rise of popularity in such web sites as myspace.com, facebook.com, and Youtube.com, there has been a blurring of the private-public distinction. This is because individuals, especially young people, are posting private photos of themselves, friends, family, lovers, etc. However, once they appear on a web site, they are transformed into the public domain.

The Structures of Racial and Gender Inequality

That’s part of American greatness—discrimination. Yes, sir. Inequality I think, breeds freedom and gives a man opportunity.

—Lester Maddox, former governor of Georgia

Ethnic and gender representations in advertising are intricately linked to social arrangements and the power structure. The mass media are the strongest glue that bonds the diverse groups that compose a heterogeneous national and global community. Ethnic
groups and social classes of all types share a great deal of common culture through the media. Yet ethnic minorities and the lowest social classes have little to do with the creation of mainstream culture.

The portrayal of unique subcultural groups in the media indicates that the groups have a type of power, a secure place in society, and a noted identity. Conversely, nonrepresentation suggests the powerless status of groups that do not possess significant material or political power bases (Gross 1991). Those near the bottom of social stratification are kept in their powerless places in part through their relative invisibility in the media. When groups or viewpoints do achieve prominence, the way that prominence is illustrated will itself resonate with the inclinations and vested interests of the elite gatekeepers who set the public agenda. These gatekeepers are typically white, middle-aged, male, middle and upper-middle class, and heterosexual.

Advertising is a very powerful force that articulates, develops, transforms, and elaborates these ideas of ethnicity, gender, and social class. Advertising (or the media in general), nevertheless, does not present a uniform conception of such complex issues. Nor does it typically consciously or deliberately conspire against members of protected classes. Such explanations are oversimple, accusatory, convenient, and misleading. Racism in advertising is more inferential or symbolic than overt.

As social importance is manifested through the appearance and varied performances of a social group, so too can the devaluation of groups be transmitted through *symbolic racism* (subtle ethnic stereotyping, trivialization of minority empowerment or racial equality, or the absence of ethnic representations). Symbolic racism involves seemingly fundamental illustrations of events and situations relating to race that have racist postulates and approaches built in as undisputed assumptions. This allows racist remarks to be presented without ever bringing into question the racist assumptions on which the assertions are grounded.

Racism cannot be treated as a simple product of capitalism. Historically, racist stereotyping has been documented at least since the propaganda of the Christian crusaders (Said 1978). Racism has also been linked to the emergence of religious formations, ethnic identities, and nation-states that predate capitalism. For example, the Muslim trade in African slaves was well established in the first millennium A.D.

Racial images in advertising are important for at least two reasons. First, there is evidence that advertising and other media images help to shape attitudes about race and ethnicity. Thus, we can select the ethnic images that advertisements present to individuals. Second, ads can provide a barometer of the extent to which ethnic minorities have penetrated social institutions dominated by white males. That is, ads reflect in which arenas (e.g., business, politics, the economy, education, sports, entertainment, academia, art, the military, religion) the power of a white-male-dominated social system is challenged by minorities, including women.

The contemporary ethnic and feminist movements, with all their agitation about the meaning of the little details in daily life, have served as an electric prod to the work of many social scientists, giving new impetus and direction to their work, whose very substance is the observation of concrete detail in social life. Because of this, the most ordinary verbal or nonverbal exchange between white males and minorities now reverberates with new meaning (e.g., the notion of political correctness).
The simplest gesture, the most familiar ritual, taken-for-granted form of address, has become a source of new understanding, albeit not without occasional conflict, with regard to ethnic and gender relations, including the underlying social arrangements behind such relations. Operating out of a politics that originates with individual feelings, ethnic scholars and feminists have made clear what social scientists should have always known: It is in the details of daily exchange that the discrepancy between actual experience and apparent experience is to be found.

The minute details of social behavior are indicative revelations of how a sense of self is established and reinforced. That sense of self, in turn, both reflects and cements the social institutions upon which rests a culture’s hierarchical structure. My point is that if one evaluates the details of social life from a highly critical stance, one learns profoundly who and what one is in the social lifeworld.

**Social, Political, and Environmental Messages**

Advertising sells more than products or services; it also sells values and attitudes. It attempts to persuade, build trust, and change or reinforce values, opinions, and attitudes on social issues. This section examines the following four types of messages:

- **Advocacy Advertising** attempts to persuade or sell a value or attitude.
- **Subvertising** uses brand recognition against itself.
- **Institutional Advertising** tries to build lifetime trust or undo damage to a company’s or government’s reputation.
- **Hybritising** combines two types of advertising. In this section, it refers to advocacy and institutional advertising.

