

5

BUYING AND SELLING GENDER

In the video called *Adventures in the Gender Trade*, Kate Bornstein, a transgender performance artist and activist, looks into the camera and says, “Once you buy gender, you’ll buy anything to keep it.” Her observation goes to the heart of deep connections between economic processes and institutionalized patterns of gender difference, opposition, and inequality in contemporary society. Readings in this chapter examine the ways in which modern marketplace forces such as commercialization, commodification, and consumerism exploit and construct gender. However, before we explore the buying and selling of gender, we want to review briefly the major elements of contemporary American economic life—elements that embody corporate capitalism—which form the framework for the packaging and delivery of gender to consumers.

DEFINING CORPORATE CAPITALISM

Corporate capitalism is an economic system in which large, national and transnational corporations are the dominant forces. The basic goal of corporate capitalism is the same as it was when social scientists such as Karl Marx studied early capitalist economies: converting money into more money (Johnson, 2001). Corporate capitalists invest money in the production of all sorts of goods and services for the purpose of selling at a profit. Capitalism, as Gitlin (2001) observes, requires a consumerist way of life.

In today’s society, corporate capitalism affects virtually every aspect of life—most Americans work for a corporate employer, whether a fast food chain or a bank, and virtually everyone buys the products and services of capitalist production (Johnson, 2001; Ritzer, 1999). Those goods and services include things we must have in order to live (e.g., food and shelter) and, most important for contemporary capitalism’s survival and growth, things we have learned to want or desire (e. g., microwave ovens, televisions, cruises, fitness fashions, cosmetic surgery), even though we do not need them in order to live (Ritzer, 1999).

From an economic viewpoint, we are a nation of consumers, people who buy and use a dizzying array of objects and services conceived, designed, and sold to us by corporations. George Ritzer (1999), a leading analyst of consumerism, observes that consumption plays such a big role in the lives of contemporary Americans that it has, in many respects, come to define our society.

218 • PART II: PATTERNS

In fact, as Ritzer notes, Americans spend most of their available resources on consumer goods and services. Corporate, consumer capitalism depends on luring people into what he calls the “cathedrals of consumption,” such as book superstores, shopping malls, theme parks, fast food restaurants, and casinos, where we will spend money to buy an array of goods and services.

Our consumption-driven economy counts on customers whose spending habits are relatively unrestrained and who view shopping as pleasurable. Indeed, Americans spend much more today than they did just forty years ago (Ritzer, 1999). Most of our available resources go to purchasing and consuming “stuff.” Americans consume more of everything and more varieties of things than people in other nations. We are also more likely to go into debt than Americans of earlier generations and people in other nations today. Some social scientists (e.g., Schor, 1998, p. 2004) use the term *hyperconsumption* to describe what seems to be a growing American passion for and obsession with consumption.

MARKETING GENDER

Gender is a fundamental element of the modern machinery of marketing. It is an obvious resource from which the creators and distributors of goods and services can draw ideas, images, and messages. The imagery of consumer culture thrives on gender difference and asymmetry. For example, consumer emblems of hyperfemininity and hypermasculinity, such as Barbie and GI Joe, stand in stark physical contrast to each other (Schiebinger, 2000). This is not happenstance. Barbie and GI Joe intentionally reinforce beliefs in essential differences between women and men. The exaggerated, gendered appearances of Barbie and GI Joe can be purchased by adult consumers who have the financial resources to pay for new cosmetic surgeries, such as breast and calf implants, that literally inscribe beliefs about physical differences between women and men into their flesh (Sullivan, 2001). As Walters observes (2001), turning difference into “an object of barter is perhaps the quintessentially

American experience” (p. 289). Indeed, virtually every product and service, including the most functional, can be designed and consumed as masculine or feminine (e.g., deodorants, bicycles, greeting cards, wallpaper, cars, and hair styles).

Gender-coding of products and services is a common strategy employed by capitalist organizations to sell their wares. It is also integral to the processes by which gender is constructed, because it frames and structures gender practices. Let’s look at the gender-coding of clothing to illustrate how consumer culture participates in the construction of gender through ordinary material forms. As the gender archeologist Sorenson (2000) observes, clothing is an ideal medium for the expression of a culture’s gender beliefs because it is an extension of the body and an important element in identity and communication. No wonder corporate capitalists have cashed in on the business of fabricating gender through dress (Sorenson, 2000). Sorenson (2000) notes that simple observation of the clothing habits of people reveals a powerful pattern of “dressing gender” (p. 124). Throughout life, she argues, the gender-coding of colors, patterns, decorations, fabrics, fastenings, trimmings, and other aspects of dress create and maintain differences between boys and girls and men and women. Even when clothing designers and manufacturers create what appear to be “unisex” fashions (e.g., tuxedos for women), they incorporate just enough gendered elements (e.g., lacy trim or a revealing neckline) to insure that the culturally created gender categories—feminine and masculine—are not completely erased. Consider the lengths to which the fashion industry has gone to create dress that conveys a “serious yet feminine” business appearance for the increasing number of women in management and executive levels of the corporate world (Kimle & Damhorst, 1997). Contemplate the ferocity of the taboo against boys and men wearing skirts and dresses. Breaking the taboo (except on a few occasions such as Halloween) typically results in negative sanctions. The reading in this chapter by Adie Nelson examines the extent to which even fantasy dress for children ends up conforming to gender stereotypes.

Gender-coded clothing is one example of corporate exploitation of gender to sell all kinds of goods and services, including gender itself. Have we arrived at a moment in history when identities, including gender identity, are largely shaped within the dynamics of consumerism? Will we, as Bornstein observes, buy anything to keep up gender appearances? The readings in this chapter help us to answer these questions. They illuminate some of the key ways in which capitalist, consumer culture makes use of cultural definitions and stereotypes of gender to produce and sell goods and services.

In our “consumers’ republic” (Cohen, 2003), the mass media (e.g., television and magazines) play a central role in delivering potential consumers to advertisers whose job it is to persuade us to buy particular products and services (Kilbourne, 1999; Ritzer, 1999). The advertising industry devotes itself to creating and keeping consumers in the marketplace, and it is very good at what it does. Today’s advertisers use sophisticated strategies for hooking consumers. The strategies work because they link our deepest emotions and most beloved ideals to products and services by persuading us that identity and self-worth can be fashioned out of the things we buy (Featherstone, 1991; Zukin, 2004)). Advertisers transform gender into a commodity, and convince consumers that we can transform ourselves into more masculine men and more feminine women by buying particular products and services. Men are lured into buying cars that will make them feel like hypermasculine machines, and women are sold a wondrous array of cosmetic products and procedures that are supposed to turn them into drop-dead beauties.

Jacqueline Urla and Alan Swedlund’s article explores the story that Barbie, a well advertised and wildly popular toy turned icon, tells about femininity in consumer culture. They note that although Barbie’s long, thin body and big breasts are remarkably unnatural, she stands as an ideal that has played itself out in the real body trends of *Playboy* magazine centerfolds and Miss America contestants. The authors provide evidence that between 1959 and 1978, the average weight and hip size for women centerfolds and

beauty contestants decreased steadily. A follow-up study for 1979–88 found the acceleration of this trend with “approximately 69 percent of *Playboy* centerfolds and 60 percent of Miss America contestants weighing in at 15 percent or more below their expected age and height category” (p. 298). One lesson we might glean from this story is that a toy (Barbie) and real women (centerfolds and beauty contestants) are converging in a culture in which the bonds of beauty norms are narrowing and tightening their grip on both products and persons (Sullivan, 2001). To illustrate the extent of media’s influence even further, Kirsten Firminger’s piece on representations of males in teenage girls’ magazines demonstrates the power of print media to guide readers not only toward consumption of gendered products and services but also toward consumption of (stereo)types of people who are packaged much like other gendered products.

Any analysis of the marketing of femininity and masculinity has to take into account the ways in which the gendering of products and services is tightly linked to prisms of difference and inequality such as sexuality, race, age, and ability/disability. Consumer culture thrives, for example, on heterosexuality, whiteness, and youthfulness. Automobile advertisers market cars made for heterosexual romance and marriage. Liquor ads feature men and women in love (Kilbourne, 1999). Recent research on race and gender imagery in the most popular advertising medium, television, confirms the continuing dominance of images of White, affluent, young adults. “Virtually all forms of television marketing perpetuate images of White hegemonic masculinity and White feminine romantic fulfillment” (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000, p. 386). In spite of what is called niche marketing or marketing to special audiences such as Latinos, gay men, and older Americans, commercial television imagery continues to rely on stereotypes of race, gender, age, and the like (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000). Stereotypes sell.

Two readings in this chapter address intersections of prisms of difference and inequality in consumer culture. The first, by Toni Calasanti and Neal King, offers detailed insight into the

220 • PART II: PATTERNS

mass-marketing of “successful aging” products, services, and activities to old men. They highlight the fact that marketing that targets old people plays upon the stigma of aging in American culture and, in the case of men, the often desperate attempts of aging men to hang onto youthful manliness. The second, by Minjeong Kim and Angie Chung, is a close analysis of multicultural advertising strategies that rely on racialized, sexualized, and gendered stereotypes of Asian American women as the “Other” not only to sell products but also to sell Orientalism itself.

CAN YOU BUY IN WITHOUT SELLING OUT?

The tension between creativity, resistance, and rebellion, on the one hand; and the lure and power of commercialization on the other, is a focus of much research on consumerism and consumer culture (Quart, 2003; Schor, 2004). Can we produce and consume the gendered products and services of corporate capitalism without wanting and trying to be just like Barbie or Madonna, the Marlboro Man or Brad Pitt? Does corporate, commercial culture consume everything and everyone in its path, including the creators of countercultural forms?

The latter question is important. Consider the fact that “grunge,” which began as antiestablishment fashion, became a national trend when companies such as Diesel and Urban Outfitters coopted and commercialized it (O’Brien, 1999). Then contemplate how commercial culture has cleverly exploited the women’s movement by associating serious social issues and problems with trivial or dangerous products. “New Freedom” is a maxipad. “ERA” is a laundry detergent. Cigarette ads often portray smoking as a symbol of women’s liberation (Kilbourne, 1999). Commercial culture is quite successful in enticing artists of all sorts to “sell out.” For example, Madonna began her career as a rebel who dared to display a rounded belly. But, over time, she has been “normalized,” as reflected in the transformation of her body to better fit celebrity appearance norms (Bordo, 1997).

The culture of the commodity is also successful in mainstreaming the unconventional by

turning nonconformity into obedience that answers to Madison Avenue (Harris, 2000). Analysts of the commodification of gayness have been especially sensitive to the potential problems posed by advertising’s recent creation of a largely fictional identity of gay as “wealthy White man” with a lifestyle defined by hip fashion (Walters, 2001). What will happen if lesbian and gay male styles are increasingly drawn into mass-mediated, consumer culture? Will those modes of rebellion against the dominance of heterosexism lose their political clout? Will they become mere “symbolic forms of resistance, ineffectual strategies of rebellion” (Harris, 2000, p. xxiii)?

THE GLOBAL REACH OF AMERICAN GENDER IMAGES AND IDEALS

The global reach of American culture is yet another concern of consumer culture researchers. Transnational corporations are selling American popular culture and consumerism as a way of life in countries around the world (Kilbourne, 1999; Ritzer, 1999). People across the globe are now regularly exposed to American images, icons, and ideals. For example, *Baywatch*, with its array of perfect (albeit cosmetically enhanced) male and female bodies, has been seen by more people in the world than any other television show (Kilbourne, 1999). American popular music and film celebrities dominate the world scene. Everyone knows Marilyn Monroe and James Dean, Tom Cruise and Julia Roberts.

You might ask, and quite legitimately, so what? The answer to that question is not a simple one, in part because cultural import-export relations are intricate. As Gitlin (2001) observes, “the cultural gates . . . swing both ways. For example, American rhythm and blues influenced Jamaican ska, which evolved into reggae, which in turn was imported to the United States via Britain” (p. 188). However, researchers have been able to document some troubling consequences of the global advantage of American commercial, consumer culture for the lifeways of people outside the United States. Thus, social scientists (e.g., Connell, 1999; Herdt, 1997) are tracing how American categories of sexual

orientation are altering the modes of organization and perception of same-gender relations in some non-Western societies that have traditionally been more fluid and tolerant of sexual diversity than the United States.

Scientists are also documenting the impact of American mass media images of femininity and masculinity on consumers in far corners of the world. The island country of Fiji is one such place. Researchers have discovered that as the young women of Fiji consume American television on a regular basis, eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa are being recorded for the first time. The ultra-thin images of girls and women that populate U.S. TV shows and TV ads have become the measuring stick of femininity in a culture in which, previously, an ample, full body was the norm for women and men (Goode, 1999). The troubling consequences of the globalization of American consumer culture do not end with these examples. Consider the potential negative impact of idealized images of whiteness in a world in which most people are brown. Or how about the impact of America's negative images of older women and men on the people of cultures in which the elderly are revered?

Although corporate, capitalist economies provide many people with all the creature comforts they need and more, as well as making consumption entertaining and more accessible, there is a price to pay (Ritzer, 1999). This chapter explores one troubling aspect of corporate, consumer culture—the commodification and commercialization of gender.

A few final questions emerge from our analysis of patterns of gender in relationship to consumer capitalism. How can the individual develop an identity and self-worth that are *not* contingent upon and defined by a whirlwind of products and services? How do we avoid devolving into caricatures of stereotyped images of femininity and masculinity, whose needs and desires can only be met by gendered commodities? Is Kate Bornstein correct when she states that “Once you buy gender, you’ll buy anything to keep it?” Or can we create and preserve alternative ways of life, even ways of life that undermine the oppression of dominant images and representations?

REFERENCES

- Bordo, S. (1997). Material girl: The effacements of postmodern culture. In R. Lancaster & M. di Leonardo (Eds.), *The gender/sexuality reader* (pp. 335–358). New York: Routledge.
- Coltrane, S., & Messineo, M. (2000). The perpetuation of subtle prejudice: Race and gender imagery in 1990s television advertising. *Sex roles*, (42), 363–389.
- Cohen, L. (2003). *A consumers' republic: The politics of mass consumption in postwar America*. New York: Vintage Books
- Connell, R. W. (1999). Making gendered people: Bodies, identities, sexualities. In M. Ferree, J. Lorber & B. Hess (Eds.), *Revisioning gender* (pp. 449–471). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Featherstone, M. (1991). The body in consumer culture. In Featherstone, Hepworth, & Turner (Eds.), *The body: Social process and cultural theory* (pp. 170–196). London: Sage.
- Gitlin, T. (2001). *Media unlimited: How the torrent of images and sounds overwhelms our lives*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.
- Goode, E. (1999). Study finds TV alters Fiji girls' view of body. *New York Times*, May 20, p. A17.
- Harris, D. (2000). *Cute, quaint, hungry and romantic: The aesthetics of consumerism*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press.
- Herdt, G. (1997). *Same sex, different cultures*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Johnson, A. (2001). *Privilege, power, and difference*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.
- Kilbourne, J. (1999). *Can't buy my love*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Kimle, P. A., & Damhorst, M. L. (1997). A grounded theory model of the ideal business image for women. *Symbolic Interaction*, 20 (1), 45–68.
- Marenco, S., with Bornstein, K. (1993). *Adventures in the gender trade: A case for diversity*. Filmmakers Library.
- O'Brien, J. (1999). *Social prisms*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge.
- Quart, A. (2003). *Branded: The buying and selling of teenagers*. New York: Basic Books.
- Ritzer, G. (1999). *Enchanting a disenchanted world*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge.
- Schiebinger, L. (2000). Introduction. In L. Schiebinger (Ed.), *Feminism and the body* (pp. 1–21). New York: Oxford University Press.

222 • PART II: PATTERNS

- Schor, J. (1998). *The overspent American*. New York: Basic Books.
- Schor, J. (2004). *Born to buy*. New York: Scribner.
- Sorenson, M. L. Stig. (2000). *Gender archaeology*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press.
- Sullivan, D. A. (2001). *Cosmetic surgery: The cutting edge of commercial medicine in America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Walters, S. D. (2001). *All the rage: The story of gay visibility in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Zukin, S. (2004). *Point of purchase: How shopping changed American culture*. New York: Routledge.

Introduction to Reading 21

Adie Nelson's article offers a marvelously detailed analysis of one way in which the modern marketplace reinforces gender stereotypes—the gender coding of children's Halloween costumes. Nelson describes the research process she employed to label costumes as masculine, feminine, or neutral. She provides extensive information about how manufacturers and advertisers use gender markers to steer buyers, in this case parents, toward “gender-appropriate” costume choices for their children. Overall, Nelson's research indicates that gender-neutral costumes, whether they are ready-to-wear or sewing patterns, are a tiny minority of all the costumes on the market.

1. Many perceive Halloween costumes as encouraging children to engage in fantasy play. How does Nelson's research call this notion into question?
2. Describe some of the key strategies employed by manufacturers to “gender” children's costumes.
3. How do Halloween costumes help to reproduce an active-masculine/passive-feminine dichotomy?

THE PINK DRAGON IS FEMALE

HALLOWEEN COSTUMES AND GENDER MARKERS

Adie Nelson

* * *

The celebration of Halloween has become, in contemporary times a socially orchestrated secular event that brings buyers and sellers into the marketplace for the sale and purchase of treats, ornaments, decorations, and fanciful costumes. Within this setting, the wearing of fancy dress costumes has such a prominent role

that it is common, especially within large cities, for major department stores and large, specialty toy stores to begin displaying their selection of Halloween costumes by mid-August if not earlier. It is also evident that the range of masks and costumes available has broadened greatly beyond those identified by McNeill (1970), and that both

From Nelson, Adie. 2000. “The pink dragon is female: Halloween costumes and gender markers” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 24.

children and adults may now select from a wide assortment of readymade costumes depicting, among other things, animals, objects, superheroes, villains, and celebrities. In addition, major suppliers of commercially available sewing patterns, such as Simplicity and McCall's, now routinely include an assortment of Halloween costumes in their fall catalogues. Within such catalogues, a variety of costumes designed for infants, toddlers, children, adults, and, not infrequently, pampered dogs are featured.

On the surface, the selection and purchase of Halloween costumes for use by children may simply appear to facilitate their participation in the world of fantasy play. At least in theory, asking children what they wish to wear or what they would like to be for Halloween may be seen to encourage them to use their imagination and to engage in the role-taking stage that Mead (1934) identified as play. Yet, it is clear that the commercial marketplace plays a major role in giving expression to children's imagination in their Halloween costuming. Moreover, although it might be facilely assumed that the occasion of Halloween provides a cultural "time out" in which women and men as well as girls and boys have tacit permission to transcend the gendered rules that mark the donning of apparel in everyday life, the androgyny of Halloween costumes may be more apparent than real. If, as our folk wisdom proclaims, "clothes make the man" (or woman), it would be presumptuous to suppose that commercially available children's Halloween costumes and sewing patterns do not reflect both the gendered nature of dress (Eicher & Roach-Higgins, 1992) and the symbolic world of heroes, villains, and fools (Klapp, 1962, 1964). Indeed, the donning of Halloween costumes may demonstrate a "gender display" (Goffman, 1966, p. 250) that is dependent on decisions made by brokering agents to the extent that it is the aftermath of a series of decisions made by commercial firms that market ready-made costumes and sewing patterns that, in turn, are purchased, rented, or sewn by parents or others. . . .

Building on Barnes and Eicher's (1992, p. 1) observation that "dress is one of the most

significant markers of gender identity," an examination of children's Halloween costumes provides a unique opportunity to explore the extent to which gender markers are also evident within the fantasy costumes available for Halloween. To the best of my knowledge, no previous research has attempted to analyze these costumes nor to examine the ways in which the imaginary vistas explored in children's fantasy dress reproduce and reiterate more conventional messages about gender.

In undertaking this research, my expectations were based on certain assumptions about the perspectives of merchandisers of Halloween costumes for children. It was expected that commercially available costumes and costume patterns would reiterate and reinforce traditional gender stereotypes. Attempting to adopt the marketing perspective of merchandisers, it was anticipated that the target audience would be parents concerned with creating memorable childhood experiences for their children, envisioning them dressed up as archetypal fantasy characters. In the case of sewing patterns, it was expected that the target audience would be primarily mothers who possessed what manufacturers might imagine to be the sewing skills of the traditional homemaker. However, these assumptions about merchandisers are not the subject of the present inquiry. Rather, the present study offers an examination of the potential contribution of marketing to the maintenance of gender stereotypes. In this article, the focus is on the costumes available in the marketplace; elsewhere I examine the interactions between children and their parents in the selection, modification, and wearing of Halloween costumes (Nelson, 1999).

METHOD

The present research was based on a content analysis of 469 unique children's Halloween ready-made costumes and sewing patterns examined from August 1996 to November 1997 at craft stores, department stores, specialty toy stores, costume rental stores, and fabric stores containing catalogues of sewing patterns. Within

224 • PART II: PATTERNS

retail stores, racks of children's Halloween costumes typically appeared in August and remained in evidence, albeit in dwindling numbers, until early November each year. In department stores, a subsection of the area generally devoted to toys featured such garments; in craft stores and/or toy stores, children's Halloween costumes were typically positioned on long racks in the center of a section devoted to the commercial paraphernalia now associated with the celebration of Halloween (e.g., cardboard witches, "Spook trees," plastic pumpkin containers). Costumes were not segregated by gender within the stores (i.e., there were no separate aisles or sections for boys' and girls' costumes); however, children's costumes were typically positioned separately from those designed for adults. . . .

All costumes were initially coded as (a) masculine, (b) feminine, or (c) neutral depending on whether boys, girls, or both were featured as the models on the packaging that accompanied a ready-to-wear costume or were used to illustrate the completed costume on the cover of a sewing pattern. . . . The pictures accompanying costumes may act as safekeeping devices, which discourage parents from buying "wrong"-sexed costumes. The process of labeling costumes as masculine, feminine, or neutral was facilitated by the fact that these public pictures (Goffman, 1979) commonly employed recognizable genderisms. For example, a full-body costume of a box of crayons could be identified as feminine by the long curled hair of the model and the black patent leather pumps with ribbons she wore. In like fashion, a photograph depicting the finished version of a sewing pattern for a teapot featured the puckish styling of the model in a variant of what Goffman (1979, p. 45) termed "the bashful knee bend" and augmented this subtle cue by having the model wear white pantyhose and Mary-Jane shoes with rosettes at the base of the toes. Although the sex of the model could have been rendered invisible, such feminine gender markers as pointy-toed footwear, party shoes of white and black patent leather, frilly socks, makeup and nail polish, jewelry, and

elaborately curled (and typically long and blonde) hair adorned with bows/barrettes/hairbands facilitated this initial stage of costume placement. By and large, female models used to illustrate Halloween costumes conformed to the ideal image of the "Little Miss" beauty pageant winner; they were almost overwhelmingly White, slim, delicate-boned blondes who did not wear glasses. Although male child models were also overwhelmingly White, they were more heterogeneous in height and weight and were more likely to wear glasses or to smile out from the photograph in a bucktooth grin. At the same time, however, masculine gender markers were apparent. Male models were almost uniformly shod in either well-worn running shoes or sturdy-looking brogues, while their hair showed little variation from the traditional little boy cut of short back and sides.

