

UC Merced

UC Merced Undergraduate Research Journal

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I Heart Sex

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Journal

UC Merced Undergraduate Research Journal, 8(2)

Author

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Publication Date

2016

DOI

10.5070/M482030782

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Undergraduate



I Heart Sex

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Conservatism is an idea and concept of the past. Revealing images of women were first publicly introduced during the infamous Prohibition era, commonly known as the reign of gangsters, mafias, and the flirtatious flappers. Women began to experiment with short dresses and short-shorts to flaunt their long, lean, and sexy legs. This newfound experimentation with clothing was frowned upon by most Americans, but as the fashions of the elite spread throughout the media, ordinary people began to adopt this new style that represented values of freedom, expression, independence, and self-confidence.

Furthermore, Americans who choose to wear revealing clothing in the present day argue about boosting values like self-esteem in men and women who want to feel attractive according to society's standards. Other celebrities or fashion icons try to promote their political views on issues like animal cruelty by posing bare naked in non-profit *PETA* ads. A good number of young models also feel comfortable in baring their skin, even men nowadays are seen shirtless in *Abercrombie & Fitch* ads. However, despite an increase in gender equality, women are more frequently being targeted and dehumanized as objects of sexual desire. Print ads like the *Arby's* Roastburger ad uses sexual innuendos to target a male audience, where two buns are displayed to represent a women's breasts. While most ads are easy to interpret, other ads, like the *Dove* beauty campaign subtly utilize body demeaning messages to decrease self-esteem in women, and therefore increase sales profits.



Arby's Roastburger Ad

Sexual connotations in the media can be seen or heard anywhere one may travel throughout the world. Although, recently sexual innuendos have been commonly targeted towards women's body parts. If women do not fit into societal standards, these women are made to feel like failures and then shamed for being ugly (Chapman 2). Women seem to have double standards compared to men, in which women are expected to not only join the workforce, but to also maintain a beautiful appearance. More specifically, women are imposed with the responsibilities of maintain a pretty face, keeping a healthy weight, having firm breasts, nice clothes, keeping the home clean, taking care of the kids, and going to work (Chapman 2). The media makes women feel as though beauty is a very important aspect of life, something that women need to constantly spend time and money worrying about.

The *Arby's* restaurant chain reinforces sexist beauty standards for women in a recent ad where a woman is covering up a pair of burgers with her hands, obviously representing the women's breasts. While viewing *Figure 1* for *Arby's* new Roastburger,

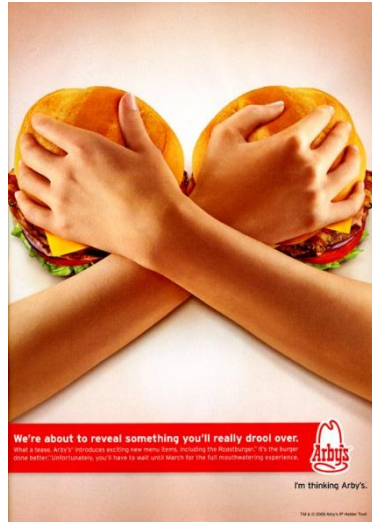


Figure 1: The Arby's Roastburger ad

Features a woman's buns as a sexual joke, expressing the desire men have for food and sex, all in a single image.

Source: <http://www.buzzfeed.com/ries/arbys-subtle-burger-ad-6y>

*Note: This image is no longer featured on Arby's official website.

a handful of people may laugh at this image and brush it aside as nothing, while others may see this ad as offensive and sexist to women who are more than just large breasts, but are intelligent people with their own thoughts and feelings.

The *Arby's* ad is not directed towards women or feminists. Instead, the *Arby's* ad is designed to attract male customers, with the main headline of the ad stating "We're about to reveal something you'll really drool over" (Reis). In replacing a women's breasts with two burgers, this *Arby's* ad aims to sexually arouse men in a way that will influence these men buy the new Roastburger. The big question to ask about this ad is why are men the main target audience and women the object of appeal? This breast and burger ad is a sign, revealing the unsolved gender issues that are still not addressed in American society.