**Advocacy Advertising**

Advocacy advertising attempts to influence public opinion on important social, political, or environmental issues of concern to the sponsoring organization (O’Guinn, Allen, and Semenik 1998). It often challenges conventional wisdom and presents alternative interpretations of social problems and political issues. Advocacy advertising essentially enhances participatory democracy, bringing issues into public view by attracting media attention. Advocacy advertising is sponsored by nonprofit organizations or companies that use nonprofit foundations to pay for ads.

The power of counteradvertising to attract attention and critique existing social arrangements is demonstrated in an incident from the 1940s. In 1942, the White Rose, an inconsequential bunch of German university students, began a humble propaganda campaign against the Nazis (Jacobs and Heller 1992). Members distributed anti-Gestapo proclamations and eyewitness exposés of atrocities on the Eastern Front. For over a year, the Nazis were frustrated by the band’s knack for avoiding capture. Though inexhaustible, most members of the group were eventually arrested, prosecuted, and summarily hanged as enemies of the government.

**Civil Rights.** The American Civil Liberties Union sponsored an advocacy ad with a stark image of many bullet holes in a metal sheet to protest the police killing of a defenseless and harmless man. The copy reads:
On February 4th, 1999, the NYPD gave Amadou Diallo the right to remain silent. And they did it without ever saying a word. Firing 43 bullets in 8 seconds, the police killed an unarmed innocent man. Also wounded that night was the constitutional right of every American to the process of law. Help us defend your rights. Support the ACLU.

**Poverty and Global Hunger.** An advocacy ad sponsored by the nonprofit organization, Barnardo’s, pushing for the alleviation of children born into poverty includes a shocking visual—a newborn infant being bottle-fed liquid poison. This represents the immediate and absolute dangers and disadvantages of poverty into which some children face at birth. The bottle of poison represents the despair, hopelessness, and dangers of life-threatening poverty. The poverty-stricken newborn is forced to drink poison vis-à-vis the nutritious and life-sustaining milk that the typical newborn receives from its mother. The message is simple: poverty kills.

An ad sponsored by the World Food Programme, illuminates the serious problem of world hunger. There is enough food to feed the world’s population yet one child dies of hunger every four seconds. Today, one in nearly seven people do not get enough food to be healthy and lead an active life, making hunger and malnutrition the number one risk to health worldwide—greater than AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined.

Another advocacy ad on world hunger, is sponsored by Food for the Poor, an inter-denominational Christian-based organization and ministry working to end hunger and suffering in the Caribbean and Latin America, appeals to potential donors and sponsors through social responsibility. This ad shows a little girl, obviously impoverished, looking pleadingly at the camera. The copy reads, “Food for the poor and you.”

**Political Issues.** A T-shirt marketed by ThoseShirts.com, a company that uses conservative humor in their products, has a photo of 2008 Democratic presidential candidate, Hillary Rodham Clinton, with a red circle around it and a diagonal line through it. The text reads: “Re-defeat Communism 2008”—an expression of opposition to Clinton’s presidential campaign and liberal views.

In 2004, an ad used in President Bush reelection campaign contains copy that reads: “10 of 10 terrorists agree anyone but Bush.” This insinuates that the Democratic candidates were soft on terrorism.

Another T-shirt from ThoseShirts.com announces the U.S. Armed Forces Freedom World Tour much as a rock band announces it summer concert tour. It points out that the U.S. military has freed many countries from France, Germany, and Japan during World War II to Kuwait (1991) to Afghanistan (2001) to Iraq (2003). The shirt also chides France and Germany for not supporting America’s invasion of Iraq, claiming that they “sold out.” Finally, Syria, North Korea, and Iran are threatened by a U.S. invasion “to be announced.”

Figure 1.12 is an anti-war message sponsored by the Cathedral of Hope. A photo of a young and frightened
Middle-Eastern girl standing in front of an adult provides the visual for this advocacy ad. The headline underneath this visual, “Who would Jesus bomb?” subverts the popular “What would Jesus do?” (wwjd) and provides startling commentary.