The use of gender-specific common and proper nouns to designate costumes (e.g., Medieval Maiden, Majorette, Prairie Girl) or gender-associated adjectives that formed part of the costume title (e.g., Tiny Tikes Beauty, Pretty Witch, Beautiful Babe, Pretty Pumpkin Pie) also served to identify feminine costumes. Similarly, the use of the terms "boy," "man," or "male" in the advertised name of the costume (e.g., Pirate Boy, Native American Boy, Dragon Boy) or the noted inclusion of advertising copy that announced "Cool dudes costumes are for boys in sizes" was used to identify masculine costumes. Costumes designated as neutral were those in which both boys and girls were featured in the illustration or photograph that accompanied the costume or sewing pattern or in which it was impossible to detect the sex of the wearer. By and large, illustrations for gender-neutral ads featured boys and girls identically clad and depicted as a twinned couple or, alternatively, showed a single child wearing a full-length animal costume complete with head and "paws," which, in the style of spats, effectively covered the shoes of the model. In addition, gender-neutral costumes were identified by an absence of gender-specific nouns and stereotypically gendered colors.

Following this initial division into three categories, the contents of each were further coded into a modified version of Klapp's (1964) schema of heroes, villains, and fools. In his work, Klapp suggested that this schema represents three dimensions of human behavior. That is, heroes are praised and set up as role models, whereas villains and fools are negative models, with the former representing evil to be feared and/or hated and the latter representing figures of absurdity inviting ridicule. However, although Klapp's categories were based on people in real life, I applied them to the realm of make-believe. For the purposes of this study, the labels refer to types of personas that engender or invite the following emotional responses, in a light-hearted way from audiences: heroes invite feelings of awe, admiration, and respect, whereas villains elicit feelings of fear and loathing, and fools evoke feelings of laughter and perceptions of cuteness. All of the feelings, however, are mock emotions based on feelings of amusement, which make my categories quite distinct from Klapp's. For example, although heroes invite awe, we do not truly expect somebody dressed as a hero to be held in awe. . . .

For the purposes of this secondary classification of costumes, the category of hero was broadened to include traditional male or female heroes (e.g., Cowboy, Robin Hood, Cinderella, Cleopatra), superheroes possessing supernatural powers (e.g., Superman, Robocop, Xena, the Warrior Princess) as well as characters with high occupational status (e.g., Emergency Room Doctor, Judge) and characters who are exemplars of prosocial conformity to traditional masculine and feminine roles (e.g., Team USA Cheerleader, Puritan Lady, Pioneer Boy). The category of villain was broadly defined to include symbolic representations of death (e.g., the Grim Reaper, Death, The Devil, Ghost), monsters (e.g., Wolfman, Frankenstein, The Mummy), and anti-heroes (e.g., Convict, Pirate, The Wicked Witch of the West, Catwoman). Fool was a hybrid category, distinguished by costumes whose ostensible function was to amuse rather than to alarm. Within this category, two subcategories were

distinguished. The first subcategory, figures of mirth, referred to costumes of clowns, court jesters, and harlequins. The second, nonhuman/inanimate objects, was composed of costumes representing foodstuffs (e.g., Peapod, Pepperoni Pizza, Chocolate Chip Cookie), animals and insects, and inanimate objects (e.g., Alarm Clock, Bar of Soap, Flower Pot). Where a costume appeared to straddle two categories, an attempt was made to assign it to a category based on the dominant emphasis of its pictorial representation. For example, a costume labeled Black Widow Spider could be classified as either an insect or a villain. If the accompanying illustration featured a broadly smiling child in a costume depicting a fuzzy body and multiple appendages, it was classified as an insect and included in the category of nonhuman/inanimate objects; if the costume featured an individual clad in a black gown, long black wig, ghoulish makeup, and a sinister mien, the costume was classified as a villain. Contents were subsequently reanalyzed in terms of their constituent parts and compared across masculine and feminine categories. In all cases, costumes were coded into the two coding schemes on the basis of a detailed written description of each costume. . . .

RESULTS

The initial placement of the 469 children's Halloween costumes into masculine, feminine, or neutral categories yielded 195 masculine costumes, 233 feminine costumes, and 41 gender-neutral costumes. The scarcity of gender-neutral costumes was notable; costumes that featured both boys and girls in their ads or in which the gender of the anticipated wearer remained (deliberately or inadvertently) ambiguous accounted for only 8.7% of those examined. Gender-neutral costumes were more common in sewing patterns than in ready-to-wear costumes and were most common in costumes designed for newborns and very young infants. In this context, gender-neutral infant costumes largely featured a winsome

226 • PART II: PATTERNS

assortment of baby animals (e.g., Li'l Bunny, Beanie the Pig) or foodstuffs (e.g., Littlest Peapod). By and large, few costumes for older children were presented as gender-neutral; the notable exceptions were costumes for scarecrows and emergency room doctors (with male/female models clad identically in olive-green "scrubs"), ready-made plastic costumes for Lost World/ Jurassic Park hunters, a single costume labeled Halfman/Halfwoman, and novel sewing patterns depicting such inanimate objects as a sugar cube, laundry hamper, or treasure chest.

Beginning most obviously with costumes designed for toddlers, gender dichotomization was promoted by gender-distinctive marketing devices employed by the manufacturers of both commercially made costumes and sewing patterns. In relation to sewing patterns for children's Halloween costumes, structurally identical costumes featured alterations through the addition or deletion of decorative trim (e.g., a skirt on a costume for an elephant) or the use of specific colors or costume names, which served to distinguish masculine from feminine costumes. For example, although the number and specific pattern pieces required to construct a particular pattern would not vary, View A featured a girl-modeled Egg or Tomato, whereas View B presented a boy-modeled Baseball or Pincushion. Structurally identical costumes modeled by both boys and girls would be distinguished through the use of distinct colors or patterns of material. Thus, for the peanut M & M costumes, the illustration featured girls clad in red or green and boys clad in blue, brown, or yellow. Similarly, female clowns wore costumes of soft pastel colors and dainty polka dots, but male clowns were garbed in bold primary colors and in material featuring large polka dots or stripes. Illustrations for ready-to-wear costumes were also likely to signal the sex of the intended wearer through the advertising copy: models for feminine costumes, for example, had long curled hair, were made up, and wore patent leather shoes. Only in such costumes as Wrinkly Old Woman,

Grandma Hag, Killer Granny, and Nun did identifiably male children model female apparel. . . .

[A]lthough hero costumes constituted a large percentage of both masculine and feminine costumes, masculine costumes contained a higher percentage of villain costumes, and feminine costumes included substantially more fool costumes, particularly those of nonhuman/inanimate objects. It may be imagined that the greater total number of feminine costumes would provide young girls with a broader range of costumes to select from than exists for young boys, but in fact the obverse is true. . . . [W]hen finer distinctions were made within the three generic categories, hero costumes for girls were clustered in a narrow range of roles that, although distinguished by specific names, were functionally equivalent in the image they portray. It would seem that, for girls, glory is concentrated in the narrow realm of beauty queens, princesses, brides, or other exemplars of traditionally passive femininity. The ornate, typically pink, ball-gowned costume of the princess (with or without a synthetic jeweled tiara) was notable, whether the specific costume was labeled Colonial Belle, the Pumpkin Princess, Angel Beauty, Blushing Bride, Georgia Peach, Pretty Mermaid, or Beauty Contest Winner. In contrast, although hero costumes for boys emphasized the warrior theme of masculinity (Doyle, 1989; Rotundo, 1993), with costumes depicting characters associated with battling historical, contemporary, or supernatural Goliaths (e.g., Broncho Rider, Dick Tracy, Sir Lancelot, Hercules, Servo Samurai, Robin the Boy Wonder), these costumes were less singular in the visual images they portrayed and were more likely to depict characters who possessed supernatural powers or skills.

Masculine costumes were also more likely than feminine costumes to depict a wide range of villainous characters (e.g., Captain Hook, Rasputin, Slash), monsters (e.g., Frankenstein, The Wolfman), and, in particular, agents or symbols of death (e.g., Dracula, Executioner, Devil boy, Grim Reaper). Moreover, costumes

for male villains were more likely than those of female villains to be elaborate constructions that were visually repellent; to feature an assortment of scars, mutations, abrasions, and suggested amputations; and to present a wide array of ingenious, macabre, or disturbing visual images. For example, the male-modeled, ready-to-wear Mad Scientist's Experiment costume consisted of a full-body costume of a monkey replete with a half-head mask featuring a gaping incision from which rubber brains dangled. Similarly, costumes for such characters as Jack the Ripper, Serial Killer, Freddy Krueger, or The Midnight Stalker were adorned with the suggestion of bloodstains and embellished with such paraphernalia as plastic knives or slip-on claws.

In marked contrast, the costumes of female villains alternated between relatively simple costumes of witches in pointy hats and capes modeled by young girls, costumes of the few female arch villains drawn from the pages of comic books, and, for older girls, costumes that were variants of the garb donned by the popular TV character Elvira, Mistress of the Dark (i.e., costumes that consisted of a long black wig and a long flowing black gown cut in an empire-style, which, when decorated with gold brocade or other trim at the top of the ribcage, served to create the suggestion of a bosom). The names of costumes for the female villains appeared to emphasize the erotic side of their villainy (e.g., Enchantra, Midnite Madness, Sexy Devil, Bewitched) or to neutralize the malignancy of the character by employing adjectives that emphasized their winsome rather than wicked qualities (e.g., Cute Cuddley Bewitched, Little Skull Girl, Pretty Little Witch).

Within the category of fools, feminine costumes were more likely than masculine costumes to depict nonhuman/inanimate objects (33.1% of feminine costumes vs. 17.4% of masculine costumes). Feminine costumes were more likely than masculine costumes to feature a wide variety of small animals and insects (e.g., Pretty Butterfly, Baby Cricket, Dalmatian

Puppy), as well as flowers, foodstuffs (BLT Sandwich, IceCream Cone, Lollipop), and dainty, fragile objects such as Tea Pot. For example, a costume for Vase of Flowers was illustrated with a picture of a young girl wearing a cardboard cylinder from her ribcage to her knees on which flowers were painted, while a profusion of pink, white, and yellow flowers emerged from the top of the vase to form a collar of blossoms around her face. Similarly, a costume for Pea Pod featured a young girl wearing a green cylinder to which four green balloons were attached; on the top of her head, the model wore a hat bedecked with green leaves and tendrils in a corkscrew shape. When costumed as animals, boys were likely to be shown modeling larger, more aggressive animals (e.g., Veliceraptor, Lion, T-Rex); masculine costumes were unlikely to be marketed with adjectives emphasizing their adorable, "li'l," cute, or cuddly qualities. In general, boys were rarely cast as objects, but when they were, they were overwhelmingly shown as items associated with masculine expertise. For example, a costume for Computer was modeled by a boy whose face was encased in the computer monitor and who wore, around his midtorso, a keyboard held up by suspenders. Another masculine costume depicted a young boy wearing a costume for Paint Can; the lid of the can was crafted in the style of a chef's hat, and across the cylindrical can worn from midchest to mid-knee was written "Brand X Paint" and, in smaller letters, "Sea Blue." Although rarely depicted as edibles or consumable products, three masculine costumes featured young boys as, variously, Root Beer Mug, Pepperoni Pizza, and Grandma's Pickle Jar.

DISCUSSION

Although the term "fantasy" implies a "play of the mind" or a "queer illusion" (Barnhart, 1967, p. 714), the marketing illustrations for children's Halloween costumes suggest a flight of imagination

228 • PART II: PATTERNS

that remains largely anchored in traditional gender roles, images, and symbols. Indeed, the noninclusive language commonly found in the names of many children's Halloween costumes reverberates throughout many other dimensions of the gendered social life depicted in this fantastical world. For example, the importance of participation in the paid-work world and financial success for men and of physical attractiveness and marriage for women is reinforced through costume names that reference masculine costumes by occupational roles or titles but describe feminine costumes via appearance and/or relationships (e.g., "Policeman" vs. "Beautiful Bride"). Although no adjectives are deemed necessary to describe Policeman, the linguistic prompt contained in Beautiful Bride serves to remind observers that the major achievements for females are getting married and looking lovely. In addition to costume titles that employ such sex-linked common nouns as Flapper, Bobby Soxer, Ballerina, and Pirate Wench, sex-marked suffixes such as the *-ess* (e.g., Pretty Waitress, Stewardess, Gypsy Princess, Sorceress) and *-ette* (e.g., Majorette) also set apart male and female fantasy character costumes. Costumes for suffragettes or female-modeled police officers, astronauts, and fire fighters were conspicuous only by their absence.

Gender stereotyping in children's Halloween costumes also reiterates an active-masculine/passive-feminine dichotomization. The ornamental passivity of Beauty Queen stands in stark contrast to the reification of the masculine action figure, whether he is heroic or villainous. In relation to hero figures, the dearth of female superhero costumes in the sample would seem to reflect the comparative absence of such characters in comic books. Although male superheroes have sprung up almost "faster than a speeding bullet" since the 1933 introduction of *Superman*, the comic book life span of women superheroes has typically been abbreviated, "rarely lasting for more than three appearances" (Robbins, 1996, p. 2). Moreover, the applicability of the term "superhero" to describe these female characters seems at least somewhat dubious. Often their

role has been that of the male hero's girlfriend or sidekick "whose purpose was to be rescued by the hero" (Robbins, 1996, p. 3).

In 1941 the creation of *Wonder Woman* (initially known as Amazon Princess Diana) represented a purposeful attempt by her creator, psychologist William Marston, to provide female readers with a same-sex superhero. . . . Nevertheless, over half a decade later, women comic book superheroes remain rare and, when they do appear, are likely to be voluptuous and scantily clad. If, as Robbins (1996, p. 166) argued, the overwhelmingly male comic book audience "expect, in fact demand that any new superheroines exist only as pinup material for their entertainment," it would seem that comic books and their televised versions are unlikely to galvanize the provision of flat-chested female superhero Halloween costumes for prepubescent females in the immediate future.

The relative paucity of feminine villains would also seem to reinforce an active/passive dichotomization on the basis of gender. Although costumes depict male villains as engaged in the commission of a wide assortment of antisocial acts, those for female villains appear more nebulous and are concentrated within the realm of erotic transgressions. Moreover, the depiction of a female villain as a sexual temptress or erotic queen suggests a type of "active passivity" (Salamon, 1983), whereby the act of commission is restricted to wielding her physical attractiveness over (presumably) weak-willed men. The veritable absence of feminine agents or symbols of death may reflect not only the stereotype of women (and girls) as life-giving and nurturing, but also the attendant assumption that femininity and lethal aggressiveness are mutually exclusive.

Building on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that the language we speak predisposes us to make particular interpretations of reality (Sapir, 1949; Whorf, 1956) and the assertion that language provides the basis for developing the gender schema identified by Bem (1983), the impact of language and other symbolic representations must be considered consequential. The symbolic representations of gender contained within

Halloween costumes may, along with specific costume titles, refurbish stereotypical notions of what women/girls and men/boys are capable of doing even within the realm of their imaginations. Nelson and Robinson (1995) noted that deprecatory terms in the English language often ally women with animals. Whether praised as a “chick,” “fox,” or “Mother Bear” or condemned as a “bitch,” “sow,” or an “old nag,” the imagery is animal reductionist. They also noted that language likens women to food items (e.g., sugar, tomato, cupcake), with the attendant suggestion that they look “good enough to eat” and are “toothsome morsels.” Complementing this, the present study suggests that feminine Halloween costumes also employ images that reduce females to commodities intended for amusement, consumption, and sustenance. A cherry pie, after all, has only a short shelf life before turning stale and unappealing. Although a computer may become obsolete, the image it conveys is that of rationality, of a repository of wisdom, and of scientifically minded wizardry.

In general, the relative absence of gender-neutral costumes is intriguing. Although it must remain speculative, it may be that the manufacturers of ready-to-wear and sewing pattern costumes subscribe to traditional ideas about gender and/or believe that costumes that depart from these ideas are unlikely to find widespread acceptance. Employing a supply–demand logic, it may be that marketing analysis of costume sales confirms their suspicions. Nevertheless, although commercial practices may reflect consumer preferences for gender-specific products rather than biases on the part of merchandisers themselves, packaging that clearly depicts boys or girls—but not both—effectively promotes gendered definitions of products beyond anything that might be culturally inherent in them. This study suggests that gender-aschematic Halloween costumes for children compose only a minority of both ready-to-wear costumes and sewing patterns. It is notable that, when male children were presented modeling female garments, the depicted character was effectively desexed by age (e.g., a wizened,

hag-like “grandmother”) or by calling (e.g., a nun).

The data for this study speak only to the gender practices of merchandisers marketing costumes and sewing patterns to parents who themselves may be responding to their children’s wishes. Beyond this, the findings do not identify precisely whose tastes are represented when these costumes are purchased. It is always possible that, despite the gendered nature of Halloween costumes presented in the illustrations and advertising copy used to market them, parents and children themselves may engage in creative redefinitions of the boundary markers surrounding gender. A child or parent may express and act on a preference for dressing a male in a pink, ready-to-wear butterfly costume or a female as Fred Flinstone and, in so doing, actively defy the symbolic boundaries that gender the Halloween costume. Alternatively, as a strategy of symbolic negotiation, those parents who sew may creatively experiment with recognizable gender markers, deciding, for example, to construct a pink dragon costume for their daughter or a brown butterfly costume for their son. Such amalgams of gender-discordant images may, on the surface, allow both male and female children to experience a broader range of fantastical roles and images. However, like Persian carpets, deliberately flawed to forestall divine wrath, such unorthodox Halloween costumes, in their structure and design, may nevertheless incorporate fibers of traditional gendered images.

REFERENCES

- Barnes, R., & Eicher, J. B. (1992). *Dress and gender: Making and meaning in cultural contexts*. New York: Berg.
- Barnhart, C. L. (1967). *The world book dictionary: A–K*. Chicago: Field Enterprises Educational Corporation.
- Bem, S. L. (1983). Gender schema theory and its implications for child development: Raising gender-aschematic children in a gender-schematic society. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 8, 598–616.

230 • PART II: PATTERNS

- Doyle, J. A. (1989). *The male experience*. Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown.
- Eicher, J. B., & Roach-Higgins, M. E. (1992). Definition and classification of dress: Implications for analysis of gender roles. In R. Barnes & J. B. Eicher (Eds.), *Dress and gender. Making and meaning in cultural contexts* (pp. 8–28). New York: Berg.
- Goffman, E. (1966). Gender display. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, 279, 250.
- Goffman, E. (1979). *Gender advertisements*. London: Macmillan.
- Klapp, O. (1962). *Heroes, villains and fools*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Klapp, O. (1964). *Symbolic leaders*. Chicago: Aldine.
- McNeill, F. M. (1970). *Hallowe'en: Its origins, rites and ceremonies in the Scottish tradition*. Edinburgh: Albyn Press.
- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self and society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Nelson, E. D. (1999). *Dressing for Halloween, doing gender*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Nelson, E. D., & Robinson, B. W. (1995). *Gigolos & Madame's bountiful: Illusions of gender, power and intimacy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Peretti, P. O., & Sydney, T. M. (1985). Parental toy stereotyping and its effect on child toy preference. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 12, 213–216.
- Robbins, T. (1996). *The Great Women Super Heroes*. Northampton, MA: Kitchen Sink Press.
- Rotundo, E. A. (1993). *American manhood: Transformations in masculinity from the revolution to the modern era*. New York: Basic Books.
- Salamon, E. (1983). *Kept women: Mistress of the '80s*. London: Orbis.
- Sapir, E. (1949). *Selected writings of Edward Sapir on language, culture and personality*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Whorf, B. L. (1956). The relation of habitual thought and behavior to language. In J. B. Carroll (Ed.), *Language, thought, and reality* (pp. 134–159). Cambridge, MA: Technology Press of MIT.

Introduction to Reading 22

This reading by Jacqueline Urla and Alan Swedlund offers an interesting approach to understanding the relationship between the success of the Barbie doll and the everyday body ideals and practices of girls and women in North America today. The authors apply the science of measuring bodies, or anthropometry, to Barbie doll and her “friends,” comparing the extreme deviation of Barbie’s body to the anthropometry of real women. Urla and Swedlund point out that Barbie exemplifies the commodification of gender in modern, consumer culture. They argue that the success of Barbie points to the strong desire of consumers for fantasy and for products that will transform them. Finally, the authors discuss the multiple meanings of Barbie for the girls and women who are her fans.

1. Why is Barbie a “perfect icon” of late capitalist constructions of femininity?
2. How has anthropometry, the science of measuring bodies, altered how we think and feel about gendered bodies?
3. Discuss the link between hyperthin bodies and hyperconsumption.

THE ANTHROPOMETRY OF BARBIE

UNSETTLING IDEALS OF THE FEMININE BODY IN POPULAR CULTURE

Jacqueline Urla and Alan C. Swedlund

It is no secret that thousands of healthy women in the United States perceive their bodies as defective. The signs are everywhere: from potentially lethal cosmetic surgery and drugs to the more familiar routines of dieting, curling, crimping, and aerobicizing, women seek to take control over their unruly physical selves. Every year at least 150,000 women undergo breast implant surgery (Williams 1992), while Asian women have their noses rebuilt and their eyes widened to make themselves look “less dull” (Kaw 1993). Studies show that the obsession with body size and the sense of inadequacy start frighteningly early; as many as 80 percent of 9-year-old suburban girls are concerned about dieting and their weight (Bordo 1991: 125). Reports like these, together with the dramatic rise in eating disorders among young women, are just some of the more noticeable fallout from what Naomi Wolf calls “the beauty myth.” Fueled by the hugely profitable cosmetic, weight-loss, and fashion industries, the beauty myth’s glamorized notions of the ideal body reverberate back upon women as “a dark vein of self hatred, physical obsessions, terror of aging, and dread of lost control” (Wolf 1991: 10).

It is this conundrum of somatic femininity, that female bodies are never feminine enough, that they must be deliberately and oftentimes painfully remade to be what “nature” intended—a condition dramatically accentuated under consumer capitalism—that motivates us to focus our

inquiry . . . on images of the feminine ideal. Neither universal nor changeless, idealized notions of both masculine and feminine bodies have a long history that shifts considerably across time, racial or ethnic group, class, and culture. Body ideals in twentieth-century North America are influenced and shaped by images from classical or “high” art, the discourses of science and medicine, and increasingly via a multitude of commercial interests, ranging from mundane life insurance standards to the more high-profile fashion, fitness, and entertainment industries.

Making her debut in 1959 as Mattel’s new teenage fashion doll, Barbie rose quickly to become the top-selling toy in the United States. Thirty-four years and a woman’s movement later, Barbie dolls remain Mattel’s best-selling item, netting over one billion dollars in revenues worldwide (Adelson 1992), or roughly one Barbie sold every two seconds (Stevenson 1991). Mattel estimates that in the United States over 95 percent of girls between the ages of three and eleven own at least one Barbie, and that the average number of dolls per owner is seven (E. Shapiro 1992). Barbie is clearly a force to contend with, eliciting over the years a combination of critique, parody, and adoration. A legacy of the postwar era, she remains an incredibly resilient visual and tactile model of femininity for prepubescent girls headed straight for the twenty-first century.

Urla, J., & Swedlund A. C., 1995, “The anthropometry of Barbie: Unsettling ideals of the feminine body in popular culture” in *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture*, ed. by Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla. Reprinted with permission of Indiana University Press.

It is not our intention to settle the debate over whether Barbie is a good or bad role model for little girls or whether her unrealistic body wrecks havoc on girls' self-esteem. . . . We want to suggest that Barbie dolls, in fact, offer a much more complex and contradictory set of possible meanings that take shape and mutate in a period marked by the growth of consumer society, intense debate over gender and racial relations, and changing notions of the body. . . . We want to explore not only how it is that this popular doll has been able to survive such dramatic social changes, but also how she takes on new significance in relation to these changing contexts.

