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BANISH BELLY BULGE AND CHISEL YOUR BIs:
A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF GENDER
REPRESENTATIONS IN FITNESS
MAGAZINE ADVERTISING

by

Lauren A. Teal

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
School of Communication

Western Michigan University
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BANISH BELLY BULGE AND CHISEL YOUR BIs:
A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF GENDER
REPRESENTATIONS IN FITNESS
MAGAZINE ADVERTISING

Lauren A. Teal, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2007

This study examined gender ideologies in the advertising of two popular fitness magazines, *Shape* and *Men's Fitness*, using Kress and van Leeuwen's visual semiotic theory (1996). The aim of this study was to determine how fitness magazine advertising participates in the construction of gender identities, and to identify what rhetorical and visual strategies are commonly employed.

Through an examination of the way gender identities are constructed by fitness magazines my research has concluded that advertising within both magazines promotes idealized body types and stereotypical gender identities for men and women. In *Shape's* advertisements, women are wives and homemakers; they are also highly concerned with achieving an idealized physical appearance. Advertisements in *Men's Fitness* idealize men with large, muscular bodies who treat women as sexual objects.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The trouble about always trying to preserve the health of the body is that it is so difficult to do without destroying the health of the mind.

- C.K. Cheteron "On the Classics," Come to think of it (1930)

Mass media are alluring to many people and it would take a great deal of effort to remain unaffected by their omnipresence. Often without question or scrutiny, people turn on the television, surf the net, and pick up the latest edition of their favorite magazine. Some people are thirsting for knowledge, while others seek an avenue to unwind in a relatively effortless manner. Regardless of individuals' intentions, or choice of medium, they are entering a pervasive sphere of influence. In this nearly unavoidable domain, they constantly receive new messages about societal norms, whether or not they consciously attend to and acknowledge these directives. Frequent use of any mass medium can make it "transparent" to the user, and when the medium becomes "transparent," it is more likely to accomplish its primary goal of persuading its audience to consume (Chandler, 2002). People can become so familiar with a particular medium that they are unconsciously influenced by its messages.

Because of the mass media's pervasiveness, much of what we learn about society is conveyed through its channels of communication, including our

perceptions of gender. Wallowitz (2004) discusses how media shape these concepts, and explains that the manner in which gender is constructed in our society significantly affects our experiences and perceptions of men and women. Films, magazines, and other media texts play a large role in these constructions: "... literature and media both reflect and create images of femininity and masculinity, and . . . readers project their own assumptions about gender onto a text" (p. 26). In addition, what individuals learn in society about gender norms conditions their reaction to visual media and in turn influences decisions about what to buy and how to present themselves (Barthel, 1988).

Gender norms frequently involve male or female physical ideals, and many scholars suggest that body image is affected by the mass media's portrayal of a white, thin ideal body type, especially in popular magazines (Botta, 2003; Cusumano & Thompson, 1997; Harrison & Cantor, 1997; Markula, 2002; Stern, 2002; Thomsen et al., 2002; Turner et al., 1997). Today the goal to be thin is displayed in media images on television, magazines, and billboards (Wilcox & Laird, 2000), and on the Internet, as well. Many advertisements in women's magazines are concerned with diet and other ways to enhance female figures (Lager & McGee, 2003; Reaves et al., 2004). Some ads are designed to encourage the use of make-up and dieting, which can also undermine a woman's self-confidence and contribute to negative body image (Reaves et al.). The prevalence of eating disorders in recent decades seems to be closely linked to

Western values of thinness in the female body shape and body image distortion (Markula, 2001).

Magazine consumption has been found to have a variety of effects on women, including disordered eating, internalization of the thin standard (Lager & McGee, 2003), and even confusion as to what a healthy body is supposed to look like (Markula, 2001). Content analyses of magazines reveal that readers are inundated with an “ideal” thin, fit body for women, and a muscular body for men (Anderson & DiDomenico, 1992; Botta, 2003; Markula, 2001; Mishkind et al., 1986; Thomsen et al., 2002). These analyses suggest that fitness magazines often contradict themselves by promoting a healthy body and mind in their articles and advertisements, while concurrently overwhelming their readers with images of pencil-thin models (Lager & McGee, 2003; Markula, 2001). These magazines are deceptive because they seemingly offer health tips, while concurrently promoting the thin “ideal” body so common in fashion magazines and on the runway. They function like this because they rely on advertising revenues to exist. They must make us believe that we are lacking something, whether it is clothing, a small enough waist, or happiness, and suggest that a product can fill the void. Advertisements are designed to manipulate behavior by exploiting and inflating human anxieties in order to prompt consumption (McCracken, 1993), and they are the primary way that commercial media survive. If the products do not sell, the advertisers pull their ads and seek other venues, and magazines lose a source of income.

Magazines were one of the earliest forms of mass media, but their content did not center around advertising until well into the twentieth century. In the early 1800s there were few types of magazines, circulation numbers were quite low, and advertising, though present, represented only a modest portion of content. In the years following the Civil War, magazines started to gain importance and several thousand new publications were created, mainly due to the growth in business and industry (McCracken, 1993). In the 1890s, readers saw "a tremendous upsurge in national magazines' advertising" (McCracken, p. 65), and ads began to impact the editorial content of magazines. Since the mid 1900s magazines have deliberately developed their editorial content to showcase their advertisers' products (McCracken). This connection to advertising was formed to create more needs among their readers. "Once linked inextricably to advertisers, magazines played an important role in the development of the consumer society" (McCracken, p. 66). Consequently, this created a market for the advertisers and also greatly increased income received by magazine publishers.