**Ethnic Issues.** Figure 1.13 is an advocacy ad sponsored by the American Indian College Fund. Their theme is “Educating the mind and spirit.” The major goal of this non-profit organization is to raise funds for Native Americans for higher education. Native Americans are the most educationally disadvantaged racial or ethnic group in the United States. The visual shows a young college-aged Native American woman. The informal printed font of the headline is a quote from her: “If I stay on the rez [reservation] I can use my education to help my people.” The ad goes on to say: “After attending a tribal college, nearly 80% of native Americans take jobs to help their cultural communities.” This ad is marketing the idea that education is important for helping your people and giving back to your community.

Figure 1.14 is an advocacy ad sponsored by the Freedom Center. In this text-only ad, the headline is a quote which reads: “He’s a very articulate black man.” There is a line through the word “black.” The quote is not blatantly racist but a more subtle type of symbolic racism. Implicit is the notion that black people are not as articulate as white people. The ad goes on to say that “Together we can stamp out prejudice. It only takes one voice to make a difference.”

**Health Issues.** An advocacy ad for AIDS awareness sponsored by the San Francisco AIDS Foundation entitled “Sex Is Good” was used to kick off AIDS Awareness Month. The ads show both heterosexual and homosexual couples, some of whom are interracial. Placements included both the San Francisco Chronicle and Examiner. The ad encourages responsible behavior of sexually active persons. The ad raised the ire of the Marines because one of the male models has a tattoo of the Marine Corps emblem clearly visible.

In a strongly worded letter, the Marine Corps demanded that the foundation stop running and destroy the ad. “The use of the emblem in your advertisement could create the
inference that the Marine Corps is somehow partially responsible for the spread of AIDS in the San Francisco area,” wrote Marine Major K. H. Winters, Acting Assistant Staff Judge Advocate for Research and Civil Law. The letter goes on to request that the foundation “remove the advertisement from future distribution and destroy the advertising layout.”

The foundation did not comply with the request. Pat Christen, executive director of the SF AIDS Foundation wrote, “We have no intention of complying with the Marines’ request. It is patently absurd. We are not selling perfume here. We are attempting to stem the tide of a raging epidemic by educating sexually active persons about the responsibilities that accompany sexual activity. These responsibilities include knowing one’s antibody status. The assumptions the Marines make in their letter are pathetic and silly.”

“This ad in no way suggests that the Marines are responsible for spreading AIDS. The ad was developed to encourage people who may be at risk for AIDS to get an antibody test. Any sexually active person may be at risk for AIDS. This includes sexually active Marines and former Marines, tattooed or not, whatever their sexual orientation may be,” added Les Pappas, campaign development director and the man responsible for creating the ad.

The Marines’ letter to the foundation also stated that “your use of our emblem could be viewed as tacit approval of homosexuality by the Marine Corps. As you are no doubt aware, neither the Marine Corps nor the Department of Defense permits homosexuals to serve in their uniformed ranks.” Christen refused to comment on this paragraph of the letter and stated that “its inanity speaks for itself.”

Figure 1.15 was created and sponsored in 2007 by the Ministry of Health of Portugal. It is a campaign that uses a character called Doctor Teddy Bear to encourage people to get their cholesterol checked. The ad warns that high blood cholesterol is one of the major causes of heart disease and strokes. Since there are no symptoms, testing is the only way to find out.

Drug Abuse. Figures 1.16 to 1.18 are provocative ads created by the Montana Meth Project, the largest advertiser in Montana, reaching 70–90 percent of teens three times a week. This is saturation-level advertising. The research-based messaging campaign—

![Fig. 1.15](image1.png) ![Fig. 1.16](image2.png) ![Fig. 1.17](image3.png) ![Fig. 1.18](image4.png)
which graphically portrays the ravages of methamphetamine use through television, radio, billboards, and Internet ads—has gained nationwide attention for its uncompromising approach and demonstrated impact.

The campaign’s core message, “Not Even Once,” speaks directly to the highly addictive nature of meth. The Project’s print advertising, featured in high school newspapers and on billboards across Montana, reveal the severe physical and psychological impacts associated with meth use (figures 1.16 and 1.18 ). This campaign shows the devastating impact meth has on the friends and family of meth users (figure 1.17).

**Domestic Violence.** Figure 1.19, sponsored by CASA (Citizens Against Spouse Abuse) whose main goal is to stop the cycle of violence by educating different communities about the serious problem of spouse abuse. The men’s muddy work boot sitting atop the women’s sandal represents the devastating effects of the psychological oppression of domestic violence. The copy reads: “When someone controls your life, it’s no longer your life.”