We begin by tracing Barbie's origins and some of the image makeovers she has undergone since her creation. From there we turn to an experiment in the anthropometry of Barbie to understand how she compares to standards for the "average American woman" that were emerging in the postwar period.¹ Not surprisingly, our measurements show Barbie's body to be thin—very thin—far from anything approaching the norm. Inundated as our society is with conflicting and exaggerated images of the feminine body, statistical measures can help us to see that exaggeration more clearly. But we cannot stop there. First, as our brief foray into the history of anthropometry shows, the measurement and creation of body averages have their own politically inflected and culturally biased histories. Standards for the "average" American body, male or female, have always been imbricated in histories of nationalism and race purity. Secondly, to say that Barbie is unrealistic seems to beg the issue. Barbie *is* fantasy: a fantasy whose relationship to the hyperspace of consumerist society is multiplex. What of the pleasures of Barbie bodies? What alternative meanings of power and self-fashioning might her thin body hold for women/girls? Our aim is not, then, to offer another rant against Barbie, but to clear a space where the range of her contradictory meanings and ironic uses can be contemplated: in short, to approach her body as a meaning system in itself, which, in tandem with her mutable fashion image, serves to crystallize

some of the predicaments of femininity and feminine bodies in late-twentieth-century North America.

A DOLL IS BORN

. . . Making sense of Barbie requires that we look to the larger sociopolitical and cultural milieu that made her genesis both possible and meaningful. Based on a German prototype, the "Lili" doll, Barbie was from "birth" implicated in the ideologies of the Cold War and the research and technology exchanges of the military-industrial complex. Her finely crafted durable plastic mold was, in fact, designed by Jack Ryan, well known for his work in designing the Hawk and Sparrow missiles for the Raytheon Company. Conceived at the hands of a military-weapons-designer-turned-toy-inventor, Barbie dolls came onto the market the same year that the infamous Nixon-Khrushchev "kitchen debate" took place at the American National Exhibition in Moscow. Here, in front of the cameras of the world, the leaders of the capitalist and socialist worlds faced off, not over missile counts, but over "the relative merits of American and Soviet washing machines, televisions, and electric ranges" (May 1988:16). As Elaine Tyler May has noted in her study of the Cold War, this much-celebrated media event signaled the transformation of American-made commodities and the model suburban home into key symbols and safeguards of democracy and freedom. It was thus with fears of nuclear annihilation and sexually charged fantasies of the perfect bomb shelter running rampant in the American imaginary, that Barbie and her torpedo-like breasts emerged into popular culture as an emblem of the aspirations of prosperity, domestic containment, and rigid gender roles that were to characterize the burgeoning postwar consumer economy and its image of the American Dream.

Marketed as the first "teenage" fashion doll, Barbie's rise in popularity also coincided with, and no doubt contributed to, the postwar creation of a distinctive teenage lifestyle.² Teens, their

tastes, and their behaviors were becoming the object of both sociologists and criminologists as well as market survey researchers intent on capturing their discretionary dollars. While J. Edgar Hoover was pronouncing “the juvenile jungle” a menace to American society, retailers, the music industry, and moviemakers declared the thirteen to nineteen-year-old age bracket “the seven golden years” (Doherty 1988:51–52).

Barbie dolls seemed to cleverly reconcile both of these concerns by personifying the good girl who was sexy, but didn’t have sex, and was willing to spend, spend, spend. . . . Every former Barbie owner knows that to buy a Barbie is to lust after Barbie accessories. . . . As Paula Rabinowitz has noted, Barbie dolls, with their focus on frills and fashion, epitomize the way that teenage girls and girl culture in general have figured as accessories in the historiography of post-war culture; that is as both essential to the burgeoning commodity culture as consumers, but seemingly irrelevant to the central narrative defining cold war existence (Rabinowitz 1993). Over the years, Mattel has kept Barbie’s love of shopping alive, creating a Suburban Shopper Outfit and her own personal Mall to shop in (Motz 1983:131). More recently, in an attempt to edge into the computer game market, we now have an electronic “Game Girl Barbie” in which (what else?) the object of the game is to take Barbie on a shopping spree. In “Game Girl Barbie,” shopping takes skill, and Barbie plays to win.

Perhaps what makes Barbie such a perfect icon of late capitalist constructions of femininity is the way in which her persona pairs endless consumption with the achievement of femininity and the appearance of an appropriately gendered body. By buying for Barbie, girls practice how to be discriminating consumers knowledgeable about the cultural capital of different name brands, how to read packaging, and the overall importance of fashion and taste for social status (Motz 1983: 131–32). . . . In making this argument, we want to stress that we are drawing on more than just the doll. “Barbie” is also the packaging, spin-off products, cartoons, commercials, magazines, and fan club paraphernalia, all of

which contribute to creating her persona. Clearly, as we will discuss below, children may engage more or less with those products, subverting or ignoring various aspects of Barbie’s “official” presentation. However, to the extent that little girls *do* participate in the prepackaged world of Barbie, they come into contact with a number of beliefs central to femininity under consumer capitalism. Little girls learn, among other things, about the crucial importance of their appearance to their personal happiness and to their ability to gain favor with their friends. Barbie’s social calendar is constantly full, and the stories in her fan magazines show her frequently engaged in preparation for the rituals of heterosexual teenage life: dates, proms, and weddings. . . .

Barbie exemplifies the way in which gender in the late twentieth century has become a commodity itself, “something we can buy into . . . the same way we buy into a style” (Willis 1991: 23). In her insightful analysis of the logics of consumer capitalism, cultural critic Susan Willis pays particular attention to the way in which children’s toys like Barbie and the popular muscle-bound “He-Man” for boys link highly conservative and narrowed images of masculinity and femininity with commodity consumption (1991: 27). In the imaginary world of Barbie and teen advertising, observes Willis, being or becoming a teenager, having a “grown-up” body, is inextricably bound up with the acquisition of certain commodities, signaled by styles of clothing, cars, music, etc. . . .

BARBIE IS A SURVIVOR

. . . In the past three decades, this popular children’s doll has undergone numerous changes in her fashion image and “occupations” and has acquired a panoply of ethnic “friends” and analogues that have allowed her to weather the dramatic social changes in gender and race relations that arose in the course of the sixties and seventies. . . .

[A] glance at Barbie’s resumé, published in *Harper’s* magazine in August 1990, while

234 • PART II: PATTERNS

incomplete, shows Mattel's attempt to expand Barbie's career options beyond the original fashion model:

Positions Held

1959–present	Fashion model
1961–present	Ballerina
1961–64	Stewardess (American Airlines)
1964	Candy striper
1965	Teacher
1965	Fashion editor
1966	Stewardess (Pan Am)
1973–75	Flight attendant (American Airlines)
1973–present	Medical doctor
1976	Olympic athlete
1984	Aerobics instructor
1985	TV news reporter
1985	Fashion designer
1985	Corporate executive
1988	Perfume designer
1989–present	Animal rights volunteer

It is only fitting, given her origin, to note that Barbie has also had a career in the military and aeronautics space industry: she has been an astronaut, a marine, and, during the Gulf War, a Desert Storm trooper. Going from pink to green, Barbie has also acquired a social conscience, taking up the causes of UNICEF, animal rights, and environmental protection. . . .

For anyone tracking Barbiana, it is abundantly clear that Mattel's marketing strategies are sensitive to a changing social climate. Just as Mattel has sought to present Barbie as a career woman with more than air in her vinyl head, they have also tried to diversify her otherwise lily-white suburban world. . . . With the expansion of sales worldwide, Barbie has acquired multiple national guises (Spanish Barbie, Jamaican Barbie, Malaysian Barbie, etc.).³ In addition, her cohort of "friends" has become increasingly ethnically diversified, as has Barbie advertising, which now regularly features Asian, Hispanic, and African American little girls playing with

Barbie. . . . This diversification has not spelled an end to reigning Anglo beauty norms and body image. Quite the reverse. When we line the dolls up together, they look virtually identical. Cultural difference is reduced to surface variations in skin tone and costumes that can be exchanged at will. . . .

"The icons of twentieth-century mass culture," writes Susan Willis, "are all deeply infused with the desire for change," and Barbie is no exception (1991: 37). In looking over the course of Barbie's career, it is clear that part of her resilience, appeal, and profitability stems from the fact that her identity is constructed primarily through fantasy and is consequently open to change and reinterpretation. As a fashion model, Barbie continually creates her identity anew with every costume change. In that sense, we might want to call Barbie the prototype of the "transformer dolls" that cultural critics have come to see as emblematic of the restless desire for change that permeates postmodern capitalist society (Wilson 1985: 63). Not only can she renew her image with a change of clothes, Barbie also is seemingly able to clone herself effortlessly into new identities—Malibu Barbie; Totally Hair Barbie; Teen Talk Barbie; even Afrocentric Barbie, Shani—without somehow suggesting a serious personality disorder. . . . The multiplication of Barbie and her friends translates the challenge of gender inequality and racial diversity into an ever-expanding array of costumes, a new "look" that can be easily accommodated into a harmonious and illusory pluralism that never ends up rocking the boat of WASP beauty. What is striking, then, is that, while Barbie's identity may be mutable—one day she might be an astronaut, another a cheerleader—*her hyperslender, big-chested body has remained fundamentally unchanged over the years*—a remarkable fact in a society that fetishizes the new and improved. . . . We turn now from Barbie's "persona" to the conundrum of her body and to our class experiment in the anthropometry of feminine ideals. In so doing, our aim is deliberately subversive. We wish to use the tools of calibration and measurement—tools of normalization that have an unsavory history for women and racial or ethnic minorities—to destabilize the ideal. . . . We begin with a very brief historical

overview of the anthropometry of women and the emergence of an “average” American female body in the postwar United States, before using our calipers on Barbie and her friends.

THE MEASURED BODY: NORMS AND IDEALS

* * *

As the science of measuring human bodies, anthropometry belongs to a long line of techniques of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries concerned with measuring, comparing, and interpreting variability in different zones of the human body: craniometry, phrenology, physiognomy, and comparative anatomy. Early anthropometry shared with these an understanding and expectation that the body was a window into a host of moral, temperamental, racial, or gender characteristics. It sought to distinguish itself from its predecessors, however, by adhering to rigorously standardized methods and quantifiable results that would, it was hoped, lead to the “complete elimination of personal bias” that anthropometrists believed had tainted earlier measurement techniques (Hrdlicka 1939: 12).⁴

Under the aegis of Earnest Hooton, Ales Hrdlicka, and Franz Boas, located respectively at Harvard University, the Smithsonian, and Columbia University, anthropometric studies within U.S. physical anthropology were utilized mainly in the pursuit of three general areas of interest: identifying racial and or national types; the measurement of adaptation and “degeneracy”; and a comparison of the sexes. Anthropometry was, in other words, believed to be a useful technique in resolving three critical border disputes: the boundaries between races or ethnic groups; the normal and the degenerate; and the border between the sexes.

As is well documented by now, women and non-Europeans did not fare well in these emerging sciences of the body (see the work of Blakey 1987; Gould 1981; Schiebinger 1989, 1993; Fee 1979; Russett 1989; also Horn and Fausto Sterling, this volume); measurements of women’s

bodies, their skulls in particular, tended to place them as inferior to or less intelligent than males. In the great chain of being, women as a class were believed to share certain atavistic characteristics with both children and so-called savages. Not everything about women was regarded negatively. In some cases it was argued that women possessed physical and moral qualities that were superior to those of males. Above all, woman’s body was understood through the lens of her reproductive function; her physical characteristics, whether inferior or superior to those of males, were inexorably dictated by her capacity to bear children. . . . With males as the unspoken prototype, women’s bodies were frequently described (subtly or not) as deviations from the norm: as subjects, the measurement of their bodies was occasionally risky to the male scientists,⁵ and as bodies they were variations from the generic or ideal type (their body fat “excessive,” their pelvises maladaptive to a bipedal [i.e., more evolved] posture, their musculature weak). Understood primarily in terms of their reproductive capacity, women’s bodies, particularly their reproductive organs, genitalia, and secondary sex characteristics, were instead more carefully scrutinized and measured within “marital adjustment” studies and in the emerging science of gynecology, whose practitioners borrowed liberally from the techniques used by physical anthropologists. . . .

In the United States, an attempt to elaborate a scientifically sanctioned notion of a normative “American” female body, however, was taking place in the college studies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the 1860s, Harvard and other universities had begun to regularly collect anthropometric data on their male student populations, and in the 1890s comparable data began to be collected from the East Coast women’s colleges as well. Conducted by departments of hygiene, physical education, and home economics, as well as physical anthropology, these large-scale studies gathered data on the elite, primarily WASP youth, in order to determine the dimensions of the “normal” American male and female. . . . Effectively excluded from

these attempts to define the “normal” or average body, of course, were those “other” Americans—descendants of African slaves, North American Indians, and the many recent European immigrants from Ireland, southern Europe, and eastern Europe—whose bodies were the subject of racist, evolution-oriented studies concerned with “race crossing,” degeneracy, and the effects of the “civilizing” process (see Blakey 1987). . . . Between the two wars, nationalist interests had fueled eugenic interests and provoked a deepening concern about the physical fitness of the American people. Did Americans constitute a distinctive physical “type”; were they puny and weak as some Europeans had alleged, or were they physically bigger and stronger than their European ancestors? Could they defend themselves in time of war? And who did this category of “Americans” include? Questions such as these fed into an already long-standing preoccupation with defining a specifically American national character and, in 1945, led to the creation of one of the most celebrated and widely publicized anthropometric models of the century: Norm and Norma, the average American male and female. Based on the composite measurements of thousands of young people, described only as “native white Americans,” across the United States, the statues of Norm and Norma were the product of a collaboration between obstetrician-gynecologist Robert Latou Dickinson, well known for his studies of human reproductive anatomy, and Abram Belskie, the prize student of Malvina Hoffman, who had sculpted the Races of Mankind series.⁶ . . .

Described in the press as the “ideal” young woman, Norma was said to be everything an American woman should be in a time of war: she was fit, strong-bodied, and at the peak of her reproductive potential. Commentators waxed eloquent about the model character traits—maturity, modesty, and virtuosity—that this perfectly average body suggested. . . . Norma and Norman were . . . more than statistical composites, they were ideals. It is striking how thoroughly racial and ethnic differences were erased

from these scientific representations of the American male and female. Based on the measurements of white Americans, eighteen to twenty-five years old, Norm and Norma emerged carved out of white alabaster, with the facial features and appearance of Anglo-Saxon gods. Here, as in the college studies that preceded them, the “average American” of the postwar period was to be visualized only as a youthful white body. However, they were not the only ideal. The health reformers, educators, and doctors who approved and promoted Norma as an ideal for American women were well aware that her sensible, strong, thick-waisted body differed significantly from the tall slim-hipped bodies of fashion models in vogue at the time.⁷ . . . As the postwar period advanced, Norma would continue to be trotted out in home economics and health education classes. But in the iconography of desirable female bodies, she would be overshadowed by the array of images of fashion models and pinup girls put out by advertisers; the entertainment industry, and a burgeoning consumer culture. These idealized images were becoming, as we will see below, increasingly thin in the sixties and seventies while the “average” woman’s body was in fact getting heavier. With the thinning of the American feminine ideal, Norma and subsequent representations of the statistically average woman would become increasingly aberrant, as slenderness and sex appeal—not physical fitness—became the premier concern of postwar femininity.

THE ANTHROPOMETRY OF BARBIE: TURNING THE TABLES

As the preceding discussion makes abundantly clear, the anthropometrically measured “normal” body has been anything but value-free. Formulated in the context of a race-, class-, and gender-stratified society, there is no doubt that quantitatively defined ideal types or standards have been both biased and oppressive. Incorporated into weight tables, put on display in museums and world’s fairs, and reprinted in

popular magazines, these scientifically endorsed standards produce what Foucault calls “normalizing effects,” shaping, in not altogether healthy ways, how individuals understand themselves and their bodies. Nevertheless, in the contemporary cultural context, where an impossibly thin image of women’s bodies has become the most popular children’s toy ever sold, it strikes us that recourse to the “normal” body might just be the power tool we need for destabilizing a fashion fantasy spun out of control. It was with this in mind that we asked students in one of our social biology classes to measure Barbie to see how her body compared to the average measurements of young American women of the same period. Besides estimating Barbie’s dimensions if she were life-sized, we see the experiment as an occasion to turn the anthropometric tables from disciplining the bodies of living women to measuring the ideals by which we have come to judge ourselves and others. We also see it as an opportunity for students who have grown up under the regimes of normalizing science—students who no doubt have been measured, weighed, and compared to standards since birth—to use those very tools to unsettle a highly popular cultural ideal. . . .

Since one objective of the course was to learn about human variation, our first task in understanding more about Barbie was to consider the fact that Barbie’s friends and family do represent some variation, limited though it may be. Through colleagues and donations from students or (in one case) their children we assembled seventeen dolls for analysis. The sample included:

- 11 early ’60s Barbie
- 4 mid-’70s-to-contemporary Barbies, including a Canadian Barbie
- 3 Kens
- 2 Skippers
- 1 Scooter
- Assorted Barbie’s friends, including Christie, Barbie’s “black” friend
- Assorted Ken’s friends

To this sample we subsequently added the most current versions of Barbie and Ken (from the “Glitter Beach” collection) and also Jamal, Nichelle, and Shani, Barbie’s more recent African American friends. As already noted, Mattel introduced these dolls (Shani, Asha, and Nichelle) as having a more authentic African American appearance, including a “rounder and more athletic” body. Noteworthy also are the skin color variations between the African American dolls, ranging from dark to light, whereas Barbie and her white friends tend to be uniformly pink or uniformly suntanned. . . .

Before beginning the actual measurements we discussed the kinds of data we thought would be most appropriate. Student interest centered on height and chest, waist, and hip circumference. Members of the class also pointed out the apparently small size of the feet and the general leanness of Barbie. As a result, we added a series of additional standardized measurements, including upper arm and thigh circumference, in order to obtain an estimate of body fat and general size. . . . In scaling Barbie to be life-sized, the students decided to translate her measurements using two standards: (a) if Barbie were a fashion model (5’10”) and (b) if she were of average height for women in the United States (5’4”). We also decided to measure Ken, using both an average male stature, which we designated as 5’8” and the more “idealized” stature for men, 6’. We took measurements of dolls in the current Glitter Beach and Shani collection that were not available for our original classroom experiment, and all measurements were retaken to confirm estimates. We report here only the highlights of the measurements taken on the newer Barbie and newer Ken, Jamal, and Shani, scaled at their ideal fashion-model height. For purposes of comparison, we include data on average body measurements from the standardized published tables of the 1988 Anthropometric Survey of Army Personnel. We have dubbed these composites for the female and male recruits Army “Norma” and Army “Norm,” respectively.

Barbie and Shani’s measurements reveal interesting similarities and subtle differences.

First, considering that they are six inches taller than “Army Norma,” . . . their measurements tend to be considerably less *at all points*. “Army Norma” is a composite of the fit woman soldier; Barbie and Shani, as high-fashion ideals, reflect the extreme thinness expected of the runway model. To dramatize this, had we scaled Barbie to 5’ 4,” her chest, waist, and hip measurements would have been 32”–17”–28,” clinically anorectic to say the least. There are only subtle differences in size, which we presume intend to facilitate the exchange of costumes among the different dolls.

We were curious to see the degree to which Mattel had physically changed the Barbie mold in making Shani. Most of the differences we could find appeared to be in the face. The nose of Shani is broader and her lips are ever so slightly larger. However, our measurements also showed that Barbie’s hip circumference is actually larger than Shani’s, and so is her hip breadth. If anything, Shani might have thinner legs than Barbie, but her back is arched in such a way that it tilts her buttocks up. This makes them appear to protrude more posteriorly, even though the hip depth measurements of both dolls are virtually the same (7.1”). Hence, the tilting of the lumbar dorsal region and the extension of the sacral pelvic area produce the visual illusion of a higher, rounder butt. . . . This is, we presume, what Mattel was referring to in claiming that Shani has a realistic, or ethnically correct, body (Jones 1991).

One of our interests in the male dolls was to ascertain whether they represent a form closer to average male values than Barbie does to average female values. Ken and Jamal provide interesting contrasts to “Army Norm,” but certainly not to each other. Their postcranial bodies are identical in all respects. They, in turn, represent a somewhat slimmer, trimmer male than the so-called fit soldier of today. Visually, the newer Ken and Jamal appear very tight and muscular and “bulked out” in impressive ways. The U.S. Army males tend to carry slightly more fat, judging from the photographs and data presented in the 1988 study.⁸ Indeed, it would appear that Barbie and virtually all her friends characterize

a somewhat extreme ideal of the human figure, but in Barbie and Shani, the female cases, the degree to which they vary from “normal” is much greater than in the male cases, bordering on the impossible. Barbie truly is the unobtainable representation of an imaginary femaleness. But she is certainly not unique in the realm of female ideals. Studies tracking the body measurements of Playboy magazine centerfolds and Miss America contestants show that between 1959 and 1978 the average weight and hip size for women in both of these groups have decreased steadily (Wiseman et al. 1992). Comparing their data to actuarial data for the same time period, researchers found that the thinning of feminine body ideals was occurring at the same time that the average weight of American women was actually increasing. A follow-up study for the years 1979–88 found this trend continuing into the eighties: approximately sixty-nine percent of Playboy centerfolds and sixty percent of Miss America contestants were weighing in at fifteen percent or more below their expected age and height category. In short, the majority of women presented to us in the media as having desirable feminine bodies were, like Barbie, well on their way to qualifying for anorexia nervosa.

OUR BARBIES, OUR SELVES

* * *

On the surface, at least, Barbie’s strikingly thin body and the repression and self-discipline that it signifies would appear to contrast with her seemingly endless desire for consumption and self-transformation. And yet, as Susan Bordo has argued in regard to anorexia, these two phenomena—hyperthin bodies and hyperconsumption—are very much linked in advanced capitalist economies that depend upon commodity excess. Regulating desire under such circumstances is a constant, ongoing problem that plays itself out on the body. As Bordo argues:

[In a society where we are] conditioned to lose control at the very sight of desirable products, we

can only master our desires through a rigid defense against them. The slender body codes the tantalizing ideal of a well-managed self in which all is “in order” despite the contradictions of consumer culture. (1990:97)

The imperative to manage the body and “be all that you can be”—in fact, the idea that you can *choose* the body that you want to have—is a pervasive feature of consumer culture. Keeping control of one’s body, not getting too fat or flabby—in other words, conforming to gendered norms of fitness and weight—are signs of an individual’s social and moral worth. But, as feminists Bordo, Sandra Bartky, and others have been quick to point out, not all bodies are subject to the same degree of scrutiny or the same repercussions if they fail. It is in women’s bodies and desires in particular where the structural contradictions—the simultaneous incitement to consume and social condemnation for overindulgence—appear to be most acutely manifested in bodily regimes of intense self-monitoring and discipline. . . . Just as it is women’s appearance that is subject to greater social scrutiny, so it is that women’s desires, hungers, and appetites are seen as most threatening and in need of control in a patriarchal society.

This cultural context is relevant to making sense of Barbie and the meaning her body holds in late consumer capitalism. In dressing and undressing Barbie, combing her hair, bathing her, turning and twisting her limbs in imaginary scenarios, children acquire a very tactile and intimate sense of Barbie’s body. Barbie is presented in packaging and advertising as a role model, a best friend or older sister to little girls. Television jingles use the refrain, “I want to be just like you,” while look-alike clothes and look-alike contests make it possible for girls to live out the fantasy of being Barbie. . . . In short, there is no reason to believe that girls (or adult women) separate Barbie’s body shape from her popularity and glamour.⁹ This is exactly what worries many feminists. As our measurements show, Barbie’s body differs wildly from anything approximating “average” female body weight and proportions. Over the years her wasp-waisted body has

evoked a steady stream of critique for having a negative impact on little girls’ sense of self-esteem.¹⁰ While her large breasts have always been a focus of commentary, it is interesting to note that, as eating disorders are on the rise, her weight has increasingly become the target of criticism. . . .