It may be an everyday sight to see a topless model in a fashion magazine, but is “sexualizing” food crossing the line? A few people may agree, while other people may disagree with this question. Others, such as Taylor M. Chapman would argue in her article “Women in American Media: A Culture of Misperception,” that objectifying women or relating women’s body parts to food can lead to violence and sexual harassment by male counterparts (5). When men begin to view women as sex tools, these men also begin to devalue women as humans, who also have thought thoughts, feelings, and emotions that are similar to men. In these terms, while the *Arby’s* ad in *Figure 1* may be seen as a joke, in reality it is a very serious issue. Internalizing such media messages can lead men to sexualize women and cause women to alter their physical appearance to fit into the molds created by the media.

As the object of desire, women are frequently seen as food, something a man can buy, possess, and devour whenever he may please. Not saying that all men view women as sexual objects, but for those who do, this *Arby’s* burger ad may be just the right ad to encourage these consumers to buy *Arby’s* new Roastburger. Steve Craig writes in his article “Men’s Men and Women’s Women” in the *Signs of Life in the USA* by Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon that “Men’s women are portrayed as physically attractive, slim, and usually young and white, frequently blond, and almost always dressed in revealing clothing” (192). On a similar note, women tend to want men that are “good looking, sensitive, romantic, and appreciative” (196). Therefore, it can be seen, as claimed by Steve Craig, that men want to see women as sexually appealing items that are available to entertain and encourage unrealistic fantasies. Craig also reveals that women want





men that are both attractive and thoughtful, like a complete 2 in 1 package. There are also ads with shirtless men that can be viewed in magazines or on television commercials, but revealing ads of women greatly outnumber the ads of the opposite gender. These gender roles seem to place the men as the spectators and the women as the toys or utensils for entertainment. Despite this fact, it is obvious that women contribute much more to society than some individuals may realize as both home makers and fully employed individuals.

Women are just as independent as men in present day America. Men are not the only consumers of food or fashion related products, and Gloria Steinem's essay "Sex, Lies, and Advertising" further dives into feminist issues where "Ms. could prove that women were important purchasers of "people products," just as men were" (254). That is to say, women too have equal rights to sample and purchase products with money that is earned from a paying job. Men are not the only purchasers of the new Roastburger, women also dine out at fast food restaurants like *Arby's*. Nowadays, men do not "rule the world" with the same authority that existed in previous decades.

The display of burgers as women's breasts on the *Arby's* burger ad gives both men and women a glimpse of the culture Americans have both adopted and actively created. The times have not changed as much as once envisioned, it is "still a man's world" in some respects. The *Arby's* food chain gives the men what they want, even though it may be considered unethical by others. This burger ad arouses men's sexual desires, while it may rouse the anger of feminists like



Gloria Steinem, who has been an advocate for women in the fashion industry. According to the perspective of the *Arby's* advertisers, the actions taken to produce this ad were to promote the restaurant and to gain more business. The interesting concept is the way the *Arby's* corporation chose to endorse the Roastburger. The fact that burgers were intended to represent a women's breasts is an indication of how half naked women are more desirable and acceptable compared to women who choose to cover themselves with clothing.

PETA's Bare Naked Ads

On television and in magazines, women are praised for their natural beauty and hourglass figures. Large breasts and large buttocks are objects of desire for sensual men and for women who do not feel beautiful. In *PETA* (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) ads, celebrities with such perfect bodies pose in different settings to show support for animals that are being mistreated or abused. Most *PETA* ads, like the one in *Figure 2* will feature naked celebrities. Most *PETA* ads however, showcase a majority of naked women over naked men.



Figure 2: A PETA ad that features stars from the HULU television show *If I Can Dream*. PETA ads often contain naked celebrities to prove a point in order to advocate animal rights.

Source: http://www.peta.org/media/psa/type/print/?category_name=celebrities#foobox-1/116/ificandreamPETA72.jpg?20151027061521

While the many celebrities that are featured on *PETA* ads believe they are doing something good, some critics believe that such *PETA* ads are doing more harm than good. Some do not understand why *PETA* is exploiting and showcasing naked women, because there are many other ways to advocate for animal rights. In fact, some countries have banned *PETA* ads due to their offensive content and almost pornographic imagery. Ads that are banned in certain areas are featured on the official *PETA* website.