**Gun Safety.** The grainy photo of a young blond child wrapped in a beach towel standing at the edge of a swimming pool provides an ominous visual for Cease Fire (figure 1.20). The organization is selling responsible parenting and gun safety. The copy delivers a tragic tale:

Louis Taylor hid his .357 Magnum so well, it took his son 6 years to find it. Louis Taylor kept his handgun unloaded in a locked case. The bullets were kept hidden in another part of the house. How did his six-year-old son, Ron, end up dead? Like every child there was nothing in his house he didn’t know about. If you think you can keep your handgun out of the hands of your children . . . please, think again.

**Poverty.** Poverty is correlated with changes in family structure (e.g., divorce, single women with children). In 1960, most poor families contained both men and women. By 2000, 53 percent of all poor families were female-headed (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000c). This has been referred to as the **feminization of poverty.** One-half of all children in the United States will live with a single parent at some point before reaching the age of eighteen (Macionis 2002; Ellwood 1988, 45–46). The increase in female-headed households is related to increasing rates of divorce, separation, and single parenting. These smaller households result in a large number of little, poorer households competing for a restricted number of affordable
homes and decent jobs. The ad in figure 1.21 is sponsored by Dress for Success, a nonprofit organization that provides low-income women with used suits for job interviews and work.

**Animal Rights**

I believe that mink are raised for being turned into fur coats and if I didn’t wear fur coats those little animals would never have been born. So is it better not to have been born or to have lived for a year or two to have been turned into a fur coat? I don’t know.

—Barbi Benton, former Playboy bunny turned actress

This provocative ad (figure 1.22) was produced to persuade people like Barbi Benton to change their attitudes on the slaughter of mammals for the sake of fashion.

**Homelessness.** The poster “If Society Can Provide Housing for a Man Like This, Can’t We Do More for the Homeless?” (figure 1.23) points to a glaring inconsistency in public policy. Why do we take better care of convicted mass murderers like Charles Manson than of the innocent homeless? Homelessness has now become criminalized in many urban areas.

**Antiwar.** The poster in figure 1.24 was used to protest the Desert Storm victory parade in
New York City in 1991. The striking illustration is a photograph of the charred remains of an Iraqi war casualty. The copy reads: “On June 10th, the U.S. war machine that burned thousands of humans will get a ‘victory’ parade . . . It was right to resist the war. Resist this parade of shame.” This antiwar message again became timely in the wake of what President George W. Bush called “The Battle of Iraq” in 2003.

Safe Sex. This advocacy poster sponsored by ACT-UP (figure 1.25), perhaps the most vocal AIDS advocacy organization, is entitled “Safe Sex Is Hot Sex.” The poster was created for the “Red Hot and Blue Project” in New York in the 1980s. It is reminiscent of that time, with the dawn of the AIDS era and a presidential administration that refused to recognize the epidemic as a national health concern. Consequently, Ronald Reagan dragged his feet in funding research that would identify and treat the killer disease.

Subvertising

Subvertising overthrows or subverts mainstream ads. It uses the power of brand recognition and brand hegemony either against itself or to promote an unrelated value or idea. It essentially turns rationalization on its head—a major theme in postmodernism. Subvertising has also been called “culture jamming” (Twitchell 1996) and “counteradvertising” (Henshel 1990). Subvertising uses the same motivational appeal as commercial advertising.

Traffic signs warning “CAUTION” and showing an image of a man and a woman pulling a child and running rapidly can be found along and near the U.S.-Mexico border. T-shirts from ThoseShirts.com subverts the traffic sign with the words “border security” followed by “the ultimate b.s.” while using conservative humor to mock border security and, ultimately, the lack of enforcement of federal immigration policy.

A recent Dolce & Gabbana ad shows a beautiful young woman wearing a tight black dress and spiked heels in a very vulnerable position—on her back. A lean, muscular, semi-nude young man is on this knees using his arm strength and leverage to pin down the sexually alluring woman. Four other young men are standing nearby watching, expressing interest, and perhaps waiting their turn. Although the image conveys the onset of a violent gang rape, the advertisers claim that the ads represents an erotic dream or sexual fantasy or game. It is not hard to understand why the ad raised the ire of consumer groups in the U.S., Spain, and Italy. A later ad subverts the orginal one by adding the headline “offensive to women” across the top center of the ad in large bold all-cap font. The subvertising is claiming that the original ad is offensive to women. (In fact, it is offensive to anyone who opposes sexual violence against women).