There is no doubt that Barbie’s body contributes to what Kim Chernin (1981) has called “the tyranny of slenderness.” But is repression all her hyperthin body conveys? Looking once again to Susan Bordo’s work on anorexia, we find an alternative reading of the slender body—one that emerges from taking seriously the way anorectic women see themselves and make sense of their experience:

For them, anorectics, [the slender ideal] may have a very different meaning; it may symbolize not so much the containment of female desire, as its liberation from a domestic, reproductive destiny. The fact that the slender female body can carry both these (seemingly contradictory) meanings is one reason, I would suggest, for its compelling attraction in periods of gender change. (Bordo 1990: 103)

. . . One could argue that, like the anorectic body she resembles, Barbie’s body displays conformity to dominant cultural imperatives for a disciplined body and contained feminine desires. As a woman, however, her excessive slenderness also signifies a rebellious manifestation of willpower, a visual denial of the maternal ideal symbolized by pendulous breasts, rounded stomach and hips. Hers is a body of hard edges, distinct borders, self-control. It is literally impenetrable. Unlike the anorectic, whose self-denial renders her gradually more androgynous in appearance, in the realm of plastic fantasy Barbie is able to remain powerfully sexualized, with her large, gravity-defying breasts, even while she is distinctly nonreproductive. Like the “hard bodies” in fitness advertising, Barbie’s body may signify for women the pleasure of control and mastery, both of which are highly valued traits in American society and predominantly associated with masculinity (Bordo 1990: 105). Putting these elements together with

240 • PART II: PATTERNS

her apparent independent wealth can make for a very different reading of Barbie than the one we often find in the popular press. To paraphrase one Barbie-doll owner: she owns a Ferrari and doesn't have a husband—she must be doing something right!¹¹ . . .

It is clear that a next step we would want to take in the cultural interpretation of Barbie is an ethnographic study of Barbie-doll owners.¹² In the meanwhile, we can know something about these alternative appropriations by looking to various forms of popular culture and the art world. Barbie has become a somewhat celebrated figure among avant-garde and pop artists, giving rise to a whole genre of Barbie satire, known as “Barbie Noire” (Kahn 1991). According to Peter Galassi, curator of *Pleasures and Terrors of Domestic Comfort*, an exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art, in New York “Barbie isn't just a doll. She suggests a type of behavior—something a lot of artists, especially women, have wanted to question” (quoted in Kahn 1991: 25). Perhaps the most notable sardonic use of Barbie dolls to date is the 1987 film *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story*, by Todd Haynes and Cynthia Schneider. In this deeply ironic exploration into the seventies, suburbia, and middle-class hypocrisy, Barbie and Ken dolls are used to tell the tragic story of Karen Carpenter's battle with anorexia and expose the perverse underbelly of the popular singing duo's candy-coated image of happy, apolitical teens. It is hard to imagine a better casting choice to tell this tale of femininity gone astray than the ever-thin, ever-plastic, ever-wholesome Barbie.

For Barbiana collectors it should come as no surprise that Barbie's excessive femininity also makes her a favorite persona of female impersonators, alongside Judy, Marilyn, Marlene, and Zsa Zsa. Appropriations of Barbie in gay camp culture have tended to favor the early, vampire Barbie look: with the arched eyebrows, heavy black eyeliner, and coy sideways look—the later superstar version of Barbie, according to BillyBoy, is just *too* pink. . . .

In the world of Barbie Noire, the hyper-rigid gender roles of the toy industry are targeted for

inversion and subversion. While Barbie is transformed into a dominatrix drag queen, Ken, too, has had his share of spoofs and gender bending. Barbie's somewhat dull steady boyfriend has never been developed into much more than a reliable escort and proof of Barbie's appropriate sexual orientation and popularity. In contrast to that of Barbie, Ken's image has remained boringly constant over the years. He has had his “mod,” “hippie” and Malibu-suntan days, and he has gotten significantly more muscular. But for the most part, his clothing line is less diversified, and he lacks an independent fan club or advertising campaign.¹³ In a world where boys' toys are G.I. Joe-style action figures, bent on alternately saving or destroying the world, Ken is an anomaly. Few would doubt that his identity was primarily another one of Barbie's accessories. His secondary status vis-à-vis Barbie is translated into emasculation and/or a secret gay identity: cartoons and spoofs of Ken have him dressed in Barbie clothes, and rumors abound that Ken's seeming lack of sexual desire for Barbie is only a cover for his real love for his boyfriends, Alan, Steve, and Dave.

Inscrutable with her blank stare and unchanging smile, Barbie is thus available for any number of readings and appropriations. What we have done here is examine some of the ways she resonates with the complex and contradictory cultural meanings of femininity in postwar consumer society and a changing politics of the body. Barbie, as we, and many other critics, have observed, is an impossible ideal, but she is an ideal that has become curiously normalized. In a youth-obsessed society like our own, she is an ideal not just for young women, but for all women who feel that being beautiful means looking like a skinny, buxom, white twenty-year-old. It is this cultural imperative to remain ageless and lean that leads women to have skewed perceptions of their bodies, undergo painful surgeries, and punish themselves with outrageous diets. Barbie, in short, is an ideal that constructs women's bodies as hopelessly imperfect. It has been our intention to unsettle this ideal and, at the same time, to be sensitive to other possible

readings, other ways in which this ideal body figures and reconfigures the female body. . . .

We have explored some of the battleground upon which the serious play of Barbie unfolds. If Barbie has taught us anything about gender, it is that femininity in consumer culture is a question of carefully performed display, of paradoxical fixity and malleability. One outfit, one occupation, one identity can be substituted for another, while Barbie's body has remained ageless, changeless untouched by the ravages of age or cellulite. She is always a perfect fit, always able to consume and be consumed. Mattel has skillfully managed to turn challenges of feminist protest, ethnic diversity, and a troubled multiculturalism to a new array of outfits and skin tones, annexing these to a singular anorectic body ideal. Cultural icon that she is, Barbie nevertheless cannot be permanently located in any singular cultural space. Her meaning is mobile as she is appropriated and relocated into different cultural contexts, some of which, as we have seen, make fun of many of the very notions of femininity and consumerism she personifies. As we consider Barbie's many meanings, we should remember that Barbie is not only a denizen of subcultures in the United States, she is also a world traveler. A product of the global assembly line, Barbie dolls owe their existence to the internationalization of the labor market and global flows of capital and commodities that today characterize the toy industry, as well as other industries in the postwar era. Designed in Los Angeles, manufactured in Taiwan or Malaysia, distributed worldwide, BarbieTM is American-made in name only. Speeding her way into an expanding global market, Barbie brings with her some of the North American cultural subtext we have outlined in this analysis. How this teenage survivor then gets interpolated into the cultural landscapes of Mayan villages, Bombay high-rises, and Malagasy towns is a rich topic that begs to be explored.

NOTES

1. At the time of this writing, there was no definitive history of Barbie and the molds that have been

created for her body. However, Barbie studies are booming and we expect new work in press, including M. G. Lord's *Forever Barbie: The Unauthorized Biography of a Real Doll* (1994), to provide greater insight into Barbie's history and the debates surrounding her body within Mattel and the press.

2. While the concept of adolescence as a distinct developmental stage between puberty and adulthood was not new to the fifties, Thomas Doherty (1988) notes that it wasn't until the end of World War II that the term "teenager" gained standard usage in the American language.

3. Recent work by Ann duCille promises to offer an incisive cultural critique of the "ethnification" of Barbie and its relationship to controversies in the United States over multiculturalism and political correctness (duCille 1995). More work, however, needs to be done on how Barbie dolls are adapted to appeal to various markets outside the U.S. For example, Barbie dolls manufactured in Japan for Japanese consumption have noticeably larger, rounder eyes than those marketed in the United States (see BillyBoy 1987). For some suggestive thoughts on the cultural implications of the transnational flow of toys like Barbie dolls, TransFormers, and He-Man, see Carol Breckenridge's (1990) brief but intriguing editorial comment to *Public Culture*.

4. Closely aligned with the emergence of statistics, it was Hrdlicka's hope that the two would be joined, and that one day the state would be "enlightened" enough to incorporate regular measurements of the population with the various other tabulations of the periodic census, in order to "ascertain whether and how its human stock is progressing or regressing" (1939: 12).

5. In *Practical Anthropometry* Hrdlicka goes to some trouble to instruct field-workers (presumably male) working among "uncivilized groups" about the steps they need to take not to offend, and thereby put themselves at risk, when measuring women (1939: 57-59).

6. Norma is described in the press reports as being based on the measurements of 15,000 "real American girls." Although we cannot be sure, it is likely this data come from the Bureau of Home Economics, which conducted extensive measurements of students "to provide more accurate dimensions and proportions for sizing women's ready-made garments"

242 • PART II: PATTERNS

(Shapiro 1945). For further information on the Dickinson collection and Dickinson's methods of observation, see Terry (1992).

7. Historians have noted a long-standing conflict between the physical culture movement, eugenicists and health reformers, on the one hand, and the fashion industry, on the other, that gave rise in American society to competing ideals of the fit and the fashionably fragile, woman (e.g., Banner 1983; Cogan 1989).

8. One aspect of the current undertaking that is clearly missing is the possible variation that exists *within* individual groups of dolls that would result from mold variation and casting processes. Determining this variation would require a much larger doll collection at our disposal. We are considering a grant proposal, but not seriously.

9. This process of identification becomes mimesis, not only in Barbie look-alike contests, but also in the recent Barbie workout video. In her fascinating analysis of the semiotics of workout videos, Margaret Morse (1987) has shown how these videos structure the gaze in such a way as to establish identification between the exercise leader's body and the participant-viewer. Surrounded by mirrors, the viewer is asked to exactly model her movements on those of the leader, literally mimicking the gestures and posture of the "star" body she wishes to become. In Barbie's video, producers use animation to make it possible for Barbie to occasionally appear on the screen as the exercise leader/cheerleader—the star whose body the little girls mimic.

10. In response to this anxiety, Cathy Meredig, an enterprising computer software designer, created the "Happy to Be Me" doll. Described as a healthy alternative for little girls, "Happy to Be Me" has a shorter neck, shorter legs, wider waist, larger feet, and a lot fewer clothes—designed to make her look more like the average woman ("She's No Barbie, nor Does She Care to Be." *New York Times*, August 15, 1991, C-11).

11. "Dolls in Playland." 1992. Colleen Toomey, producer. BBC.

12. While not exactly ethnographic, Hohmann's 1985 study offers a sociopsychological view of how children experiment with social relations during play with Barbies.

13. Signs of a Ken makeover, however, have begun to appear. In 1991, a Ken with "real" hair that can be

styled was introduced and, most dramatically, in 1993, he had his hair streaked and acquired an earring in his left ear. This was presented as a "big breakthrough" by Mattel and was received by the media as a sign of a broader trend in the toy industry to break down rigid gender stereotyping in children's toys (see Lawson 1993). It doesn't appear, however, that Ken is any closer to getting a "realistic" body than Barbie. Ruth Handler notes that when Mattel was planning the Ken doll, she had wanted him to have genitals—or at least a bump, and claims the men in the marketing group vetoed her suggestion. Ken did later acquire his bump (see "Dolls in Playland," Colleen Toomey, producer. BBC. 1993).

REFERENCES

- Adelson, Andrea 1992 "And Now, Barbie Looks Like a Billion." *New York Times*, November 26, sec. D, p. 3.
- Banner, Lois W. 1983 *American Beauty*. New York: Knopf.
- Bartky, Sandra Lee 1990 "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power." In *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, pp. 63–82. New York: Routledge.
- Billyboy. 1987 *Barbie, Her Life and Times, and the New Theater of Fashion*. New York: Crown.
- Blakey, Michael L. 1987 "Skull Doctors: Intrinsic Social and Political Bias in the History of American Physical Anthropology" *Critique of Anthropology* 7(2): 7–35.
- Bordo, Susan R. 1990 "Reading the Slender Body." In *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science*. Ed. Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Sally Shuttleworth, pp. 83–112. New York: Routledge.
- Breckenridge, Carol A. 1990 "Editor's Comment: On Toying with Terror." *Public Culture* 2(2): i–iii.
- Brumberg, Joan Jacobs 1988 *Fasting Girls: The History of Anorexia Nervosa*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Reprint, New York: New American Library.
- Chernin, Kim 1981 *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Cogan, Frances B. 1989 *All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Woman-hood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century*

- America*. Athens and London: University of Georgia Press.
- Davis, Kathy 1991 "Remaking the She-Devil: A Critical Look at Feminist Approaches to Beauty." *Hypatia* 6(2): 21–43.
- Doherty, Thomas 1998 *Teenagers and Teen Pies: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.
- duCille, Ann 1995 "Toy Theory: Blackface Barbie and the Deep Play of Difference." In *The Skin Trade: Essays on Race, Gender, and the Merchandising of Difference*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Fee, Elizabeth 1979 "Nineteenth-Century Craniology: The Study of the Female Skull." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 53:415–33.
- France, Kim 1992 "Tits 'R' Us." *Village Voice*, March 17, p. 22.
- Goldin, Nan 1993 *The Other Side*. New York: Scalo.
- Gould, Stephen Jay 1981 *The Mismeasure of Man*. New York: Norton.
- Halberstam, Judith 1994 "F2M: The Making of Female Masculinity." In *The Lesbian Postmodern*, ed. Laura Doan, pp. 210–28. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hohmann, Delf Maria 1985 "Jennifer and Her Barbies: A Contextual Analysis of a Child Playing Barbie Dolls." *Canadian Folklore Canadien* 7(1–2): 111–20.
- Hrdlicka, Ales 1925 "Relation of the Size of the Head and Skull to Capacity in the Two Sexes." *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 8:249–50.
- Hrdlicka, Ales 1939 *Practical Anthropometry*. Philadelphia: Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology.
- Jones, Lisa 1991 "Skin Trade: A Doll Is Born." *Village Voice*, March 26, p. 36
- Kahn, Alice 1991 "A Onetime Bimbo Becomes a Muse." *New York Times*, September 29.
- Kaw, Eugenia 1993 "Medicalization of Racial Features: Asian American Women and Cosmetic Surgery." *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 7(1): 74–89.
- Lawson, Carol 1993 "Toys Will Be Toys: The Stereotypes Unravel." *New York Times*. February 11, sec. C, pp. 1, 8.
- Lord, M. G. 1994 *Forever Barbie: The Unauthorized Biography of a Real Doll*. New York: William Morrow.
- "Material Girl: The Effacements of Postmodern Culture." In *The Female Body: Figures, Styles, Speculations*. Ed. Laurence Goldstein, pp. 106–30. Ann Arbor, Mich.: The University of Michigan Press.
- May, Elaine Tyler 1988 *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. New York: Basic Books.
- Morse, Margaret 1987 "Artemis Aging: Exercise and the Female Body on Video." *Discourse* 10(1987/88): 20–53.
- Motz, Marilyn Ferris 1983 "I Want to Be a Barbie Doll When I Grow Up: The Cultural Significance of the Barbie Doll." In *The Popular Culture Reader*, 3d ed. Ed. Christopher D. Geist and Jack Nachbar, pp. 122–36. Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press.
- Rabinowitz, Paula 1993 *Accessorizing History: Girls and Popular Culture*. Discussant Comments, Panel #150: Engendering Post-war Popular Culture in Britain and America. Ninth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women. Vassar College, June 11–13, 1993.
- Russett, Cynthia Eagle 1989 *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Schiebinger, Londa 1989 *The Mind Has No Sex?: Women in the Origins of Modern Science*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Schiebinger, Londa 1993 *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science*. Boston: Beacon.
- Schwartz, Hillel 1986 *Never Satisfied: A Cultural History of Diets, Fantasies and Fat*. New York: Free Press.
- Shapiro, Eben 1992 "'Totally Hot, Totally Cool.' Long-Haired Barbie Is a Hit." *New York Times*. June 22, sec. D, p. 9.
- Shapiro, Harry L. 1945 *Americans: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*. Man and Nature Publications. (Science Guide No. 126). New York: The American Museum of Natural History.
- Spencer, Frank 1992 "Some Notes on the Attempt to Apply Photography to Anthropometry during the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century" In *Anthropology and Photography, 1860–1920*. Ed. Elizabeth Edwards, pp. 99–107. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sprague Zones, Jane 1989 "The Dangers of Breast Augmentation." *The Network News* (July/August),

244 • PART II: PATTERNS

- pp. 1, 4, 6, 8. Washington, D.C.: National Women's Health Network.
- Stevenson, Richard 1991 "Mattel Thrives as Barbie Grows." *New York Times*. December 2.
- Terry, Jennifer C. 1992 *Siting Homosexuality: A History of Surveillance and the Production of Deviant Subjects (1935–1950)*. Ph.D. diss., University of California at Santa Cruz.
- Williams, Lena 1992 "Woman's Image in a Mirror: Who Defines What She Sees?" *New York Times*, February 6, sec. A, p. 1, sec. B, p. 7.
- Willis, Susan 1991 *A Primer for Daily Life*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Wilson, Elizabeth 1985 *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity*. London: Virago.
- Wiseman, C., J. Gray, J. Mosimann, and A. Ahrens 1992 "Cultural Expectations of Thinness in Women: An Update." *International Journal of Eating Disorders* 11(1): 85–89.
- Wolf, Naomi 1991 *The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used against Women*. New York: William Morrow.

Introduction to Reading 23

This reading is a good example of the application of intersectional analysis, employing categories of gender, age, and social class. The authors studied a mass-marketed program of so-called "successful aging" that targets old men in an effort to persuade them to spend their money on products and activities that will supposedly make them look and feel youthfully and heterosexually virile and successful. Toni Calasanti and Neal King analyze the ageism of "successful aging" consumer campaigns and their implications for old men's "physical health, unequal access to wealth, heterosexual dominance, and fears of impotence" (from abstract).

1. How does ageism permeate "successful aging" consumer campaigns?
2. Why is it important to examine age relations and their intersections with other inequalities?
3. Discuss the "dirty"/"impotent" double bind and its link to the rise of "successful aging" consumer programs.

FIRMING THE FLOPPY PENIS

AGE, CLASS, AND GENDER RELATIONS IN THE LIVES OF OLD MEN

Toni Calasanti and Neal King

The rise of a consumer market that targets old people and their desire to remain young brings into sharp relief the problems that old age poses to manhood. This article

proposes an expansion of research approaches to the lives of old men so that they may enrich our understandings of masculinities at a time when scientific breakthroughs and high-priced

Calasanti, T., & King, N. 2005. "Firming the floppy penis: Age, class, and gender relations in the lives of old men," *Men and Masculinities* 8(1), p. 3. Reprinted with permission of Sage Publications, Inc.

regimens sell visions of manhood renewed. We begin with a brief review of the (relative lack of) research on old men, continue with a look at the mass marketing of “successful aging,” and conclude with an overview of the potential rewards that sustained scholarship on the old, and a theorizing of age relations as a dimension of inequality, can offer the studies of men and masculinities.

(YOUNG) MEN’S STUDIES

Studies of old men are common in the gerontological literature, but those that theorize masculinity remain rare. As in many academic endeavors, men’s experiences have formed the basis for much research, but this androcentric foundation goes largely unexplored because manhood has served as invisible norm rather than as explicit focus of theory. Men’s lives have formed the standard for scholarship on retirement, for example, to such an extent that even the *Retirement History Study*, a longitudinal study conducted by the Social Security Administration, excluded married women as primary respondents (Calasanti 1993). In recent years, feminist gerontologists have urged that scholars examine not only women but gender relations as well, and a handful of scholars such as Woodward (1999), Cruikshank (2003), and Davidson (2001) have done so. Despite the proliferation of feminist theorizing, however, most mainstream gerontological studies of women still ignore gender (Hooymans 1999), and research on men lags further. Few studies examine old men *as men* or attend to masculinity as a research topic.

At the same time, profeminist studies of masculinity have studied neither old men nor the age relations that subordinate them. Ageism, often inadvertent, permeates this research, stemming from failures to study the lives of old men, to base questions on old men’s accounts of their lives, or to theorize age the way we have theorized relations of gender, race, and class. Mentions of age inequality arise as afterthoughts, usually at the ends of lists of oppressions, but they remain unexamined. As a result,

our understanding and concepts of manhood fall short because they assume, as standards of normalcy, men of middle age or younger. Aging scholars’ inattention to old *men*, combined with men’s studies’ lack of concern with *old men*, not only renders old men virtually invisible but also reproduces our own present and future oppression. This article examines a range of popular representations of old men in the context of research about their lives to outline some ways in which the vital work on men and masculinity might benefit by taking age relations into account as a form of inequality that intersects with gender, race, sexuality, and class.

Denial of Aging

Our ageism—both our exclusion of the old and our ignorance of age relations as an inequality affecting us all—surfaces not only in our choices of what (not) to study but also in how we theorize men and masculinities. Listening to the old and theorizing the inequality that subordinates them require that we begin with elementary observations. People treat signs of old age as stigma and avoid notice of them in both personal and professional lives. For instance, we often write or say “older” rather than “old,” usually in our attempts to avoid negative labels. But rather than accept this stigma attached to the old and help people to pass as younger than that, we should ask what seems so wrong with that stage of life. In a more aggregate version of this ageism, one theorizes old age as social construction and then suggests that people do not automatically become old at a particular age. One continues to treat “old age” as demeaning and merely seeks to eradicate recognition of it by granting reprieves from inclusion in the group. As well intended as such a theoretical move may be, it exacts a high price. It maintains the stigma rather than examining or removing it. As Andrews (1999) observed, all life cycle stages are social constructions, but “there is not much serious discussion about eliminating infancy, adolescence, or adulthood from the developmental landscape. It is only old age which

246 • PART II: PATTERNS

comes under the scalpel” (302). Emphasis on the socially constructed status of this age category does nothing to eliminate its real-world consequences.

Old age has material dimensions, the consequences of actors both social and biological: bodies *do* age, even if at variable rates, just as groups categorize and apportion resources accordingly. Emphasizing their subjective nature makes age categories no less real. Bodies matter; and the old are not, in fact, just like the middle-aged but only older. They are different, even though cultures and people within them define the differences in divergent ways. We need to consider the social construction of old age in conjunction with the aging of bodies (which, in a vexing irony, we understand only through social constructions).

Successful Aging

A more refined form of ageism attempts to portray old age in a positive light but retains the use of middle age as an implicit standard of goodness and health, in contrast to which the old remain deviant. One may see this ageism in the popular notion that men should “age successfully.” From this “anti-aging” perspective, some of the changes that occur with age might seem acceptable—gray hair and even, on occasion, wrinkles—but other age-related changes do not, such as losses of libido, income, or mobility. Aging successfully requires that the old maintain the activities popular among the middle-aged. Successful aging, in effect, requires well-funded resistance to culturally designated markers of old age, including relaxation. Within this paradigm, those signs of seniority remain thoroughly stigmatized.

To be sure, a research focus on men who have aged “successfully” flows from good intentions. Study of successful agers helps us negate stereotypes of the old as “useless,” unhappy, and the like. Nevertheless, a theory of the age relations underlying this movement must recognize their interrelations with class, sexual, and racial inequalities. The relevant standards for health and happy lifestyles have been based on leisure

activities accessible only to the more well-to-do and middle-aged: tennis, traveling, sipping wine in front of sunsets, and strolls on the beaches of tony resorts that appear in the advertising campaigns for such lifestyles.

The dictate to age successfully by remaining active is both ageist and ignorant of the lives of the working classes. Spurred by the new anti-aging industry, the promotional images of the “active elder” are bound by gender, race, class, and sexuality. The sort of consumption and lifestyles implicated in ads for posh retirement communities with their depiction of “‘imagineered’ landscapes of consumptions marked by ‘compulsively tidy lawns’ and populated by ‘tanned golfers’” (McHugh 2000, 110) assumes a sort of “active” lifestyle available only to a select group: men whose race and class make them most likely to be able to afford it, and their spouses.