The naked women featured in *PETA*'s ads would not be deemed fat or ugly according to societal standards. The women in the ads are wealthy celebrities who can afford to alter their bodies using plastic surgery or expensive make-up. Rich and famous women are more likely to undergo plastic surgery for breast enlargements, or a "boob job." The high beauty standards set by celebrities influences ordinary Americans to spend nearly "\$33 billion on weight loss; \$7 billion on cosmetics; \$300 million on cosmetic surgery" (Jacobsen & Mazur 74-87). These



advertisers make women with heavier or curvier bodies feel insecure and even physically unacceptable for not having the perfect body. In fact, the large breasts seen *PETA* ads or in the media are often times enhanced with tight and clothing or special effects in the camera to make the breasts seem large and firm. “The laws of physics dictate that large breasts eventually droop downward, but the breasts depicted in ads are typically high, firm, and a round shape that is only attainable by very young or surgically altered women” (Jacobsen & Mazur 74-87). Therefore, thousands of women are tricked into believing that the perfect body is impossible to attain compared to the physique of a young female model.

This new American obsession for “the perfect body” has gotten quite out of control. There are women that will go to the extremes of wearing tops or dresses with plunging necklines just to show others “how much they got.” It is normal to see Hollywood stars, such as those in the *PETA* ads wearing translucent and provocative clothing to accentuate the body and tightly hug the figure. While some believe that exposure to the bodies of celebrity women has no overall effect on young women, the truth is that the negative effects of media exposure are subtle and processed through the subconscious mind, without any personal realization that one is being influenced by the messages (Chapman 1). Young women do fall for media traps that include female models with perfect bodies, and seeing naked women in *PETA* ads decreases the self-esteem young women have of their own body image.



Another issue that arises with *PETA* ads featuring women is that women of non-Caucasian descent are usually shown as exotic jungle animals with animal-like body paint, which is a way of implying that non-white women are not as civilized as white models (Chapman 3). Non-Caucasian models are featured less than Caucasian models on *PETA*'s celebrity ads, and when these models are featured they are usually posing as jungle creatures. Aside from sexualizing women in their ads, *PETA* further discriminates against minority race women, all while preaching an anti-violence propaganda against animals. Women of all skin color and body types are being negatively affected by *PETA* ads, especially young girls of color who see very few colored models of their own race.

Dove's "Yin-Yang" Campaign

Retailers and the media realize and frequently manipulate the fact that many women express low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction. Similar to the ads produced by *PETA*, *Dove* ads featuring normal American women also have a subtle, but negative affect on self-esteem. *Dove* soap retailers have developed a 'Campaign for Real Beauty' that use deceitful methods to lower, rather than increase women's body image and self-esteem. As seen in *Figure 3*, the *Dove* soap company uses a checkbox method of beauty that may make women with certain flaws



Figure 3: A dove beauty ad that forces women to choose between two extremes: either you are beautiful or you are not beautiful. While this ad seems positive at first glance, it becomes negative once one applies these scenarios to oneself.

Source: http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_chanhonoproj/1691

more aware of those flaws, especially when one of the two checkboxes is desirable while the other checkbox is undesirable. Research also shows that while the women seen in the *Dove* ads are flaunting their natural beauty, in reality these images are still Photoshopped, filtered, and “fixed” to create a more pleasing picture (Elias & Gill 183). So one may question if *Dove’s* campaign is real or fake, if they women in the ads are still modified to some degree to look more photogenic in the eyes of the photographers. The subtle ads produced by *Dove* became popular when they were first released, but they may not have the positive effects one would think. The *Dove* campaigns seemed to assume that increasing one’s self-esteem was an easy task with simple self-reminders of one’s own beauty (Elias & Gill 182). However, increasing a women’s self-esteem is not that simple in reality, especially when a women does not believe she is genuinely beautiful. In other words, the *Dove* campaign is teaching young women to lie to themselves, even though these lies may even prove to have some benefit if told enough times. Aside from the majority of female

models, some men are also making a debut in the modeling industry, and these men are also facing similar objectification issues.

Abercrombie & Fitch Shirtless Male Ad

Women's bodies are not the only entities being sold into the advertising market, because men are also stepping into the sensual category of the fashion industry. Although women are more explicitly featured in revealing ads, the same is happening for male models, but to a lesser degree. The popular clothing brand *Abercrombie & Fitch* has also boarded the train of sexist advertising as seen in *Figure 4*, by displaying muscular and shirtless male models in suggestive poses. Such inappropriate advertisements promote not only the product, but sexual intercourse as well.