Figure 1.26, “Uncle Sam wants you,” is perhaps the most famous poster in the world. Created by James Montgomery Flagg and originally published as the cover for the July
6, 1916, issue of *Leslie’s Weekly* with the title “What Are You Doing for Preparedness?” This portrait of “Uncle Sam” is itself already an example of subvertising. Over four million copies were printed between 1917 and 1918, as the United States entered World War I and began sending troops and supplies into war zones. A contemporary T-shirt, a subverting of figure 1.26, is an anti-immigration message. The T-shirt has the original image of “Uncle Sam” and reads: “I want you to speak English or get out!” This shirt conveys conservatives’ disapproval of a recently proposed but rejected immigration bill that would have given amnesty to millions of illegal immigrants, without requiring that they actually learn English. Instead the bill required that they merely “demonstrate an attempt to gain an understanding of the English language”—a condition that the shirts’ makers and wearers consider far too lenient.

Another example of subvertising is the sabotage of the Marlboro man (see chapter 6, “Segmentation in Cigarette Marketing”). The illustration in figure 6.4, with its two rugged cowboys on horseback, has the distinct look of a Marlboro ad. But the brief boldface copy—“Bob, I’ve got emphysema”—is startling.

Another example of the first type is the attacks on the use of sex to sell beer (figure 1.27). “Quit using our cans to sell yours” proclaims the copy of an ad showing disgruntled women, referring to the use of scantily clad women in Budweiser beer ads.

The ad’s sponsor, the Dangerous Promises Coalition in Los Angeles, was prepared to pay the going rate for billboard space. Nevertheless, the ads were rejected by all of the mainstream billboard companies in the area. The coalition finally managed to purchase space on a portable billboard and arranged for it to be displayed in Hollywood at Sunset and Highland. With no additional promotion, photographs of the billboard appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* the day before the Wine Institute decided to revise its advertising code.

The San Francisco branch of the Dangerous Promises Coalition created the counterad shown in figure 1.28. A media firm originally agreed to sell billboard space but reneged
two weeks later. The coalition was twice more rejected. It then used media refusal to accept its subvertising to launch the Bay Area media campaign.

The second type of subvertising—the use of advertising to promote an unrelated value or product—is demonstrated in the ad in figure 1.29; it exploits the famous Tommy Hilfiger logo and copy on T-shirts, baseball caps, and neckties to proclaim a message of forgiveness and salvation.

Calvin Klein, one of the greatest purveyors of consumer culture in the late twentieth century, uses some of the most sexually explicit advertising representations to sell clothes. His famous “ck” logo has also been exploited to advertise a different message of hope and good news. The logo is put on sweatshirts and T-shirts under the copy “Christ is King.”

Figure 1.30a, a World War II poster by J. Howard Miller, Westinghouse for War Production Coordinating Committee, features Rosie the Riveter, an icon and inspirational symbol for women in the workforce during wartime. Figure 1.30b, an ad by Proctor & Gamble, subvertizes this well-known image only this time, Rosie has “Tampax was there” tattooed on her flexed right bicep.
Institutional Advertising

Institutional advertising involves trust-building, and attempts to entice a loyal, lifelong consumer, and to connect a business, corporation, or government to a social, environmental, or political cause. While both advocacy and institutional advertising may deal with social issues, advocacy is sponsored by nonprofit organizations while institutional advertising attempts to build trust or negate damage to a for-profit organization’s or government’s reputation. Corporations, industries, and governments sometimes use advertising as bureaucratic propaganda, just as national governments use psychological warfare or religious cults use proselytization. Bureaucratic propaganda tries “to bring an audience around to the special viewpoint of a particular bureaucracy” (Henshel 1990, 61).

Institutional advertising attempts to persuade a public audience to adopt a certain attitude about a particular firm or institution (Henshel 1990). With traditional advertising, a company merely emits commercial messages to sell a particular brand of automobile. If institutional advertising is carried off successfully, it can be used to justify enormous profit.