Regimens of successful aging also encourage consumers to define any old person in terms of “what she or he is no longer: a mature productive adult” (McHugh 2000, 104). One strives to remain active to show that one is not really old. In this sense, successful aging means not aging and not being old because our constructions of old age contain no positive content. Signs of old age continue to operate as stigma, even in this currently popular model with its many academic adherents. The successful aging movement disapproves implicitly of much about the lives of the old, pressuring those whose bodies are changing to work hard to preserve their “youth” so that they will not be seen as old. As a result, the old and their bodies have become subject to a kind of disciplinary *activity*. This emphasis on productive activity means that those who are chronically impaired, or who prefer to be contemplative, become “problem” old people, far too comfortable just being “old” (Katz 2000; Holstein 1999).

This underlying bias concerning successful aging and “agelessness” is analogous to what many white feminists have had to learn about race relations, or indeed many men have had to learn about gender relations. Many whites began with the notion that nonwhites were

doing fine as long as they acted like whites (just as women in many workplaces were deemed OK to the extent that they acted like men). That actual diversity would benefit our society was news to many, its recognition hard-won by activists of color who championed an awareness of the structuring effects of race relations. Only when we can acknowledge and validate these constructed differences do we join the fights against racism and sexism. The same is true of age relations and the old. We must see the old as legitimately different from the middle-aged, separated by a systematic inequality—built on some set of biological factors—that affects all of our lives. To theorize this complex and ever-changing construction is to understand age relations.

The experience of ageism itself varies by gender and other social inequalities (just as the experience of manhood varies by age and the like). Others have already pointed to the double standard of aging whereby women are seen to be old sooner than men (Calasanti and Slevin 2001). But the experience of ageism varies among different social hierarchies. Women with the appropriate class background, for instance, can afford to use various technologies to “hide” signs of aging bodies (such as gray hair and wrinkles) that will postpone their experiences of ageism. Some women of color, such as African Americans, accept more readily the superficial bodily signs of aging that might bother middle-class white women. Within their communities, signs of aging may confer a status not affirmed in the wider culture (Slevin and Wingrove 1998). By failing to reflect on our own ageism and its sources, we have left age relations and its intersections with such other inequalities unquestioned and misunderstood. We have given lip service to age relations by placing it on a list of oppressions, but we have only begun to theorize them. And so we have left unexplored one of the most important systems shaping manhood.

Examining age relations and its intersections with other inequalities will allow us to address ageism in its deepest form and address the structural inequities that deny power to subgroups of

the old. It involves breaking the ethical hold that successful, active aging has on our views of aging. Just as feminists have argued for women’s emancipation from stigmatizing pressure to avoid the paths that they might like to take, so too must the old be free to choose ways to be old that suit them without having to feel like slackards or sick people. Old age should include acceptance of inactivity as well as activity, contemplation as well as exertion, and sexual assertiveness as well as a well-earned break. Old people will have achieved greater equality with the young when they feel free not to try to be young, when they need not be “exceptional,” and when they can be frail, or flabby, or have “age spots” without feeling ugly. *Old* will have positive content and not be defined mainly by disease, mortality, or the absence of economic value.

OLD MEN IN POPULAR CULTURE

The study of masculinity benefits from a look at mass-produced images of old men, because they suggest much about the changing definitions of their problems and the solutions offered. Viewed in context of the experiences of diverse old men as well as the structural constraints on various groups, these popular images illustrate the pressures to be masculine and ways in which men respond to accomplish old manhood. On one hand, the goal of consumer images is to convince others to buy products that will help them better their lives. What is instructive about such images is what they reveal about how people—in this case, aging men—should go about improving their lives (i.e., what it is that they should strive for). On the other hand, images of powerful older men—such as CEOs and politicians—periodically appear in the news media, demonstrating what old men should be striving for in the consumer ads: money, power, and the like. We use mass-produced images of old men, then, to explore the ways that men and masculinities intersect with other systems of inequality—including age relations—to influence various experiences of manhood.

Current Images: New Manhood in Old Age

The recent demographic shift toward an aged population has inspired consumer marketers to address the old with promises of “positive” or successful aging. A massive ad campaign sells anti-aging—the belief that one should deny or defy the signs and even the fact of aging, and treat the looks and recreation of middle-aged as the appropriate standards for beauty, health, and all around success. As Katz (2001–2002) recently put it, “The ideals of positive aging and anti-ageism have come to be used to promote a widespread anti-aging culture, one that translates their radical appeal into commercial capital” (27). These ads present a paradox for old men, whom ads depict as masculine but unable by virtue of infirmity and retirement to achieve the hegemonic ideals rooted in the lives of the young. Thus, old masculinity is always wanting, ever in need of strenuous affirmation. Even when blessed with the privileges of money and whiteness, old men lack two of hegemonic masculinity’s fundamentals: hard-charging careers and robust physical strength. The most current ads promise successful aging with interesting implications for these forms of male privilege.

“Playing Hard”

The first image in this “new masculinity” shows men “playing hard,” which differs from previous ads in important ways. It emphasizes activities modeled after the experiences of middle-aged, white, middle-class men. Men pursue leisure but not in terms of grandparenting, reading, or other familial and relaxing pastimes. Instead, they propel themselves into hard play as consumers of expensive sports and travel. Having maintained achievement orientations during their paid-work years, they now intensify their involvement in the expanding consumerist realm, trading production or administration for activity-based consumption. They compete not against other men for salaries and promotions but against their own and nature’s incursions into their health as they defy old age to hobble them.

Katz (2001–2002) noted that many ads portray the “older person as an independent, healthy, flexi-retired ‘citizen’; who bridges middle age and old age without suffering the time-related constraints of either. In this model . . . ‘retirement is not old age’” (29). For instance, McHugh observed that the marketing of sunbelt retirement communities includes the admonition to seniors to busy themselves in the consumption of leisure, to “rush about as if their very lives depended upon it” (McHugh 2000, 112). Similarly, Aetna advertisements selling retirement financial planning show pictures of retired men in exotic places, engaging in such activities as surfing or communing with penguins. Captions offer such invitations as

Who decided that at the age of 65 it was time to hit the brakes, start acting your age, and smile sweetly as the world spins by? . . . [W]hen you turn 65, the concept of retirement will be the only thing that’s old and tired. (*Newsweek* January 5, 1998, 9)

This active consumer image reinforces a construction of old age that benefits elite men in two ways. First, it favors the young in that the old men pictured do nothing that would entitle them to pay. Instead, they purchase expensive forms of leisure. Readers can infer that old men neither need money nor deserve it. Retired, their roles center around spending their money (implicitly transferring it to the younger generations who do need and deserve it). Such ads affirm younger men’s right to a cushion from competition with senior men for salaried positions, power, and status. Second, this active consumer image favors the monied classes by avoiding any mention of old men’s financial struggles or (varied) dependence on the state. Indeed, age relations work to heighten economic inequalities, such that the greatest differences in income and wealth appear among the old (Calasanti and Slevin 2001). This polarization of income and wealth creates a demographic situation in which only the most privileged men—white, middle-class or better, and physically similar to middle-aged men—can engage in the recreation marketed.

There, we see an additional benefit to the young of such images of men—the emphasis on the physical abilities that the young are more likely to have. Featherstone and Hepworth (1995) noted that the consumer images of “positive aging” found in publications for those of retirement age or planning retirement ultimately have “serious shortcomings” because they do not counter the ageist meanings that adhere to “other” images of the old, that is, “decay and dependency.” In other words, we look more kindly on those old persons engaged in “an extended plateau of active middle age typified in the imagery of positive aging as a period of youthfulness and active consumer lifestyles” (46). In this sense, the new, “positive,” and consumer-based view of the old is one steeped in middle-aged, middle-class views and resources. The wide variety of retirement and other magazines—and, more recently, a large and expanding number of Web sites—convey the idea that the body can be “serviced and repaired, and . . . cultivate the hope that the period of active life can be extended and controlled” through the use of a wide range of advertised products (44). This image does not recognize or impute value to those more often viewed to be physically dependent, for example. As a result, those men who are able to achieve this masculine version of “successful aging” appear acceptable within this paradigm, but this new form of acceptance does not mitigate the ways in which we view the old. It denies the physical realities of aging and is thus doomed to failure. Not only are the majority of old men left out of this image of new masculinity for old men, but also the depiction is in itself illusory and transitory. Note the gender inequality in these depictions of aging denied through consumption. Most women participate in the lifestyles of the well-to-do as parts of married couples, dependent on men. Old men may lose status relative to younger men but still maintain privilege in relation to old women.

However hollow such promises of expensive recreation might be for most men, the study of men’s physical aggression and self-care suggests that illusions drive many indeed and that men

will often sacrifice health and even their lives to accomplish this exaggerated sense of physical superiority to women and resistance to the forces of nature. Researchers of health, violence, and manhood have already documented the harms that men do to themselves. Whether disenfranchised men of color in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty (Franklin 1987; Lee 2000; Staples 1995), athletes desperate to perform as champions (Dworkin and Messner 1999; Klein 1995; White, Young, and McTeer 1995), or ordinary men expressing rage through violence (Harris 2000) and refusing to consult physicians when ill (Courtenay 2000), all manner of men undercut themselves and endanger their lives in the pursuit of their ideals. Harris (2000, 782), for instance, referred to the violence as part of the “doing” of manhood, in line with the sociological theory of gender as accomplishment (Fenstermaker and West 2002). Injury in the pursuit of masculinity extends to social networks, which men more often than women neglect to the point of near isolation and desolation (Courtenay 2000). For those not killed outright, the accumulated damage results in debilitating injury and chronic disease leading to depression (White, Young, and McTeer 1995; Charmaz 1995), fatal heart disease (Helgeson 1995), and high rates of suicide born of lonely despair (Stack 2000). The effect of all of this on old manhood is tremendous, with men experiencing higher death rates than women at every age except after age ninety-five (Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics 2000), at which point few men remain alive.

More important to this discussion, however, than the results of such self-abuse on old age are the effects of age relations on this doing of manhood. To be sure, criminal combat and bone-crunching sports decline with age (much earlier in life, actually) such that old men commit few assaults and play little rugby. The increasing fragility of their bodies leads to relatively sedate lifestyles. Nevertheless, the recent anti-aging boom sells the implicit notion that relaxation equals death or at least defeat and that, once he retires, only high-priced recreation keeps a man a man. Age and gender ideals to which any man

250 • PART II: PATTERNS

can be held accountable shift from careerism to consumption, from sport to milder recreation, but maintain notions of performance all the while.

The theoretical gain here lies in recognizing the historical (and very recent) shift to old manhood as a social problem solved through the consumption of market goods. Men throughout history and across the globe appear always to feel defensive about manhood, in danger of losing or being stripped of it (Solomon-Godeau 1995). This theme takes different forms in different periods, however, and in our own appears as the notion that old men lose their hardness if they relax but can buy it back from leisure companies and medical experts.

“Staying Hard”

Given the importance of heterosexuality to hegemonic masculinity, we should consider the ways in which age and gender interact with sexuality, so often equated for men with “the erect phall[us]” (Marsiglio and Greer 1994, 126). Although graceful acceptance by men of their declining sexual desire had previously served as a hallmark of proper aging (Marshall and Katz 2002), current depictions of old men’s masculinity focus on virility as expressed in a (hetero)sexuality enabled by medical products. “Staying hard” goes hand-in-hand with playing hard in the construction of age-appropriate gender ideals in this consumer economy.

Examples of the link among continued sexual functioning, manhood, and resistance to aging, in a context of individual responsibility and control, appear throughout the anti-aging industry, which has been growing as a part of our popular culture through the proliferation of Web sites, direct-mail brochures, journal and magazine advertisements, blurbs in academic newsletters, appearances on talk shows and infomercials, self-help paperbacks, and pricey seminars designed to empower the weakening old. For instance, a few passages from *Newsweek* (Cowley 1996) on the movement toward the use of human growth hormone (HGH) and testosterone draw connections among virility,

aging, masculinity, individual control, and consumerism.

Five years ago, on the eve of his 50th birthday, Ron Fortner realized that time was catching up with him. . . . His belly was soft, his energy and libido were lagging and his coronary arteries were ominously clogged up. After his advancing heart disease forced him into a quintuple bypass operation, Fortner decided he wasn’t ready to get old. He . . . embarked on a hormone-based regimen designed to restore his youthful vigor. . . . [H]e started injecting himself with human growth hormone. . . . He claims the results were “almost instantaneous.” First came a general sense of well-being. Then within weeks, his skin grew more supple, his hair more lustrous and his upper body leaner and more chiseled. . . . Awash in all these juices, he says he discovered new reserves of patience and energy, and became a sexual iron man. “My wife would like a word with you,” he kids his guru during on-air interviews, “and that word is stop.” (Cowley 1996, 68, 70)

Significantly, a yearlong supply of HGH in 1996 ran between \$10,000 and \$15,000, making it most accessible to elite men.

Another “success story” from the article concerns

Robert, a 56-year-old consultant who wore a scrotal patch [for testosterone] for two and a half years. . . . Since raising his testosterone level from the bottom to the top of the normal range, Robert has seen his beard thicken, his body odor worsen and his libido explode. “Whether it’s mental or physical, you start feeling older when you can’t do physical things like you could,” he says. “Sexually, I’m more comfortable because I know I’m dependable.” His only complaint is that he’s always covered with little rings of glue that won’t come off without a heavy-duty astringent. (Cowley 1996, 71–72)

Finally, the story concludes by noting that

as the population of aging males grows, the virility preservation movement is sure to grow with it.

“Basically, it’s a marketing issue,” says epidemiologist John McKinley, director of the New England Research Institute. . . . “The pharmaceutical industry is going to ride this curve all the way to the bank” (Cowley 1996, 75)

Scientific discourse and practice equate, especially for men, sex with “not aging,” and propose technology to retain and restore sexual “functionality” (Katz and Marshall 2003). Indeed, as anti-aging guru Dr. Karlis Ullis, author of *Age Right* and *Super T* (for testosterone), proclaims on his Web site, “Good, ethical sex is the best anti-aging medicine we have” (2003). The appearance of such chemical interventions as sildenafil (Viagra) and the widespread advertising campaigns to promote them have also helped to reconstruct old manhood. A recent ad shows an old, white, finely dressed couple dancing a tango, with the man above and the woman leaning back over his leg. The strenuous dance combines with the caption to convey his virility: “Viagra: Let the dance begin.” (*Good Housekeeping* April 1999, 79). Here is a man who likes to be on top and has the (newly enhanced) strength to prove it. Still another ad affirms the role of phallic sex in marital bliss. The bold letters next to a black man with visibly graying hair state, “With Viagra, she and I have a lot of catching up to do.” And, at the bottom: “Love life again” (*Black Enterprise* March 2000, 24–5).

Such ideals of virility appear in age-defying ads for active leisure—such as one for Martex towels, which features the caption, “Never, ever throw in the towel.” Below this line, three old men stand, towels around their waists, in front of three surfboards that stand erect, stuck in the beach sand. Beneath, one reads that the towels are “for body and soul” (*Oprah* April 2001, 118). An Aetna financial planning ad shows an old white man paddling in the surf, his erect board standing upward between his legs. The caption reads, “A Rocking Chair Is a Piece of Furniture. Not a State of Mind” (*Newsweek* October 27, 1997, 15). In the ideal world of these ads, age is a state of mind, one to be conquered through public displays of a phallic, physical prowess. One accomplishes old manhood, then, by at least

appearing to try to live up to some of the ideals pictured in these magazines. The resulting widespread doing of old manhood as consumption of the right products and maintenance of the right activities serves in turn to render natural the ideals toward which men strive.

Masculinity and sexual functioning have long been linked to aging in our popular culture, but the nature of his relationship has shifted as age relations have transformed and come under medical authority. Contemporary drug marketers build on an ancient quest but market it in new ways.

By the 1960s, therapists blamed psychological factors for male impotence and suggested that “to cease having sex would hasten aging itself” (Katz and Marshall 2003, 7). They later redefined male impotence as a physiological event—“erectile dysfunction”—to be addressed through such technologies as penile injections and sildenafil (Viagra)—and declared intercourse vital to successful aging (Marshall and Katz 2002; Potts 2000). More recently, advertisers have catered to a popular notion of “male menopause”—an umbrella label for the consequences of the fears of loss that expectations of high performance, in the context of women’s rising status, can engender (Featherstone and Hepworth 1985). Marketers have built their depictions of old manhood on these links among sex, success, and masculinity. Sexual functioning now serves as a vehicle for reconstructions of manhood as “ageless,” symbolizing the continued physical vigor and attractiveness derived from the experiences of younger men. To the extent that men can demonstrate their virility, they can still be men and stave off old age and the loss of status that accrues to that label.

To be sure, this shift in advertising imagery toward the phallic can work to the benefit of old men, convincing people to take them seriously as men full of potency as well as consumer power. To stop our analysis there, however, leaves unquestioned the ageism on which these assertions rest, the fact that we root these ideals of activity and virility in the experiences of the younger men. The ads avoid sexuality based on

252 • PART II: PATTERNS

attributes other than hard penises and experiences other than heterosexual intercourse, and these are hegemonic sexual symbols of the young. The little research available suggests that orgasm and intercourse recede in importance for some old men, who turn to oral sex and other expressions of love (Wiley and Bortz 1996). But these phallic ads value men only to the extent that they act like younger, heterosexual (and wealthy) men. Their emphases on both playing and staying hard reveal some of the ways in which gender and other inequalities shape old age. Old men are disadvantaged in relation to younger men, no matter how elite they may be.

The renewed emphasis on sexual intercourse among old men also reinforces the gender inequalities embedded in phallic depictions of bodies and sexuality. Historically, women's bodies and sexualities have been of only peripheral interest in part because they did not fit the "scientific" models based on men's physiologies. For example, rejuvenators were uncomfortable touting sex gland surgery for women (one variation promoted grafting the ovaries of chimpanzees to those of female patients) partly because they knew that they could not restore fertility in women. Thus, when they did speak of women, they tended to focus instead on the "mental" fertility that might result. Part of the problem was that women's "losses" in terms of sexuality (i.e., menopause) occurred much earlier in life. Those women were often "young," which confounded the equation of "loss of sexuality" with "old" (Hirshbein 2000).

People continue to define old women's sexuality in relation to old men's, assessing it in terms of penile-vaginal penetration. An old woman, in such popular imagery, remains passive and dependent on her man's continued erection for any pleasure of her own. Research on old women's accounts of their experiences, however, makes clear that these models represent little of what they want from their sex lives. These popular definitions also ignore that many old women have no partners at all. Even if old women "accept" and try to live up to the burden of being sexual and "not old" in male-defined terms, there are not enough old men for them to be partnered

(and our age-based norms do not allow them to date younger men).

Finally, the ageism implicit in the demand to emulate the young is self-defeating and ignores the reality that even with technology and unlimited resources, bodies still change. Ultimately, individuals cannot control this; it is a "battle" one cannot win.

THEORIZING AGE, CLASS, AND GENDER RELATIONS

The rewards for the inclusion of a marginalized group into research extend beyond the satisfaction of listening to oft-ignored voices. The study of old manhood stands to enrich our theories of masculinity as social problem, as disciplinary consumer object, as the accomplishment of heterosexuality, and as the "crisis"-torn struggle to achieve or resist the hegemonic ideals spread through our popular culture.

Studying age relations can render insights into ways that we theorize gender. For instance, Judith Kegan Gardiner (2002) suggested that we clarify gender relations by making an analogy to age relations. This would help reconstruct thinking about gender in our popular culture, she argued, because many people already recognize *continuity* in age categories while they still see gender as dichotomous. People already see themselves as *performing* age-appropriate behavior ("acting their ages") while continuing to take for granted the doing of gender (Fenstermaker and West 2002). And popular culture more fully recognizes enduring group *conflicts* (over divisions of resources) between generations than between sexes. Gardiner (2002) suggested that a fuller theorizing of age relations has much to offer the study of men, that scholars may move beyond their polarization of biological and social construction, and that our popular culture may more fully appreciate the power struggles that govern gender relations.

We recommend just this view—of age and gender, race and class, and other dimensions of inequality—as accomplished by social as well as

biological actors; as accountable to ever-changing ideals of age- and sex-appropriate behavior; as constructed in the context of a popular culture shaped by consumer marketing and technological change; and as imposing disciplinary regimens in the names of good health, empowerment, beauty, and success.

Taken together, the mass media reviewed above posit ideals of old manhood to which most if not all men find themselves held accountable. To the men fortunate enough to have been wealthy or well paid for their careerism, corporations (often with the support of those gerontologists who implicitly treat old age as a social problem) sell regimens through which those old men may live full lives, working, playing, and staying hard. If careerism kept the attention of these men from their families and leisure lives, constricting their social networks and degrading their physical health, then this high-priced old age serves as a promised payoff. Once retired, those few wealthy enough to do it can enjoy a reward: high-energy time with a spouse and some friends, enjoyment of tourism, surfing, and sex. Men sacrificed much, even their lives, in their pursuits of hegemonic masculine status. Those who survive face a rougher time with old age as a result: few sources of social support and bodies weakened by self-abuse. Thus, the accomplishment of manhood comes to require some response to the invitation to strain toward middle-age activities. Some men reach with all of their strength for the lifestyle ideals broadcast so loudly, whereas many give up for lack of means to compete, and still others deliberately resist. In a cruel irony, the ideals move all the further out of reach of the men who pursued them with such costly vigor in younger years and damaged their health beyond repair. The final push for hegemonic masculinity involves spending money and enjoying health that many old men do not have to pursue the recreation and phallic sex that the ads tell them they need.

Certainly, the study of old men offers striking views of a popular struggle over heterosexuality (although the study of old gay men will surely be as transforming, the near total lack of research on

them prevents us from speculating how). Widely held views of old men's sexuality suggest dominance over women as a form of virility. But, as bodies change, outright predation recedes as an issue and impotency moves to the center of concern. A popular (consumer) culture that figures old manhood in terms of *loss* hardly departs from any trend in images of masculinity. Men have always felt that they were losing their manhood, their pride, and their virility, whether because their penises actually softened or because women gained status and so frightened them. But the study of this transition—from the feelings of invincibility that drive the destructiveness of youth to the growing expectation of vulnerability—throws old masculinity into a valuable relief. For instance, theories that center on violence and predation capture little of the realities of old men's lives, just as scholarly emphasis on coercion and harassment of women excludes most of the experiences of old women. For old women, the more important sexual theme may be that of being *cast aside* (Calasanti and Slevin 2001, 195). For old men, *impotence* in its most general sense, leading to many responses ranging from suicidal depression to more graceful acceptance, may be a more productive theme. It serves as both positive and negative ideal in a classic double-bind: old men should, so as not to intrude on the rights of younger men, retreat from the paid labor market; but they should also, so as to age successfully, never stop consuming opportunities to be active. They should, so as not to be "dirty," stop becoming erect; but they should also, so as to age successfully, never lose that erection. Old men fear impotence to the point that many suffer it who otherwise would not. Anxieties drain them at just the moment when expectations of aggressive consumption, of proving themselves younger than they are, reach their heights.

The notion that men accomplish age just as they do gender has much to offer, with its sensitivity to relations of inequality, its moment-to-moment accountability to unreachable but hegemonic ideals, and the perpetually changing nature of such accomplishments. Never have erections been so easily discussed in public, and

254 • PART II: PATTERNS

never has this “dirty”/“impotent” double bind been tighter, than since the rise of this consumer regimen. Nor have old men, before now, lived under such pressure to remain active further into their lengthening life spans. The ideals of manhood that tempted so many to cripple themselves in younger years now loom large enough to shame those who cannot play tennis or waltz the ballrooms of fancy resorts. The study of manhood should take careful notice of the ways in which men do old manhood under such tight constraints. The popular images that we have reviewed provide ideals of old manhood, but they do not necessarily describe the lives of very many old men. Given how little we know of the ways in which old men respond to such ideals, the research task before us seems clear.