Figure 4: Abercrombie & Fitch male models pose shirtless as they await the Black Friday sale, where excited girls will have a chance to meet them for the first time. Source:

<https://img.buzzfeed.com/buzzfeed-static/static/2013-11/enhanced/webdr05/30/20/grid-cell-8247-1385862695-1.jpg>



The *Abercrombie & Fitch* male models seen on the windows of the store are usually Caucasian men with rock hard abs. The *Abercrombie & Fitch* website has used the catch phrase “VOTE FOR YOUR CITY TO GET THE HOTTEST GUYS FLOWN-IN FROM AROUND THE WORLD FOR BLACK FRIDAY” (“Abercrombie & Fitch”). In an attempt to entice young girls to buy new clothes during the Black Friday weekend of Thanksgiving, the *Abercrombie & Fitch* retailers are bringing in “hot guys” from around the world to mingle with the anxious young females. These unethical strategies used to attract customers are being employed by other clothing retailers as well, and to be honest, these strategies are working. More than clothes, food, or any other beauty product, sex is a top selling concept that is helping advertisers become instantaneously rich. Sex and anything that has to do with sex sells, because sex is directly linked to beauty, and only beautiful people tend to have a lot of sex with other beautiful people. Television shows like “*How to Look Good Naked*” exploit human fascination of sex by bringing in girls with low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction and helping them feel better by ‘baring it all’ in their underwear as they walk down a catwalk in the mall (Elias & Gill 183). While the girls on the catwalk may feel good momentarily as they gain public support for being “confident” as well as nearly naked, this boost in self-esteem is only temporary. Self-esteem drops once one is left along to his or her own thoughts, so attempts made by the *Dove* campaign or even the show “*How to Look Good Naked*” are not effective in the long run. Men also battle similar self-esteem issues and body dissatisfaction issues as women, and showcasing muscular models decreases self-esteem in men who do not have this ideal body type. Advertisers that choose to utilize male



models as the main showcase pieces for new products are challenging ordinary, American men to compete with the muscular models that females so adore.

Men and Women May Be in the Same Boat

This competition for the survival-of-the-fittest has become quite literal in the sense that skinny women and athletic men have the ideal body images that Americans strive to attain in unhealthy ways. Men are expected to have unnatural looking, steroid enhanced bodies by exercising at the gym or at home. A nice physical appearance comes with hard work and lots of sweat, but for overweight men battling weight problems, it can be hard to get the right kind of attention from women. Although, the dreadful truth is that most people are meant to resemble PETA female models or Abercrombie & Fitch male models. Women are not the only ones being socially pressured to conform to societal norms. Men feel the same pressures women do and also go to extremes to sculpt the perfect face and body.

It may be evident that men love sex and breasts, but women love sex just as much as men do. If men want female nudity, then women also desire to see nude males. The *PETA* ads also feature some nude male models as seen in *Figure 2* with the celebrities. However, even with the addition of male models, women are being the most negatively affected by media ads, especially when there are ten times more dieting and weight ads in women's magazines, compared to men's magazines (Chapman 4). Most ads are still targeted towards women in the media, and these ads do more harm than they do good, especially when dealing with self-esteem issues.



The freedoms of living in America have encouraged the blossoming forth of new fashions and styles that continue to change. The clothing style transitions made during and after the Prohibition era have marked the turn of the modern era as well. As far as setting a good example for America, advertisers have failed, because there does not seem to be a positive aspect many ads that may have positive intentions.

The image of women has changed to mirror the tastes of men, and this is seen in the *Arby's*, *Dove*, and *PETA* ads. Women were never meant to be objects of sexual appeal, instead women were made to nurture and promote the growth of the human race. Similarly, men are also used as sexual objects to appeal to the tastes of women, and the *Abercrombie & Fitch* male models, as well as some *PETA* models are an example of ideal men in the fantasies of numerous women. Men also go through the same insecurities and self-torture as women do to create a physical image that will be acceptable in the eyes of the rest of the world. Even with men and women, both young and old, facing the same issues, women are more overly used in arousing ads. All in all, ads with borderline pornographic images of women are more widespread than images of half nude males, because women are assumed to be the more seductive and alluring of the two sexes.

Living in a society that places pressure on men and women to have a variety of sexual encounters, it can be difficult for an individual to reject receiving sensual pleasure from an activity that is enjoyed by the masses. No single person can stop the media or advertisers from producing inappropriate material, but one may openly refuse to accept the products or ideas



being sold, while encouraging others to do so as well. The consequences of saying “no” to sex or erotic advertisement may cause one to become what may seem an old fashioned social reject, but at least that individual can proudly support a movement against the sexual revolution that is subtly sabotaging the minds’ of young men and women.



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