Institutional advertising tries to create an emotional bond between consumers and the company. For example, Aetna Life Insurance Company’s institutional advertising (figure 1.31) states: “We want you to know Aetna’s Culture of Diversity. The ad goes on to point out that the firm is promoting diversity “from inside and out” and that it has earmarked “up to $100 million dollars to invest in and with minority- and women-owned businesses.” The ad concludes that Aetna “was listed as one of the top 50 employers for both minorities and women in a recent special Advertising Section in FORTUNE magazine.” What most people do not know about Aetna is that the company flourished because of the slave trade. In 2002 Aetna and other companies were accused of conspiracy, human rights violations, unjust enrichment from their corporate predecessors’ roles in the slave trade, and conversion of the value of the slaves’ labor into their profits.

These corporations benefited from stealing people and forced labor, forced breeding, torture, and committing numerous terrible actions. Should they be able to hold onto assets they acquired through such horrendous acts?

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Fig. 1.31
Figure 1.32 is an institutional ad for Toyota, the Japanese automaker. There is a photo of civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. giving a speech. Toyota links its theme, Moving Forward, with the cause of civil rights. The message is brief and to the point: “Moving forward starts with not leaving his message behind. Celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King’s birthday. 01.15.07.” Similarly, Timberland’s ad (figure 1.33) decrees: “Give racism the boot.”

Family values are being implicitly touted in this institutional ad sponsored by the Ford Motor Company (figure 1.34). The headlines states: “INNOVATION because you’re not just changing lanes . . . you’re moving precious cargo.” A young mother is gently lifting her sleeping child out of a car seat. Ford is making the claim that their vehicles are “safer” and “help save lives.” The company is trying to garner lifelong loyal customers.

**Hybritising**

Hybritising combines two types of advertising. For example, the ad in figure 1.35 uses two sponsors: Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) and Allstate Insurance. Both organizations benefit from the amelioration of drunk driving. Since MADD is a nonprofit organization, it is advocacy advertising. But because Allstate is a profit-seeking corpo-
ration, it is institutional advertising; since the ad combines both types, it may be referred to as hybridising. The ad is stirring: an auto key impaling an olive in a martini; the brief copy: Killer cocktail.

Overview

This book examines the ways in which cultural symbols, ethnic minorities, and women are displayed in advertisements. There is focus on print ads since they are a significant part of the advertising arena. Approximately 50 percent of advertising revenues are earmarked for various print media; 22 percent are spent on television commercials (Kellner 1988).

Consider how advertising, often unintentionally, reflects our values, belief systems, and behavior (in addition to shopping and purchasing). This is the latent, or unintended, function of advertising. This book is chiefly concerned with the latent consequences of advertising, not its manifest objectives and activities of selling brand goods and services.

This book expands Goffman’s (1976) and Kilbourne’s (1989) analyses of gender differences by examining images of minority men and women in advertising. The ideal images of men and women that advertising presents to the consumer in order to sell products or services are examined. The way that minority men and women are often held to the white standard of perfection is critiqued. This has significant implications for assimilation, identity, and racial integration. For example, the copycat: the concurrent production of two nearly identical ads except for the ethnic background of the models. This uses one approach for two different (e.g., black and white) target audiences.

Three possible models for the way minorities are presented in ads are examined. First is the notion of equal presentation: whites and minorities are shown in exactly the same way, regardless of any cultural, economic, or physical differences. Consequently, if whites are presented predominantly as middle-class persons in middle-class settings, ethnic minorities are portrayed similarly, regardless of actual differences in class distribution. Analyses of copycat ads (chapter 4) support this framework. Furthermore, since the structural obstructions to the procurement of wealth are not visible in the world of advertising, the tacit message is that a group’s relative indigence is the outcome of inner failure, a notion compliant with the ideology of the American dream.

Second is the social-reality model. There is also evidence for this prototype. Since minorities are more likely to be poor or in lower-status occupations than whites, ads reflect any differences that currently exist in society. This realistic approach draws the public’s attention to the very real inequalities in our society. However, both the equal-presentation and social-reality models ultimately fall short.
Finally, a case can be made that cultural attitudes toward ethnic minorities affect the way minorities are portrayed in advertising. Cultural attitudes held by whites toward people of color affect how they are depicted in ads and television commercials.

Chapter 3 focuses on the use of fear, intimidation, and violence in advertising. Advertisers have exploited, maintained, and developed women’s fear of being pursued or sexually assaulted. Numerous ads reveal this disturbing trend of violent images. While some messages are meant to be subliminal, others are blatant. Goffman’s concept of mock assault demonstrates this theme. Chapter 3 also analyzes visual representations of the child as sex object in advertising, another distressing trend.