CONCLUSION

Scholars tend to ignore age relations in part because of our own ageism. Most are not yet old, and even if we are, we often deny it (Minichiello, Browne, and Kendig 2000). Most people know little about the old because we seldom talk to them. Family and occupational segregation by age leave the old outside the purview of the work that most young people do.

Resulting in part from such segregation, the study of men, although no more than any other social science and humanist scholarship, has focused on the work, problems, sexuality, and consumption patterns of the young. This neglect of the old results in theories of masculinity that underplay the lengths to which men go to play and stay hard, the long-term effects of their strenuous accomplishment of manhood, and the variety of ways in which men remain masculine once their appetites for self-destruction begin to wane. Research on the old can reveal much about the desperate struggle for hegemonic masculinity and the varied ways in which men begin to re-define manhood. At the same time, it also uncovers the young and middle-aged biases that inhere in typical notions of masculinity that tend to center on accomplishments and power in the productive

sphere, for instance. Few researchers have considered the reality of masculinities not directly tied to the fact of or potential for paid labor.

To leave age relations unexplored reinforces the inequality that subordinates the old, an inequality that we unwittingly reproduce for ourselves. Unlike other forms of oppression, in which the privileged rarely become the oppressed, we will all face ageism if we live long enough. As feminists, scientists, and people growing old, we can better develop our sense of interlocking inequalities and the ways in which they shape us, young and old. Our theories and concepts have too often assumed rather than theorized these age relations. The study of men and masculinity and the scholarship on age relations are just beginning to inform each other.

REFERENCES

- Andrews, M. 1999. The seductiveness of agelessness. *Ageing and Society* 19(3): 301–18.
- Calasanti, T. M. 1993. Bringing in diversity: Toward an inclusive theory of retirement *Journal of Aging Studies* 7(2): 133–50.
- Calasanti, T. M., and K. F. Slevin. 2001. *Gender, social inequalities, and aging*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira.
- Charmaz, K. 1995. Identity dilemmas of chronically ill men. In *Men's health and illness: Gender, power, and the body*, edited by D. Sabo and D. F. Gordon, 266–91. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Courtenay, W. H. 2000. Behavioral factors associated with disease, injury, and death among men: Evidence and implications for prevention. *Journal of Men's Studies* 9(1): 81–142.
- Cowley, Geoffrey. 1996. Attention: Aging Men. *Newsweek*, September 16, 68–75.
- Cruikshank, M. 2003. *Learning to be old: Gender, culture, and aging*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Davidson, K. 2001. Later life widowhood, selfishness, and new partnership choices: A gendered perspective. *Ageing and Society* 21:297–317.
- Dworkin, S. L., and M. A. Messner. 1999. Just do . . . what? Sport, bodies, gender. In *Revisioning*

- gender*, edited by M. M. Ferree, J. Lorber, and B. B. Hess, 341–61. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Estes, Carroll L., and Elizabeth A. Binney. 1991. The biomedicalization of aging: Dangers and dilemmas. In *Critical perspectives on aging: The political and moral economy of growing old*, edited by Meredith Minkler and Carroll L. Estes, 117–34. Amityville, NY: Baywood.
- Featherstone, M., and M. Hepworth. 1985. The male menopause: Lifestyle and sexuality. *Maturitas* 7:235–46.
- . 1995. Images of positive aging: A case study of *Retirement Choice magazine*. In *Images of aging: Cultural representations of later life*, edited by M. Featherstone and A. Wernick, 29–47. London: Routledge.
- Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics. 2000. *Older Americans 2000: Key indicators of well-being*. <http://www.agingstats.gov>.
- Fenstermaker, S., and C. West, eds. 2002. *Doing gender, doing difference: Inequality, power, and institutional change*. New York: Routledge.
- Franklin, C. 1987. Surviving the institutional decimation of black males: Causes, consequences, and intervention. In *The making of masculinities: The new men's studies*, edited by H. Brod, 155–69. Winchester, MA: Allen and Unwin.
- Gardiner, J. K. 2002. Theorizing age and gender: Bly's boys, feminism, and maturity masculinity. In *Masculinity studies & feminist theory: New directions*, edited by J. K. Gardiner, 90–118. New York: University of Columbia Press.
- Haraway, D. 1992. The promises of monsters: A regenerative politics for inappropriate/d others. In *Cultural studies*, edited by L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, and P. Treichler, 295–337. New York: Routledge.
- Harris, A. P. 2000. Gender, violence, and criminal justice. *Stanford Law Review* 52:777–807.
- Helgeson, V. S. 1995. Masculinity, men's roles, and coronary heart disease. In *Men's health and illness: Gender, power and the body*, edited by D. Sabo and D. F. Gordon, 68–104. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hirshbein, L. D. 2000. The glandular solution: Sex, masculinity and aging in the 1920s. *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9(3): 27–304.
- Holstein, Martha. 1999. Women and productive aging: Troubling implications. In *Critical gerontology: Perspectives from political and moral economy*, edited by Meredith Minkler and Carroll L. Estes, 359–73. Amityville, NY: Baywood.
- Hooyman, N. R. 1999. Research on older women: Where is feminism? *The Gerontologist* 39:115–18.
- Katz, S. 2000. Busy bodies: Activity, aging, and the management of everyday life. *Journal of Aging Studies* 14(2): 135–52.
- . 2001–2002. Growing older without aging? Positive aging, anti-ageism, and anti-aging. *Generations* 25(4): 27–32.
- Katz, S., and B. Marshall. 2003. New sex for old: Lifestyle, consumerism, and the ethics of aging well. *Journal of Aging Studies* 17(1): 3–16.
- Klein, A. M. 1995. Life's too short to die small: Steroid use among male bodybuilders. In *Men's health and illness: Gender power and the body*, edited by D. Sabo and D. F. Gordon, 105–21. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lee, M. R. 2000. Concentrated poverty, race, and homicide. *Sociological Quarterly* 41(2): 189–206.
- Marshall, B., and S. Katz. 2002. Forever functional: Sexual fitness and the ageing male body. *Body & Society* 8(4): 43–70.
- Marsiglio, William, and Richard A. Greer. 1994. A gender analysis of older men's sexuality. In *Older men's lives*, edited by Edward H. Thompson, Jr., 122–40. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- McHugh, K. 2000. The “ageless self”? Emplacement of identities in sun belt retirement communities. *Journal of Aging Studies* 14(1): 103–15.
- Minichiello, V., J. Browne, and H. Kendig. 2000. Perceptions and consequences of ageism: Views of older people. *Ageing and Society* 20(3): 253–78.
- Potts, A. 2000. The essence of the “hard on”: Hegemonic masculinity and the cultural construction of “erectile dysfunction.” *Men and Masculinities* 3(1): 85–103.
- Slevin, K. F., and C. R. Wingrove. 1998. *From stumbling blocks to stepping stones: The life experiences of fifty professional African American women*. New York: New York University Press.
- Solomon-Godeau, A. 1995. Male trouble. In *Constructing masculinities*, edited by M. Berger,

256 • PART II: PATTERNS

- B. Wallis, and S. Watson, 69–76. New York: Routledge.
- Stack, S. 2000. Suicide: A 15-year review of the sociological literature. *Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior* 30(2): 145–76.
- Staples, R. 1995. Health among Afro-American males. In *Men's health and illness: Gender, power, and the body*, edited by D. Sabo and D.F. Gordon, 121–38. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ullis, Karlis. 2003. *Agingprevent.com*. <http://www.agingprevent.com/flash/index.html>.
- White, P. G., K. Young, and W. G. McTeer. 1995. Sport, masculinity, and the injured body. In *Men's health and illness: Gender, power, and the body*, edited by D. Sabo and D. F. Gordon, 158–82. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Wiley, D., and W. M. Bortz. 1996. Sexuality and aging—usual and successful. *Journal of Gerontology* 51A (3): M142–M146.
- Woodward, K., ed. 1999. *Figuring age: Women, bodies, generations*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Introduction to Reading 24

This article examines the intersection of race, gender, and nativity in consumption culture. The authors focus their analysis on advertising campaigns that repackage old racial stereotypes of Asian American women under the guise of corporate multiculturalism. Asian American women are sexually objectified, culturally misrepresented, and offered up as bodies to be visually consumed. The authors maintain that “Orientalism” has become an object to consume and a vehicle to stimulate consumption.

1. Define Orientalism and describe its history in the United States.
2. How do corporations use multiculturalism to market their products?
3. How are Asian American women positioned in relationship to White males in the cultural schemata of corporate advertisements?

CONSUMING ORIENTALISM

IMAGES OF ASIAN-AMERICAN WOMEN IN MULTICULTURAL ADVERTISING

Minjeong Kim and Angie Y. Chung

Research studies have long challenged the ways in which advertising and marketing campaigns employ gendered imagery that objectify women and reinforce power differences between the sexes in order to sell their products

(Berger 1977; Betterton 1987; Bordo 1993; Cortese 1999; Goffman 1979; Kilbourn 1999, 2000; Manca and Manca 1994; Williamson 1978, 1986). Among other things, print advertising has been shown to promote images that distort

From Minjeong, K., & Chung, A. Y. 2005. “Consuming Orientalism: Images of Asian/American women in multicultural advertising” *Qualitative Sociology* 28(1). Reprinted with permission of Springer.

women's bodies for male pleasure, condone violence against women, or belittle the women's movement itself as a playful prank. From a historical perspective, however, women of color rarely figured into the marketing campaigns of these companies—partly because of their small numbers as well as their racialized invisibility to mainstream American society. As a result, aside from research on racial stereotypes in the TV and movie entertainment industries (Gee 1988; Hamamoto 1994; Lee 1999), few scholars have fully examined the commodified images of Asian/American women¹ that have come to play an integral role in today's consumer culture industries.

Recent trends in the global economy have transformed the cultural content and marketing strategies of corporate advertising campaigns today as we demonstrate in this study. In particular, these advertising campaigns have sought to diversify their cultural repertoire through the greater inclusion of Asian and Latino/American characters and the invocation of global imageries. However, we will argue that representations of ethnic minority groups in such advertising campaigns are usually based on gendered and racialized reflections of global culture that draw on resurrected themes of colonialism and American Orientalism. This particularly holds true in their depictions of Asian/American women (and the implicit absence or rarity of Asian/American men). On the one hand, it is important to note that images of Asian/American women in advertising are not ahistorical in origin. Oftentimes, they selectively emulate and modify popular images of Asian/American women in the U.S. culture that have been shaped throughout American history. At the same time, this study aims to show how such representations also emerge from the specific "multicultural" and globalized context of post-Civil Rights America that have destabilized and transformed the identities of White males.

This paper will discuss the dynamics of American Orientalism in advertising and its role in reconstructing Asian/American women in relation to White Americans within the globalizing multicultural context of U.S. society. First, it will provide a theoretical context for understanding

gendered and racial representations of women in the print media in post-industrial American society. Second, we will show how stereotypical imageries of Asian/American women and commodified Orientalism have evolved in American media culture over time. Third, we will analyze advertisements taken from various magazines that have included Asian/American female characters with specific focus on three multicultural advertising campaigns. In this section, we will show how the marketing of Orientalist images and meanings take shape under the guise of multiculturalism with more detailed explanations of specific race/gender imagery. Based on this analysis, the paper will conclude by showing how Orientalist ideologies have been rearticulated within the context of today's globalized economy.

CONSUMING CULTURE IN POST-INDUSTRIAL AMERICA

Much of scholarly attention has focused on the construction of corporate marketing and advertising campaigns through a gendered lens (Cortese 1999; Kilbourn 1990, 2000; Manca and Manca 1994; Williamson 1978, 1986), yet most studies oddly leave out an important racial and nativist element of today's global capitalist culture that feeds on the visual consumption of women's bodies. The early representations of America's consumption culture relied heavily on images of middle-class White women whose idealistic roles were defined within the context of the modern domestic economy.

Although many studies have examined the gendered dimensions of this consumption culture, there has been a noticeable lack of research that analyzes today's capitalist culture through the intersections of race, gender and nativity. Various trends in the current post-industrial global economy have underscored not only the consumptive aspects of traditional gender roles, but also the exploitative international machinery upon which this consumption economy is built. The high standards of living that sustain the growing white-collar sector of the American economy are made possible by the employment and exploitation of

258 • PART II: PATTERNS

cheap immigrant labor, particularly women and children from Asia and Latin America. As more and more white-collar workers are integrated into the expanding highly-skilled and professional labor force, there has been a growing need for immigrant labor to take their place in the home as nannies, housekeepers, lawnmowers and even shopping consumers (Chang and Abramovitz 2000; Hothschild and Ehrenreich 2003; Sassen-Koob 1984). At the same time, the steady growth of low-skilled immigrant workers has also been accompanied by an influx of highly-skilled workers and professionals, particularly from Asia—a pattern that marks the polarized nature of the global economy.

But even beyond the realm of professional service, the mainstream cultural economy as a whole has come to rely increasingly on the cheap labor of immigrants in order to sustain its mass production of cheap goods in large-scale industries like Walmart, Gap, and Nike. Immigrant women from Third World countries have figured greatly into the new economic structure, because of their cheaper labor and greater vulnerability to subcontractors who must drive down labor costs in order to maintain their competitive relations with large-scale corporations. The greater flexibility of production in the new era of technology has allowed corporations to export these jobs as well to Third World countries where such workers are abundant and labor regulation laws are poor. Innovative research by Sassen (Sassen-Koob 1984) and other scholars have shown how the feminization of cheap Third World wage labor and the related rise in female immigration to the U.S. have acted as integral cogs in the corporate machinery of post-industrial capitalism. In this manner, the cultural and structural foundations of today's cultural economy still feed on the colonization of the "Other." The gendered impact of the globalized economy is best exemplified by the coinciding expansion of the Asian sex industry, which has opened its doors to businessmen traveling to Asia (Hochschild and Ehrenreich 2003; Jeffreys 1999).

The rising significance of immigration from Asia and Latin America and America's role in the new global economy will inevitably have an

effect on the multicultural representations that advertising and marketing campaigns will promote, particularly among their white-collar, professional audience. Multiculturalism is one of the clever marketing strategies that corporations have recently used to market their products. "Multiculturalism" evokes artificial images of racial unity and harmony among the various cultural groups of America and celebrates the general openness of "color-blind" Americans to the rich cultural traditions of different racial groups. The multicultural approach allows corporations to achieve two things: While allowing them to expand their market share to a racially diversifying population of consumers, corporations have also used the visual consumption of women's bodies—and the bodies of women of color in particular—to re-package and obscure the exploitative labor machinery that produces them.

However, the various manifestations of this new consumption culture represent more than just the hegemonic forces of capitalism. Analysis of this post-industrial global culture must also take into account the historical and cultural context within which this system has taken shape in America. The fantastic imagery of a happy, multicultural society has been a key step for Americans who not too long ago eliminated the last remnants of legalized segregation and discrimination during the 1960s Civil Right era. The series of politically tumultuous struggles that led to its ultimate demise left a deep impression on the White American psyche by calling into question its strong belief in the meritocracy and humanity of American democracy and highlighting the ambiguity of its own identity in an era that rallied cultural pride and self-empowerment for non-White groups. One way that White Americans have established a cultural passage-way for themselves has been by laying claim to the birth of this new multicultural world and by establishing their role within it. As best exemplified by the commodification of African American hip-hop, corporations are able to disassociate everyday Americans from the structural context of oppression and the historical context of struggle that define the post-industrial world by laying claim to the bodies and cultures of the "Other"

(Giroux 1994; Rose 1994). The cultural landscapes of post-Civil Rights White America in many ways depend largely on this vision of the American melting pot—a trend that has sustained recent political backlash against “anti-color-blind” policies such as affirmative action (Omi 1991).

Within this context, the article examines the cultural representations of corporate marketing campaigns within the contemporary global era with specific attention to their hegemonic outlooks on race, nativity and gender. The article will argue how the multicultural imagery of specific advertising campaigns, while expanding its campaign to include multi-racial characters, relies on the “foreign” and “seductive” appeal of Asian/American women in order to highlight the supremacy and positionality of White men within the global order. As the next section will show, many of the earlier themes of commodified orientalism are replicated in contemporary depictions of Asian/American women; at the same time, our analysis of corporate campaigns will show how they have now been re-contextualized within the multicultural, global setting of post-industrial American culture.

THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN ORIENTALISM

Discursive images of American Orientalism have been profoundly shaped by the historical context of race relations in the domestic homefront, as well as the nation’s diplomatic relations with Asian countries abroad (Gee 1988; Lee 1999, pp. 8–9). In his influential book, *Orientalism*, Edward W. Said argues that “the essence of Orientalism is the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority” (1979, p. 42). Westerners’ knowledge about the East imagines the Orient in a way that polarizes the Orient from the Occident and places the Occident higher than the Orient in the world hierarchy. The West is depicted as developed, powerful, articulate, and superior, while the East is seen as undeveloped, weak, mysterious, and inferior. Although Said focuses mainly on Europe’s relations with the Middle East and South Asia, the

political ideologies and cultural imageries implicit in such hegemonic dichotomies help to shed light on the internal dynamics of Orientalism in America. Specifically, American Orientalism has been sustained by this notion of Western/White power as a means to justify and exert its cultural domination over Asia and Asian America.

While European Orientalism was purported to justify the colonization and domination of Third World people, early American Orientalism was first invented to exclude Asian immigrants from entering or making a home on American soil. To this end, the mass media began its long history of cultivating insidious stereotypes of Asian/Americans for the visual consumption of the White American public—everything from the aggressive, ominous images of Japanese and Chinese immigrants during the “yellow peril” to more modern depictions of Asian/Americans as the passive “model minority” (Espiritu 1997; Hamamoto 1994; Lee 1999; Moy 1993; Taylor and Stern 1997). In all these stereotypes, the assimilability of Asian/Americans has always been at question (Palumbo-Liu 1999; Yu 2001). Robert G. Lee’s book, *Orientalists: Asian Americans in Popular Culture* (1999), shows how Orientalist images during the Gold Rush era depicted Asian/Americans as “pollutants” in the free land of California and Chinese immigrant workers as potential threats to the stability of the White immigrant working class. In movies like *The Bitter Tea of General Yen* (1933) and Fu Manchu films, the image of emasculated, asexual Asians co-existed with the image of Orientals as licentious beasts that threatened to undermine the economic and moral stability of the U.S. nation and the American family. Such cultural representations help set the ideological backdrop for anti-Chinese fervor, which led to the outbreak of anti-Chinese rioting and the implementation of the first Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882.

Within this context, it is important to note that the practice of “consuming Orientalism” evolved long before the advent of the post-industrial era. Even in the early twentieth century, Americans supported Orientalism in their day-to-day purchasing and consumption practices. Advertising cards for various products like soaps, dentifrice,

260 • PART II: PATTERNS

waterproof collars and cuffs, clothes wringers, threads, glycerin, hats, and tobacco drew on Sino-phobic themes, such as Chinese queues, porcelain doll-like Chinese women, and hyper-feminized Asian men, to market the distinctive appeal of their products (see Chan http://www.chsa.org/features/ching/ching_conf.htm). These cultural representations reinforced White America's moral and masculine superiority over the foreign elements of the East and allowed them to lay both physical and sexual claim to the bodies of Orientals at home and abroad.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the concept of Oriental inassimilability began to give way to the assimilation-oriented Model Minority myth—that is, the belief that Asian/Americans have achieved the American Dream through hard work and passive obedience. After World War II and the Korean War, movies like *Flower Drum Song* (1961) evolved their plots around less threatening, passive versions of Asian/American characters who happily shed their backwards ancestral culture in order to embrace the American lifestyle. However, as Gina Marchetti argues, “Hollywood used Asians, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islanders as signifiers of racial otherness to avoid the far more immediate racial tensions between blacks and whites or the ambivalent mixture of guilt and enduring hatred toward Native Americans and Hispanics” (1993, p. 6). For one, the media's obsession with the model minority arose within the political context of the Civil Rights era (Lee 1999; Suzuki 1989). Images of effeminate Asian men and submissive Asian women were used to counter images of violent and vociferous African Americans and feminists and to demonstrate that familial stability, social mobility, and ethnic assimilation could be achieved without militant social activism. Thus, the Asian American model minority became the symbolic antithesis of militant Civil Rights activists and feminist groups.

Nonetheless, focus on the assimilability of Asian Americans as “honorary whites” did not exempt them from the whims of racial antagonism and continued to co-exist with the image of Asian Americans as “forever foreigners” (Tuan 1998). For instance, America's bitter experiences

during the prolonged Vietnam War simultaneously revived cultural images of Asians as villains and “gooks.” Countless war movies repeatedly invoked images of the faceless, merciless and destructive Viet Cong instigating unmentionable travesties against brave, White U.S. soldiers. In the 1970s and 1980s, American society, once again threatened by surging economic development in Japan, projected its fears through the cultural resurrection of sinister Fu Manchu-like villains in movies such as *Blade Runner* (1982) or *Rising Sun* (1993) The massive influx of Asian immigrants in the post-1965 era has only helped to sustain the identification of Asian/Americans with mystical beings from the Orient. Compared to African Americans whose activists had been vigilant enough to protest racist movies like *Birth of the Nation* (1915), Asian/Americans were considered to be politically acquiescent and indifferent to misrepresentations in popular culture—a view that seemed to justify Hollywood's all-too-familiar messages of anti-miscegenation and White superiority.

Throughout the evolution of American Orientalism, the notion of the Orient as the culturally-inferior Other has also converged with the concept of women as the gender-inferior Other. Orientalist romanticism in the West synchronized White men's heterosexual desire for (Oriental) women and for Eastern territories through the feminization of the Orient (Kang 1993; Lowe 1991). American Orientalism in many ways depended on the masculine, superior image of White men juxtaposed with the emasculation of Asian/American men. By portraying Asian/American men as sexually excessive or asexually feminine, such cultural themes reaffirmed Orientals' deviance from “normal” heterosexual gender norms implicit in White middle-class families (Espiritu 1997; Lee 1999).

Aside from projecting stereotypes associated with the yellow peril, the model minority, and the gook, cultural representations of Asian/American women in the media have played on specific characteristics that derive from their peculiar status at the crossroads of race and gender (Degabriele 1996; Espiritu 1997; Gee 1988; Hagedorn 1994; Kang 1993; Lee 1996; Lu 1997;

Marchetti 1993; Tajima 1989). Typical representations of Asian/American women have been embodied in what Renee E. Tajima calls, “the Lotus Blossom Baby (e.g. China Doll, Geisha Girl, and the shy Polynesian beauty), and the Dragon Lady (e.g. prostitutes and devious madams)” (1989, p. 309). Although distinctive in many ways, both images have served to stimulate the sexual voyeurism of White American males and the objectification of foreign, exotic Oriental women as their rightful property. As an example of this, the most prevailing image of Asian/American women in movies like *The World of Suzie Wong* (1960) fixated on their shameless sexual desire, their aggressive and manipulative traits, and their inability to resist White men. The storylines of more contemporary movies such as *Year of the Dragon* (1985), and *Heaven and Earth* (1993) continue to focus on Asian/American female characters who are betrayed or exploited by men of their own race but are later saved by White male heroes. Thus, Orientalism in all its guises has been an underlying feature of American culture.

ADVERTISING MULTICULTURALISM

Historically, Asian Americans were never targeted as a significant consumer base for many of these marketing campaigns. However, as ethnic minorities grew in numbers throughout the 1980s and 1990s, marketers and advertisers began to rapidly acknowledge their potential impact as consumers (Cortese 1999; Cui 1997; Reese 1997). As one of the fastest-growing racial groups in the United States, Asian Americans have offered a very attractive market to advertisers because of their high levels of income and education. Furthermore, the steady global expansion of corporate branches into modernizing economies in Asia and Latin America and the growing sector of Asian professionals within the U.S. and abroad have also increased the need to re-conceptualize advertisement campaigns in a multicultural fashion (Ong, Bonacich and Cheng 1994). As a result, ethnic-based marketing strategies have become an indispensable terminology

in the area of marketing (Cortese 1999; Cui 1997).

Two decades after the Civil Rights movements, companies and advertisers began to integrate minority consumers into their main marketing strategies (Cui 1997, p. 123) and initiated what Anthony Cortese calls the “copycat ad”—that is, traditional advertisements reproduced with models of different races. However, the copycat ad was perceived to be problematic because it assumed that “African Americans and Latinos are simply dark-skinned white people” (Cortese 1999, p. 96) and ignored the specific consumer needs and ethnic identities of their target population. In response, companies introduced a new style of marketing focused on promoting a corporate brand of multiculturalism.

Some pundits argue that multicultural marketing is more sensitive to the needs of minority consumers and helps to update or abandon traditional stereotypical representations of these populations (Cui 1997, p. 124). However, this study will demonstrate how such campaigns merely re-package long-standing racial stereotypes in their efforts to promote multicultural, globalized settings. Although old advertising cards were explicitly meant to appeal to the native-born White American population, our argument is that contemporary advertising campaigns have tried to re-invent the world in all its multicultural glories without threatening culturally-embedded hierarchies of the past. Images of Asian/Americans in multicultural ad series often employ traditional themes of American Orientalism with a new global twist. In the words of Williamson, “capitalism’s constant search for new areas to colonize” (Williamson 1986, p. 116) has permeated the realms of advertisement in terms of the way they portray social movements, feminism, the gay and lesbian movement (Cagan 1978; Clark 1995; Cortese 1999), and now multiculturalism. Under the guise of multiculturalism, Orientalism has evolved into an object to consume and a vehicle to stimulate consumption. Examples of this include recent trends in Asian meditation and spa products and youth-oriented clothing lines that have incorporated “Oriental” paraphernalia like dragons and happy Buddhas into their apparel.

262 • PART II: PATTERNS

To this end, the research highlights . . . advertising campaigns that were chosen from six different magazines, including *Newsweek*, *Business Week*, *Vogue*, *In Style*, *Premiere*, and *Entertainment Weekly*.² We looked at all issues from these six magazines from September 1999 to December 2000. There were noticeable changes in all magazines in terms of the number of ads showcasing Asian/American models.

Notably, Asian/American males make rare appearances in magazine advertisements we have examined as compared with their female counterparts, which intimates to the racial and gender dynamics of advertisement cultures. And this is not an unprecedented trend. Following the popularity of Connie Chung, Asian American women anchorpersons have been very visible, whereas Asian American men anchors are nearly completely absent (Espiritu 1997). This gender imbalance not only sustains the construction of Asian American women as more desirable candidates to be assimilated when paired with White men but also reinforces the “ownership” of White American males over the bodies and spirits of Asian/American women by negating the potential physical and sexual threat imposed by Asian/American men. This point will be emphasized later.

Our purview of advertisements in the selected magazines also reveals a diversity of targeted Asian/American consumers—from lower to middle-range customers who shop at *Target* to high-class clientele at *Neiman Marcus*, but significantly, a new interest in marketing campaigns has been their attention to white-collar professional clientele, mainly businessmen. For instance, out of the 51 companies that advertised in these widely-read magazines, 8 were prestigious insurance/financial management corporations (e.g. Morgan Stanley Dean Witter), 4 were hotel/travel-related industries (e.g. Hilton, Northwest Airlines), and 5 were high-end designer brands (e.g. Dolce and Gabbana)—all of which cater to higher-income yuppie or professional consumers. This deliberate attention to the consumption patterns of white-collar professionals stems from Asian Americans’ rising purchasing power of this rapidly expanding occupational sector in today’s post-industrial economy.

Although these corporations are targeting a multi-racial consumer base, the perspectives of these marketing campaigns implicitly preserve the centrality of White men by re-packaging Orientalist themes of Asian/American women under the guise of multiculturalism. A multicultural ad by Charles Schwab (featured in *Newsweek* and *Business Week*) . . . contextualizes these emerging themes of globalization, enterprise and professionalism through the incorporation of Asian/American models. The ad shows three people sitting on a bench, each holding a book with a title relevant to each person. The White woman to the left is holding a book, “Keep Ahead of the Sharks,” the Asian American woman sitting next to her is holding a book “How to Get Rich Overnight,” and the White man is holding a book titled “Boy, Am I Happy.” The main character is the White man with the blissful look. The advertisement conveys the message that you, the consumer, can be just as happy as this man with help from the consultation company, Charles Schwab.

More interestingly, the White woman is fixated on the book she is reading, but in stark contrast, the Asian American woman is glaring at the White man askance with feelings of resentful anger and jealousy because of his happiness and financial success—a theme that draws on the image of Asia as an economic adversary of the United States (Espiritu 1997; Lee 1999; Suzuki 1989). But also, the unusually large lettering of the word “RICH” on her book highlights her obsession with making money and reaffirms the cultural perception of Asian/Americans as greedy money-mongers and threats to the overall well-being of real (White) “Americans.”

The ad’s portrayal of the Asian/American woman revolves around the conniving and hostile nature of her role in the global market and more importantly, takes shape *in relation to* her White female and White male counterparts. While these ads speak to a racially-diverse audience of professionals, it is important to note the ways in which relationality is a key component in Orientalism and that multiculturalism arises “within the context of White males within this global market. Importantly, this image that

evokes that of the “Dragon Lady,” the epithet for belligerent, cunning, and untrustworthy Asian/American women, is placed to represent this societal locality of Asian Americans. Hence, the new wave of advertisement campaigns underscores some of the inherent contradictions of multiculturalism itself: while opening its doors to the new Asian consumer, it does so by representing them within traditional White patriarchal frameworks of Orientalism.

The following . . . corporate campaigns were mainly selected because they are part of a larger multicultural ad series, as opposed to a single-themed advertisement frame. In the last couple of years, the multicultural ad *series* has become a popular way of marketing brand-name products with a racially diverse cast. The multicultural ad series is an advertisement campaign that features each model in various ad copies, poses, or appearances within a series of thematic frames. The frames are either featured all at the same time or in isolation from one another in different magazines. The multicultural ad series tries to include diverse racial groups and has thus generated an increase in Asian/American representations in advertising. They are particularly interesting to our research, because they allow us not only to analyze the cultural undertones of an individual ad but also, compare the thematic representations that come out of each racial/gender frame.

The first series of multicultural advertisements comes from the “Find Your Voice” campaign by Virginia Slims, which depicts different images of women from diverse racial backgrounds expressing ways to “find your voice” in life. Virginia Slims is a brand of cigarettes produced by Philip Morris, the third largest cigarette company (2.4% in 2003) in retail share performance, which specifically targets a racially-diverse audience of female consumers. Established in 1968, Virginia Slims first played on themes of female empowerment through campaign slogans like “You’ve Come a Long Way Baby,” which elicited angry responses from various feminist organizations because of the way it distorted and trivialized feminist issues in order to profit on women’s addictions (Cagan 1978; Kilbourn 2000). Following the multicultural marketing

trends of the time, Virginia Slims then introduced a new advertisement series in 1999–2000 called the “Find Your Voice” campaign, which again promoted themes of female liberation but this time with attention to a broader multicultural and global consumer base. As one feminist newsletter proclaims, the Virginia Slims campaign now equated smoking their cigarettes with the liberating influence of Western culture through advertisements targeting vulnerable Third World populations (Batchelor 2003). *Ms.* magazine also expressed its indignation to the company’s efforts to “globalize addiction and equalize smoking-related illnesses” through multicultural campaigns like these (Comments Please 2000, p. 96).

A glimpse at four different ads from this campaign, each featuring models of different races. The first photo shoot shows a blonde-haired White woman next to the words “I look temptation right in the eye and then make my own decisions”; an African woman proclaiming “No single institution owns the copyright for BEAUTY”; a Latino woman stating “Dance around naked with a rose between your teeth if you want . . . but do it like you mean it”; and finally an Asian woman with the words “My voice reveals the hidden power within.” In another ad, the same Asian woman is juxtaposed next to the words “In silence I see. With WISDOM, I speak.”

Focusing on the Asian model, we can see blatant references to time-old themes of Oriental feminine exoticism perpetuated by numerous Hollywood films (e.g., *Sayonara* (1957), *The Teahouse of the August Moon* (1956) and *Japanese War Bride* (1952)) as well as western literature (e.g., *Memoir of the Geisha* (1999)) and musicals (e.g., *Madam Butterfly*) in the past century. Stepping away from the feminist undertones of Virginia Slim campaigns, the posture of the Asian woman in two different ads is one of femininity and sexual invitation. She is looking down and sideways, and her head is tilted as well, with a cryptic smile. Her hands are curled in front of her in an “Oriental-like” gesture as if she is dancing. She appears as an entertainer, a *Madam Butterfly*, a courtesan, a geisha, and “a Lotus Blossom baby.” Historically, Lotus

264 • PART II: PATTERNS

Blossom images represented Asian women as exotic, enticing, subservient, pampering, self-effacing, self-sacrificing and sensual. In a similar manner as this ad, Asian women in Lotus Blossom images throw sexually suggestive smiles and gazes but hesitate to speak. Renee E. Tajima states "Asian women . . . are interchangeable in appearance and name, and are joined together by the common language of non-language—that is, uninterpretable chattering, pidgin English, giggling, or silence" (1989, p. 309). References to "Hidden power" and "In silence I see" again reaffirm the "non-language" embodiment of Asian women. Furthermore, although the ads make no explicit references to men, it is important to note that Lotus Blossom images were traditionally used to obliterate Asian women's subjectivity by validating their role as the objects of White men's sexual fantasy.

What is more interesting about this ad series is the way the "exotic," "feminine" and "mysterious" allure of the Orientalized character becomes accentuated by the projected normalcy of the White characters. The ads that feature women of color consistently promote the strongest cultural references in the series: an African woman in a colorful headdress,³ a dancing Latino woman in a light cotton weave and wooden beads, an Asian woman in heavy makeup and traditional Chinese dress. In the case of the Asian woman, this aura of foreignness is highlighted by the antediluvian attire and posture. The Asian woman in both ads is wearing dresses and makeup that are modified renditions of traditional Chinese dresses and hairdos that are no longer worn today. This theme derives from Orientalist depictions of Asia—that is, the unchangeable and undeveloped portrayal of a colonized Orient (Said 1979; Nochlin 1989). Furthermore, this particular series invokes feminine and hyper-sexualized stereotypes of Asian women (as well as Latino women) in stark contrast to the themes of liberation and empowerment associated with the White and African American characters.

At the same time, the Westernized version of Orientalism reified by the ad serves to commodify Asian culture. Westerners' indulgence in

Asian culture has been often understood as a signifier of their wealth and the broadened purview of their ability to consume (Marchetti 1993, p. 27). The consumption of Asian culture has never required an accurate comprehension of Asian cultures and histories and empathy with Third World experiences of colonialism, imperialism, and economic exploitation. In the ad, the costume of the Asian woman looks Chinese but it is in actuality pseudo-authentic at best. Her hairdo is not done in a traditional Chinese style and her makeup is modern not traditional in fashion. Furthermore, her posture is pan-Asian, drawing on gestures, expressions and stances that stem from various Asian cultures. One of the ads . . . even features messages written in Chinese that make no sense in interpretation. Despite the corporation's attempts to address a multicultural audience, the cultural references in the ads end up perpetuating Orientalist meanings that reaffirm the dominant status of White Americans. The Orientalist depiction of Chinese customs and written characters were there not to be understood but to be objectified by viewers in their visual consumption of the Asian female model. The ad provided neither identification with nor education about Asian cultures, but only the commodification and "objectification" of their people.

Ofoto (Featured in Newsweek and InStyle)

A subsidiary of Eastman Kodak Company, Ofoto is an online photography service (www.ofoto.com) that gives consumers a virtual space where they can store as well as modify and edit their pictures. The company was founded in July 1999 and Internet Service was launched on December 1999, accompanied with an extensive ad campaign. Each of the four ads . . . were found in different magazines or different issues of the same magazine but take on greater meaning when we place them next to one another. The general schemata of the Ofoto advertisement series features an individual sitting on a chair, looking at an unseen picture of himself/herself with someone else. A caption below the scene describes what the person is looking at.

Thus in the illustration, we see four different frames, each featuring models of different races. The White man is supposedly looking at a photo labeled “Tom Gilmartin with the star of the kindergarten play, Hannah Gilmartin, the purple rabbit princess”—that is, a father and daughter scenario. The photo held by an older African American man is captioned “Daryl Lamar Edwards II with Daryl Lamar Edwards IV”—or grandfather with grandson. The White woman is looking at “A rare nose-to-nose meeting between Carol McBride’s cat, Manny, and her dog, Marley”—a picture of family pets. And last but not least, the Asian/American version of the series—a woman holding a picture of herself or “Tia Fong with a ‘friend’ on her hotel room balcony in Prague.”

Several points stand out in our analysis of these four different ads—the first being that while both the White and African American men are seen to have a connection to their families and lineage, the female characters are not. Although Carol McBride’s wide-legged posture in the ad manifests her power and confidence, her beloved family is her pets, not her family or child. The picture of Tia Fong, the Asian American woman, is even more problematic, because first, Tia’s “friend,” unlike Carol’s pets, does not even have a name and second, she is seeing herself in a hotel room situated in the distant, exotic land of Prague. In essence, Tia Fong is not to be associated with the comforts of home and family but rather, the erotic setting of foreign lands and forbidden pleasures. The fact that Tia’s photo includes a mysterious “friend” and that she is located in Prague evokes mystic images of the Orient. This aspect of positionality is also interesting in its racial implications, because it symbolizes not only Asian Americans’ detachment from both home and lineage but also their dislocation from American society itself. In essence, these advertisements once again hint to the unassimilability of Asians in America.

The illustration of Tia Fong is imbued with other gendered meanings as well—the most obvious of which is the sexual connotation behind the faceless “friend” and the hotel room where she is staying with this friend. Unlike the other two ads

that conjure up feelings of familial belonging (albeit a surrogate family in the case of Carol), the Asian/American ad is replete with references to sexual liaisons within a Prague hotel room—perhaps the modern equivalent of a geisha tea-house. The quotations around the word “friend” and the mysterious smile of the Asian American character is meant to imply the forbidden pleasures associated with this trip. Furthermore, her legs are crossed in a demure, intimate manner that is meant to evoke images of Orientalized sitting postures, while her fingers delicately hold the photo in a gesture that strongly resembles the dancing hand movements of the Virginia Slims Asian model. Again, Ofoto’s advertising campaign is drawing on traditional representations of Asian/American women as exotic and erotic objects of White men’s sexual adventure.

CONCLUSION

The article has analyzed . . . advertisements which best exemplify the diverse ways in which Asian/American women are sexually objectified, culturally misrepresented and visually consumed in contemporary American Orientalism. The Virginia Slims campaign was perhaps the most blatant in its resurrection of Asian/American exotica through its mish-mash of simulated Orientalist paraphernalia. However, even when the physical appearances of Asian/American female characters were normalized in relation to other White American characters, the other advertisements series were shown to make more subtle but powerful messages about their inherent cultural and behavioral unassimilability to American society. The Ofoto campaign on the other hand draws on the mystical aspects of Asian/American female sexuality, detaching its characters from the all-American setting of family and home and placing them in the exotic spaces of a hotel room in Prague.

The subtle ingenuity of the multicultural advertisement campaign is the way it is able to profit off a multi-racial consumer base through greater inclusion while maintaining White male supremacy through the visual consumption of

Asian/American women's bodies. By highlighting the ascribed "foreign" nature of Asian/American women, the cultural schemata of corporate advertisements aim to profit off the sense of identity and place they provide for White males in the U.S. through their products, while simultaneously targeting an increasingly diverse global audience. Thus, the illustrations presented in this study would have had less meaning if they included only two White people or even White and African American characters without the added "foreign" Asian/American presence. Furthermore, corporations market on the physical embodiments of sex and pleasure that take the form of Asian/American women in these advertisements. That is, they are not just selling their liquor or their cigarettes or their services to American society, but they are also selling the *bodies* of Asian/American women and the forbidden pleasures that come with them. The ads also displayed racialized and gendered images of other figures (i.e. White females and African American characters), but the presence of Asian/Americans seemed to be most central in highlighting the multicultural nature of today's global society vis-a-vis their exoticization/eroticization, as well as re-affirming White normalcy and supremacy within this global hierarchy.

As our research study has shown, the emerging global culture has been packaged, commodified and marketed by multi-national global corporations in a form that can be sold to dominant White groups attempting to disengage from a historical legacy of racism, segregation and Anglo-conformity. Cultural representations of multiculturalism in corporate advertising campaigns have a more concrete impact on the lived experiences of Asian/American women by re-affirming the complex racial and gender hierarchies underlying the new global order and legitimating the physical domination of their bodies through rape, abuse, exploitation and prostitution. In this way, the perception of multiculturalist advertisements as the symbolic site for cultural diversity and equality overlooks the subtle complexities

with which Asian/American bodies are presented and represented to White America.

NOTES

1. As Palumbo-Liu explains, the inclusion of the slash in the word "Asian/American" conveys the same meaning as in the construction "and/or." That is, it represents "a choice between two terms, their simultaneous and equal status, and an element of indecidability, that is, as it at once implies both exclusion and inclusion (Palumbo-Liu 1999:1)." This element of "indecidability" is an important factor in this word choice, because Asian Americans are still considered to be "foreigners," or Asians. In this paper, we use "Asian American" only for specific situations related to Asian Americans.

2. Magazines were chosen based on two conditions—to cover different types of magazines (Taylor, Lee, and Stern 1995) and accessibility. They include general interest magazine (*Newsweek*), business press (*Business Week*), women's magazines (*Vogue* and *In Style*), and entertainment magazines (*Premiere* and *Entertainment Weekly*); and, the first author subscribed to four magazines out of six. *Newsweek*, *Business Week*, and *Vogue* were used in the previous research. According to Ulrich's International Periodical Directories (www.ulrichsweb.com), the numbers of paid circulations are 3.1 million (*Newsweek*), 1.2 million (*Business Week*), 1.3 million (*Vogue*), 1.1 million (*In style*), 1.5 million (*Entertainment Weekly*), and 0.6 million (*Premiere*).

3. Notably, the Virginia Slims campaign also includes ads featuring an African American woman in contemporary attire without such cultural references—a strategy that is used to differentiate the two audiences to whom they are speaking, unlike the case of the Asian and Latino ads which feature exoticized women only.

REFERENCES

Appadurai, A. (1993). Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy. In B. Robbins (Ed.),

- The phantom public sphere* (pp. 269–295). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Batchelor, S. (2003). Traditional women are tobacco's new global market. *Women's Enews*. <<http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/1491>> (Accessed: June 9, 2003).
- Berger, J. (1977). *Ways of seeing*. London: Penguin.
- Betterton, R. (1987). *Looking on: Images of femininity in the visual arts and media*. London and Boston: Pandora Press.
- Bordo, S. (1993). *Unbearable weight. Feminism, Western culture, and the body*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press.
- Cagan, E. (1978). The selling of the women's movement." *Social Policy*, May/June, 4–12.
- Chan, J. (2003) 'Rough on rats': Racism and advertising in the latter half of the nineteenth century. <http://www.chsa.org/features/ching/ching_conf.htm> (Accessed: February 25, 2003).
- Chang, G., & Abramovitz, M (2000). *Disposable domestics: Immigrant women workers in the global economy*. Cambridge: South End Press.
- Clark, D. (1995). Commodity lesbianism. In G. Dines & J. M. Humez (Eds.), *Gender, race and class in media: A text-reader* (pp. 142–151). Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi: Sage.
- Comments please. (2000). *Ms.*, June/July, 96–97.
- Cortese, A. J. (1999). *Provocateur. Images of women and minorities in advertising*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Cui, G. (1997). Marketing strategies in a multi-ethnic environment. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 5, 122–134.
- Degabriele, M. (1996). From Madame Butterfly to Miss Saigon: One hundred years of popular Orientalism. *Critical Arts*, 10, 105–118.
- Espiritu, Y. L. (1997). *Asian American women and men: Labor, laws, and love*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gee, D. (Director). (1988). *Slaying the dragon* [Film]. San Francisco: Cross Current Media and National Asian American Telecommunication Association.
- Giroux, H. A. (1994). Consuming social change: The 'United Colors of Benetton.' *Cultural Critique*, 26, 5–31.
- Goffman, E. (1979). *Gender advertisements*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hagedorn, J. (1994). Asian women in film: No joy, No luck. *Ms.*, January/February, 74–79.
- Hamamoto, D. Y. (1994). *Monitored peril: Asian Americans and the politics of TV representation*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hochschild, A., & Ehrenreich, B. (2003). *Global woman: Nannies, maids and sex workers in the new economy*. New York: Metropolitan.
- Jeffreys, S. (1999). Globalizing sexual exploitation: Sex tourism and the traffic in women. *Leisure Studies*, 18, 179–186.
- Kang, L. H. (1993). The desiring of Asian female bodies: Interracial romance and cinematic subjection. *Visual Anthropology Review*, 9, 5–21.
- Kilbourne, J. (1999). *Deadly persuasion: Why women and girls must fight the addictive power of advertising*. New York: Free Press.
- Kilbourne, J. (2000). *Killing us softly 3* [Film]. Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation.
- Lee, J. (1996). Why Suzie Wong is not a lesbian: Asian and Asian American lesbian and bisexual women and femme/butch/gender identities. In B. Beemyn & M. Eliason (Eds.), *Queer studies: A lesbian, gay, bisexual & transgender anthology* (pp. 115–132). New York and London: New York University Press.
- Lee, R. G. (1999). *Orientalists: Asian Americans in popular culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Lowe, L. (1991). *Critical terrains: French and British orientalisms*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Lu, L. (1997). Critical visions: The representation and resistance of Asian women. In S. Shah (Ed.), *Dragon ladies: Asian American feminists breathe fire* (pp. 17–28). Boston: South End Press.
- Manca, L., & Manca, A. (1994). *Gender & utopia in advertising: A critical reader*. Lisle, IL and Syracuse, NY: Procopian Press and Syracuse University Press.
- Marchetti, G. (1993). *Romance and the "yellow peril": Race, sex, and discursive strategies in Hollywood fiction*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press.

268 • PART II: PATTERNS

- Moy, J. S. (1993). *Marginal sights: Staging the Chinese in America*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.
- Nochlin, L. (1989). *The politics of vision*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Omi, M. (1991). Shifting the blame: Racial ideology and politics in the post-Civil Rights era. *Critical Sociology*, 18, 77–98.
- Ong, P., Bonacich E., & Cheng, L. (1994). *The new Asian immigration in Los Angeles and global restructuring*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Palumbo-Liu, D. (1999). *Asian/American: Historical crossings of a racial frontier*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Reese, S. (1997). A world of differences. *Marketing Tools*, 4, 36–41.
- Rose, T. (1994). *Black noise: Rap music and Black culture in contemporary America*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Said, E. W. (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.
- Sassen-Koob, S. (1984). Notes on the incorporation of Third World women into wage-labor through immigration and off-shore production. *International Migration Review*, 18, 1144–1167.
- Suzuki, B. H. (1989). Asian Americans as the ‘model minority’: Outdoing Whites? Or media hype? *Change*, November/December, 12–19.
- Tajima, R. E. (1989). Lotus blossoms don’t bleed: Images of Asian women. In Asian Women United of California (Ed.), *Making waves: An anthology of writings by and about Asian American women* (pp. 308–317). Boston: Beacon Press.
- Taylor, C. R., & Stern, B. B. (1997). Asian-Americans: Television advertising and the ‘model minority’ stereotype. *Journal of Advertising*, 26, 47–31.
- Tuan, M. (1998). *Forever foreigners or honorary whites?: The Asian ethnic experience today*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Williamson, J. (1978). *Decoding advertisements. Ideology and meaning in advertising*. London: Boyars.
- Williamson, J. (1986). Woman is an island: Femininity and colonization. In T. Modleski (Ed.), *Studies in entertainment: Critical approaches to mass culture* (pp. 99–118). Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Yu, H. (2001). *Thinking Orientals: Migration, contact, and exoticism in modern America*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Introduction to Reading 25

Kirsten Firminger’s research on representations of males in five different popular teenage girls’ magazines reveals that girls are encouraged to become informed consumers of boys, who are presented as shallow, highly sexual, emotionally inexpressive, and insecure, but also as potential sources of romance, intimacy, and love. Boys appear as products, much like other products and services being sold to girls. Girls are represented as responsible for good shopping, including selecting the right guy.

1. How do teenage girls’ magazines function as a guide to selecting boys?
2. What are the links between girls’ beauty and fashion products and the presentation of boys as products?
3. Discuss the author’s final sentences, “Bottom line: look at dating as a way to sample the menu before picking your entrée. In the end, you’ll be much happier with the choice you make! Yum!”

IS HE BOYFRIEND MATERIAL?

REPRESENTATION OF MALES IN TEENAGE GIRLS' MAGAZINES

Kirsten B. Firminger

On the pages of popular teenage girls' magazines, boys are presented (in)congruently as the providers of potential love, romance, and excitement and as highly sexual, attracted to the superficial, and emotionally inexpressive. The magazines guide female readers toward avoiding the "bad" male and male behavior (locking up their feelings tighter than Fort Knox) and obtaining the "good" male and male behavior (setting you apart from other girls). Within girls' magazines, success in life and (heterosexual) love is girls' responsibility, tied to their ability to self-regulate, make good choices, and present themselves in the "right" way. The only barriers are girls' own lack of self-esteem or limited effort (Harris 2004). While the "girl power" language of the feminist movement is used, its politics and questioning of patriarchal gender norms are not discussed. Instead, the magazines advocate relentless surveillance of self, boys, and peers. Embarrassing and confessional tales, quizzes, and opportunities to rate and judge boys and girls on the basis of their photos and profiles encourage young women to "fashion" identities through clothes, cosmetics, beauty items, and consumerism.

Popular teenage girls' magazines. In the United States, teenage girls' magazines are read by more than 75 percent of teenage girls (Market profile: Teenagers 2000). The magazines play an important role in shaping the norms and expectations during a crucial stage of identity and relationship development. Currie (1999) found that some readers consider the magazines' content to

be more compelling than their own personal experiences and knowledge. Magazines are in the business of both selling themselves to their audience and selling their audience to advertisers (Kilborne 1999). Teenage girls are advertised as more loyal to their favorite magazines than to their favorite television programs, with magazines touted as "a sister and a friend rolled into one" (Market profile: Teenagers 2000). Magazines attract and keep advertisers by providing the right audience for their products and services, suppressing information that might offend the advertiser, and including editorial content saturated in advertiser-friendly advice (Kilborne 1999).

In this textual environment, consumerist and individualist attitudes and values are promoted to the exclusion of alternative perspectives. Across magazines, one relentless message is clear: "the road to happiness is attracting males for successful heterosexual life by way of physical beautification" (Evan et al. 1991; see also Carpenter 1998, Currie 1999, Signorelli 1997). Given the clarity of this message, little work has been done focusing on the portrayal of males that the girls are supposed to attract. I began my research examining this question: how are males and male behavior portrayed in popular teenage girls' magazines?

METHOD

To explore these questions, I designed a discursive analysis of a cross-section of adolescent girls' magazines, sampling a variety of magazines and

From Firminger, K. B. 2006. "Is he boyfriend material? Representation of males in teenage girls' magazines" *Men and Masculinities* 8(3), p. 298. Reprinted with permission of Sage Publications, Inc.

270 • PART II: PATTERNS

analyzing across them for common portrayals of males. *Seventeen* and *YM* are long-running adolescent girls' magazines. *Seventeen* has a base circulation of 2.4 million while *YM* has a circulation of 2.2 million (*Advertising Age* 74: 21). As a result of the potential of the market, the magazines that are directed at adolescent girls have expanded to include the new *CosmoGirl* (launched in 1999) and *ELLEgirl* (in 2001). Very successful, *CosmoGirl* has a base circulation of 1 million. *ELLEgirl* reports a smaller circulation of 450,000 (*Advertising Age* 74: 21). Chosen as an alternative to the other adolescent girls' magazines, *Girls' Life* is directed at a younger female audience and is the winner of the 2000, 1999, and 1996 Parents' Choice Awards Medal and of the 2000 and 1998 Parents' Guide to Children's Media Association Award of Excellence. The magazine reports it is the number one magazine for girls ages 10 to 15, with a circulation of 3 million (<http://www.girlslife.com/infopage.php>, retrieved May 23, 2004).

I coded two issues each of *Seventeen*, *YM*, *CosmoGirl*, *ELLEgirl*, and *Girls' Life*, for a total of ten issues. Magazines build loyalty with their readers by presenting the same kinds of material, in a similar form, month after month (Duke 2002). To take into account seasonal differences in content, I purchased the magazines six months apart, once during December 2002 and once during July 2003. While the magazines range in their dates of publication (for instance, Holiday issue, December issue, January issue, etc.), all the magazines were together at the same newsstand at the singular time of purchase.

RESULTS

Within the pages of the magazines, articles and photo layouts focus primarily on beauty, fashion, & celebrities and entertainment, boys and love, health and sex, and self-development. The magazines specialize, with emphasis more or less on one of these topics over the other: *ElleGirl* presents itself as more fashion focused, while self-development is the emphasis for *Girls' Life's* younger audience. Within the self-development

sections, one can find articles focusing on topics such as activities, school, career aspirations, volunteering, sports, and politics. However, even in these articles, focus is on the social, interpersonal aspects of relationships and on consumption instead of the actual doing and mastery of activities.

Advertising permeates the magazines, accounting for 20.8 percent to 44.8 percent of the pages. Additionally, many of the editorial articles, presumably noncommercial, are written in ways that endorse specific products and services (see Currie 1999, for more information on "advertorials"). For instance, one advice column responded to a reader's inquiry about a first kiss by recommending "... [having] the following supplies [handy] for when the magical moment finally arrives: Sugarless mints, yummy flavored lip gloss (I dig Bonne Bell Lip Smackers) . . ."

Male-focused content. On average, 19.7 percent of the pages focused on males,¹ ranging from a minimum of 13.6 percent in *ELLEGirl* to a maximum 26.6 percent in *Seventeen*. Articles on boys delve into boys' culture, points of view, opinions, interests, and hobbies, while articles on girls' activities focus more pointedly on the pursuit of boys. Girls learn "Where the boys are," since the "next boyfriend could be right under your nose." They are told,

Where to go: Minor-league ballparks. Why: Cute guys! . . . Who'll be there: The players are just for gazing at; your targets are the cuties in the stands. And don't forget the muscular types lugging soda trays up and down the aisles. What to say: Ask him what he thinks about designated hitters (they're paid just to bat). He'll be totally impressed that you even brought up the subject.

Males are offered up to readers in several different formats. First we read profiles, then we meet "examples," we are allowed question and answer, we are quizzed, and then we are asked to judge the males. Celebrity features contain in-depth interviews with male celebrities, while personal short profiles of celebrities or "regular" guys include a photo, biographical information,

hobbies, interests, and inquiries such as his “three big requirements for a girlfriend” and “his perfect date.” In question-and-answer articles, regular columnists answer selected questions that the readers have submitted.² Some columns consistently focus on boys, such as “GL Guys by Bill and Dave” and *YM*’s “Love Q and A,” while others focus on a variety of questions, for instance *ELLEgirl*’s “Ask Jennifur” profiles of noncelebrity males are presented and judged in rating articles. The magazines publish their criteria for rating boys, via rhetorical devices such as “the magazine staffs’ opinions” or the opinion polls of other teenage girls.

Ratings include categories such as “his style,” “dateable?,” and “style factor.” For example, in *CosmoGirl*’s Boy-a-Meter article, “Dateable?: I usually go for dark hair, olive skin, and thick eyebrows. But his eyes make me feel like I could confide in him,” or *ELLEgirl*’s The Rating Game, “He’s cute, but I don’t dig the emo-look and the hair in the face. It’s girlie.” Readers can then assess their opinions in relation to those of other girls’ and the magazine staff.

Romantic stories and quotes enable readers to witness “real” romance and love and compare their “personal experiences” to those presented in the magazines. For instance, “Then one day I found a note tucked in my locker that said, ‘You are different than everyone else. But that is why you are beautiful.’ At the bottom of the note it said, ‘From Matt—I’m in your science class.’ We started dating the next day.” These can also be rated, as the magazine staff then responded, “Grade: A. He sounds like a very smart boy.”

Finally, the readers can then test their knowledge and experiences through the quizzes in the magazines, such as *Seventeen*’s quiz, “Can your summer love last?” with questions and multiple-choice answers:

As he’s leaving for a weeklong road trip with the guys, he: A) tells you at least 10 times how much he’s going to miss you. B) promises to call you when he gets a chance. C) can’t stop talking about how much fun it will be to “get away” with just his buddies for seven whole days.

Over the pages, boys as a “product” begin to merge with the [other] products and services being sold to girls in “training” as informed consumers, learning to feel “empowered” and make good “choices.” While a good boy is a commodity of value, the young women readers learn that relationships with boys should be considered disposable and interchangeable like the other products being sold, “Remember, BFs come and go, but best friends are forever! Is he worth it? Didn’t think so.”

Embarrassing and confessional stories. Short embarrassing or confessional stories submitted by the readers for publication provide another textual window through which young women can view gender politics; one issue of *YM* included a special pull-out book focused exclusively on confessionals.³ Kaplan and Cole (2003) found in their four focus groups that the girls enjoy the embarrassing and confessional stories because they reveal “what it is like to be a teenage girl.”

On average, two-thirds of the confessional/embarrassing stories were male focused; in 42–100 percent of the stories males were the viewing audience for, or participant in, a girl’s embarrassing/confessional moment. Often these stories involve a “cute boy,” “my boyfriend,” or “my crush.” For example:

My friends and I noticed these cute guys at the ice cream parlor. As we were leaving with our cones, the guys offered to walk with us. I was wearing my chunky-heeled shoes and feeling pretty awesome . . . until I tripped. My double scoop flew in the air and hit one of the guys. Oops.

Teenage girls within these stories are embarrassed about things that have happened, often accidentally, with males typically as the audience. While this may allow the female readers to see that they are not the only ones who have experienced embarrassing moments, it also reinforces the notion of self-surveillance as well as socializes girls to think of boys as the audience and judges of their behavior (Currie 1999).

Representations of males. To assess how males are represented, I coded content across

272 • PART II: PATTERNS

male-focused feature articles and “question and answer” columns.⁴ These articles contained the most general statements about boys and their behaviors, motivations, and characteristics (for example, “Guys are a few steps behind girls when it comes to maturity level”⁵).

A dominant tension in the representations of boys involves males’ splitting of intimacy from sexuality. The magazine advises girls as they negotiate these different behaviors and situations, trying to choose the “right” guy (who will develop an intimate relationship with a girl), reject the “bad” guy (who is focused only on sex), or if possible, change the “bad” guy into the “good” guy (through a girl’s decisions and interactions with the male).

My boyfriend and I were together for 10 months when he said he wanted to take a break—he wasn’t sure he was ready for such a commitment. The thought of him seeing other people tore me apart. So every day while we were broken up, I gave him something as a sign of my feelings for him: love sayings cut out from magazines, or cute comics from the paper. Eventually he confessed that he had just been confused and that he loved me more than ever.

As girls are represented as responsible for good shopping, they are represented also as responsible for selecting/changing/shaping male behavior. If girls learn to make the right choices, they can have the right relationship with the right guy, or convert a “bad”/confused boy into a good catch.

The tension is most evident in stories about males’ high sex drive, attraction to superficial appearances, emotional inexpressiveness, and fear of rejection and contrasted with those males who are “keepers”: who keep their sex drive in check, value more than just girls’ appearances, and are able to open up. The articles and advice columns blend the traditional and the feminist; encompassing both new and old meanings and definitions of what it means to be female and male within today’s culture (Harris 2004).

The males’ sex drive. The “naturally” high sex drive of males rises as the most predominant theme across the magazines. Viewed as normal

and unavoidable in teenage boys, girls write to ask for an explanation and advice, and they are told:

You invited a guy you kind of like up to your room (just to talk!) and he got the wrong idea. This was not your fault. Guys—especially unchaperoned guys on school trips—will interpret any move by a girl as an invitation to get heavy. And I mean any move. You could have sat down next to him at a lab table and he would have taken that as a sign from God that you wanted his body.

When it comes to the topic of sexuality, traditional notions surround “appropriate behavior” for young women and men. Girls learn that males respect and date girls who are able to keep males’ sex drive in check and who take time building a relationship. Girls were rarely shown as being highly sexual or interested only in sexual relationship with a boy. Girls are supposed to avoid potentially dangerous situations (such as being alone with a boy) and draw the line (since the males frequently are unable to do so). If they don’t, they can be labeled sluts.

Don’t even make out with someone until you’re sure things are exclusive. When you hook up with him too early, you’re giving him the message that you are something less than a goddess (because, as you know, a goddess is guarded in a temple, and it’s not easy to get to her). Take it from me when I tell you that guys want to be with girls they consider goddesses. So treat your body as a temple—don’t let just anyone in.

Valuing superficial appearances. Driven by sex, males were shown as judging and valuing girls based on their appearance.

That’s bad, but it’s scarier when combined with another sad male truth: They’re a lot more into looks than we are.

Okay, I’m the first to admit that guys can be shallow and insipid and *Baywatch* brainwashed to the point where the sight of two balloons on a string will turn them on.

Since males are thought to be interested in the superficial, girls sought advice on how to be

most superficially appealing, asking what do guys prefer, including the size of a girl's breasts, hair color, eye color, height, and weight. Girls are portrayed as wanting to know how to present themselves to attract boys, demonstrating an interaction between girls' ideas and understanding of what males want and girls' own choices and behaviors.

Boys are emotionally inexpressive. Across features, readers learn about boys' inability or unwillingness to open up and share their feelings. However, the articles suggest also that if a girl is able to negotiate the relationship correctly, she could get a guy to trust her.

Let's say you go to the pet store and see a really cute puppy you'd like to pet but, every time you try, he pulls away because he was treated badly in the past. People aren't much different. Move very slowly, and build up trust bit by bit. Show this guy you're into him for real, and he'll warm up to you. Puppy love is worth the wait.

Girls are responsible for doing the emotional work and maintenance and for being change agents in relationships, not allowing room for or even expecting males to take on any of these tasks (see also Chang 2000).

Boys' insecurity and fear of rejection. Boys are displayed as afraid of rejection. Reflecting the neoliberal ideology of "girl power," girls were urged by the magazines to take the initiative in seeking out and approaching boys. This way they are in control of and responsible for their fate, with only lack of confidence, self-esteem, and effort holding them back from finding romance and love.

So in the next week (why waste more time?), write him a note, pull him aside at a party, or call him up with your best friend by your side for support. Hey, he could be psyched that you took the initiative.

So I think you may have to do the work. If there's a certain guy you're feelin' and you think he's intimidated by you, make the first move. Say something to relax him, like, "What's up? My name is Chelsea." After that, he'll probably start completing sentences.

Males' potential—the "keepers." "Consider every guy to be on a level playing field—they all have potential." Boys were shown to have "potential" and girls were advised to search out the "right" guys.

He does indeed sound dreamy. He also sounds like a total gentleman, considering he hasn't attempted to jump your bones yet, so the consensus is: He's a keeper.

Most guys are actually smarter than you think and are attracted to all sorts of things about the female species. Yes, big boobs definitely have their dedicated fan base, but so do musical taste, brains, a cute laugh, style and the ability to throw a spiral football (to name just a few). What's turn-on or dealbreaker for one guy is a nonevent for another.

These boys become the center of the romantic stories and quotes about love and relationships. Resulting from and sustained by girls' self-regulation, personal responsibility, effort, and good choices (as guided by the tools and advice provided by the magazines), these boys are for keeps.

DISCUSSION

Within the magazines, girls are invited to explore boys as shallow, highly sexual, emotionally inexpressive, and insecure and boys who are potential boyfriends, providing romance, intimacy, and love. Males' high sex drive and interest in superficial appearances are naturalized and left unquestioned in the content of the magazines; within a "girl power" version of compulsory heterosexuality, girls should learn the right way to approach a boy in order to get what they want—"the road to happiness is attracting males for successful heterosexual life by way of physical beautification" (Evans et al. 1991). Girls walk the fine line of taking advantage of males' interest in sex and appearance, without crossing over into being labeled a slut. Socialized to be purchasers of beauty and fashion products that promise to make them attractive to boys, girls are "in charge" of themselves and the boys they "choose." It's a competitive

market so they better have the right understanding of boys, as well as the right body and outfit to go with it.

The magazines' portrayals, values, and opinions are shaped by their need to create an advertiser-friendly environment while attracting and appealing to the magazines' audience of teenage girls. Skewing the portrayal of males and females to their target audience, magazine editors, writers, and, though I have not highlighted it here—advertisers take advantage of gender-specific fantasies, myths, and fears (Craig 1993). Boys become another product, status symbol, and identity choice. If girls' happiness requires finding romance and love, girls should learn to be informed consumers of boys. By purchasing the magazines, they have a guide to this process, guaranteed to help them understand "What his mixed signals really mean." In addition, if boys are concerned with superficial appearances, it is to the benefit of girls to buy the advertised products and learn "The best swimsuit for [their] bod[ies]."

As girls survey and judge themselves and others, possessions and consumption become the metric for assessing status (Rohlinger 2002; Salamon 2003), the cultural capital for teenagers in place of work, community, and other activities (Harris 2004). The feminist "girl empowerment" becomes personal, appropriated to sell products. The choice and purchase of products and services sold in the magazines promise recreation and transformation, of not only one's outward appearance but also of one's inner self, leading to happiness, satisfaction, and success (Kilborne 1999). Money is the underlying driving force in magazine content. However, while the magazines focus on doing good business, girls are being socialized by the magazines' norms and expectations.

"Bottom line: look at dating as a way to sample the menu before picking your entrée. In the end, you'll be much happier with the choice you make! Yum!"

NOTES

1. Percentage of male-focused pages was taken out of total editorial pages, not including advertising

pages. Confessional/embarrassing stories did not count toward the total number of pages because of inconsistencies in unit of analysis, with the confessional stories having a variable number of male-focused stories. I analyzed those separately. Feature articles (unique, nonregular) counted if the article focused on or if males significantly contributed to the narrative in the article (for instance, "Out of bounds: A cheerleader tells the story of how the coach she trusted attacked her"). If the feature was equally balanced with focused sections on both boys and girls (for example, if the article is sectioned into different topics or interviews), only pages that focused on males were counted.

Because of the limited nature of the study, I chose to focus purely on the content that was decided upon by the editorial/writing (called "editorial content" within this article) staff of the magazines, since they establish the mission and tone of the content across all of the issues of the magazine. While I acknowledge the influential presence of advertising, I did no analysis of the content of the advertising pages or photographs. The analysis consists only of the written content of the magazines.

2. The magazines report that the question-and-answer columns and embarrassing/confessional tales are "submitted by readers." However, they do not report how they choose the questions and stories that are published, or whether the magazine staff edits this content.

3. *ELLEgirl* did not contain embarrassing or confessional stories.

4. The unit of analysis was the smallest number of sentences that contained a complete thought, experience, or response, ranging from one sentence to a paragraph. For example, "The fact is you can't change other people. He has to change himself—but perhaps your concern will convince him to make some changes." I took this approach so that the meaning and context of a statement was not lost in the coding. Whole paragraphs could not always be used because they sometimes contained contrasting or multiple themes.

5. The other articles that were not included in the coding focused predominantly on a specific boy or a celebrity male and his interests/activities, or on stories including a boy, or activities to do with a boy, rather than making broad statements about how all boys act (for example, "When he was in kindergarten, his mom enrolled Elijah [Wood] in a local modeling and talent school" or "One time, my boyfriend dared me to sneak

out of the house in the middle of the night while my parents were sleeping and meet him at a park.”).

REFERENCES

- Carpenter, L. M. 1998. From girls into women: Scripts for sexuality and romance in *Seventeen Magazine*, 1974–1994. *The Journal of Sex Research* 35: 158–168.
- Chang, J. 2000. Agony-resolution pathways: How women perceive American men in *Cosmopolitan's* agony (advice) column. *The Journal of Men's Studies* 8: 285–308.
- Currie, D. H. 1999. *Girl talk: Adolescent magazines and their readers*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Craig, S. 1993. Selling masculinities, selling femininities: Multiple genders and the economics of television. *The Mid-Atlantic Almanack* 2: 15–27.
- Duke, L. 2002. Get real!: Cultural relevance and resistance to the mediated feminine ideal. *Psychology and Marketing* 19: 211–233.
- Evans, E., J. Rutberg, and C. Sather. 1991. Content analysis of contemporary teen magazines for adolescent females. *Youth and Society* 23: 99–120.
- Girls' Life magazine: About us. Retrieved May 23, 2004 from <http://www.girlslife.com/infopage.php>.
- Kaplan, E. B. and L. Cole. 2003. “I want to read stuff on boys”: White, Latina, and Black girls reading *Seventeen* magazine and encountering adolescence. *Adolescence* 38: 141–159.
- Market profile: Teenagers. 2000. Magazine Publishers of America.
- McRobbie, A. 1991. *Feminism and Youth Culture*. London: Macmillan.
- Rohlinger, D. 2002. Eroticizing men: Cultural influences on advertising and male objectification. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research* 46: 61–74.
- Salamon, S. 2003. From hometown to nontown: Rural community effects of suburbanization. *Rural Sociology* 68: 1–24.
- Signorelli, N. 1997. A content analysis: Reflections of girls in the media, a study of television shows and commercials, movies, music videos, and teen magazine articles and ads. Children Now and Kaiser Family Foundation Publication.
- Tolman, D. L., R. Spencer, T. Harmon, M. Rosen-Reynoso, and M. Stripe. 2004. Getting close, staying cool: Early adolescent boys' experiences with romantic relationships, In *Adolescent boys: Exploring diverse cultures of boyhood*, edited by N. Way and J. Chu. New York: NYU Press.
- Tolman, D. L., R. Spencer, M. Rosen-Reynoso, and M. Porche. 2002. Sowing the seeds of violence in heterosexual relationships: Early adolescents narrate compulsory heterosexuality. *Journal of Social Issues* 59: 159–178.
- Van Roosmalen, E. 2000. Forces of patriarchy: Adolescent experiences of sexuality and conceptions of relationships. *Youth and Society* 32: 202–227.
- Where the girls are. 2003. *Advertising Age* 74: 21.

✦ Topics for Further Examination ✦

- Find articles and Web sites that offer critiques of gender stereotypes in the mass media, popular culture, and consumer culture. For example, visit the following Web site: <http://womensissues.about.com/cs/genderstereotypes/>.
- Locate research on the impact of American media images of masculinity and femininity on the self-perceptions of women and men in non-Western cultures such as India, Thailand, and Kenya.
- Google Hummer ads for women and Hummer ads for men. Compare and contrast the gendered “marketing” strategies. Select other products and compare, contrast, and critique.
- Check out song lyrics by artists who dare to criticize hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity. For example, Google Pink lyrics for the tune titled “Stupid Girls.”