As Shields and Heineken have argued, "Advertising is a key institution of socialization in modern/postmodern society" (Shields & Heineken, 2002, p. 37). Since the early 1900s, advertising has pervaded our lives on a daily basis and affects each of us on a social level. "If advertising provides us insights into the culture where it resides..., studies of that advertising provide additional, perhaps more subtle, and even more revealing insights into that culture" (Duffy,

1994, p. 5). Advertising is created by individuals within a culture. Many of these individuals project their values and beliefs onto the advertisements, whether or not they do it purposefully. Since our values and beliefs play a large role in our lives, and predict much of our actions, it is difficult to remain objective and simply toss them aside. For these reasons, examining advertisements will highlight the values of the culture that produced them.

Thus, popular magazines are important to analyze because a broad portrait of our society emerges from the articles, editorial content, and, in particular, the advertisements contained within them. They are a primary medium through which people consume commercial media, and advertising, which “underlies nearly 90 percent of the pages of most women’s magazines” (McCracken, 1993, p. 64), is their fundamental focus. Magazines are cultural artifacts that reflect the ideologies of the time in which they are published, and this includes beliefs about gender. Gender ideology varies from culture to culture, and may alter as the culture changes. “Ample evidence exists that a gender ideal is socially constructed in a specific historical and cultural context and that it changes over time and according to environment” (Alexander, 2003, p. 537). If gender ideals are “socially constructed,” they are spread through advertising, given that advertising is a major part of our culture. Since advertisements comprise such a large portion of magazines, they offer an important historical record and account of gender norms. Fitness magazines are particularly important in considerations of gender construction because their

main focus is on the body, and practices to improve and modify the body in order to achieve the thin, fit white ideal expected by society. The “ideal” female is lean (with no visible body fat), has large breasts, and may or may not have a small amount of noticeable muscle definition.



Figure 1. Example of “ideal” female body type.
Source: *Shape*, February 2005, p. 133

The “ideal” male body type is mesomorphic and has no apparent fat. Most of us are familiar with these “ideals” because they are the most commonly seen body types on television, in movies, and in magazines (*see* Figure 1 and Figure 2). The focus on the body is key because “... it is the essential structure of the sexual subject on which gender is inscribed. If a woman’s body is not the right size and shape nothing else will fit—certainly not any positive self-identity” (Wykes & Gunter, 2005, p. 83). In this context, the body is much like a canvas which is to be painted by society.

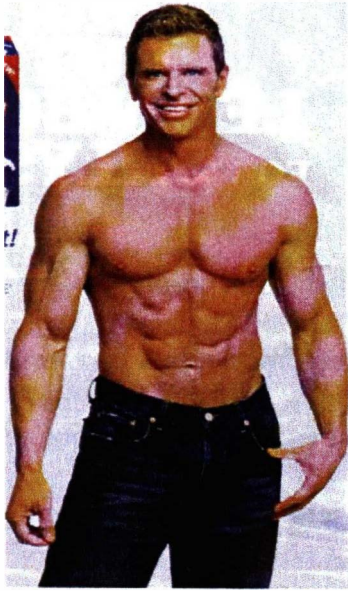


Figure 2. Example of "ideal" male body type.
Source: *Men's Fitness*, August 2005, p. 57

The purpose of this study is to examine the advertisements in nine issues of both *Shape* and *Men's Fitness* magazines, using Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) visual semiotic theory, to determine how gender roles are constructed and identify any differences that may exist between the two magazines. This study will provide insight into the social construction of gender within advertising, thus revealing much about deeply rooted expectations concerning men and women's roles within our society. In the following pages, I will review the literature as it relates to gender, consumer behavior, representations of women and men in media, the effects of magazine consumption, and the function(s) of fitness magazines.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender

Dividing and labeling humans as either male or female seems to be a universal and natural system (Deaux & Kite, 1987). Looking at an individual's biological makeup may be one of the most obvious ways to identify a person's gender category; another way is to consider other physical characteristics, such as build, hair, clothing, etc. (Deaux & Kite). People are also labeled according to their personality, how they handle their emotions, the way they talk, whether they are aggressive, etc. Some of these latter characteristics that we rely on are socially constructed traits that typify either masculinity or femininity: gender. Some people argue that gender qualities are innate, but many scholars disagree. According to McCracken (1993), "Feminist scholars, particularly in the fields of communication and mass media studies, define gender as the term that describes the cultural and social basis of roles assumed daily by men and women" (p. x). These are traits we learn through our interactions with others in society, and may vary depending on the culture that we are socialized within.

Traditionally, an essentialist (biological) view of gender prevailed. Scholars that endorsed this model agreed that women and men are different in many ways because of their biology, not only physically, but also behaviorally. Simone de Beauvoir was one of the first feminists to draw attention to (but not

necessarily dismiss) the long-standing essentialist view that women exist in opposition to men and are secondary to them. "Woman is weaker than man; she has less muscular strength, fewer red blood corpuscles, less lung capacity; she runs more slowly, can lift less heavy weights, can compete with man in hardly any sport; she cannot stand up to fight him.... These are facts" (Beauvoir, 1961, p. 30-31). Because men have this greater physical power, they can do anything, and they decide who they are. Beauvoir suggests in *The Second Sex* that "man is defined as a being who is not fixed, who makes himself what he is" (p. 30). A woman on the other hand is imprisoned in her sex; she is limited as to what she can do and what she can become. In other words, she cannot escape becoming a woman. Beauvoir writes:

A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man. The terms *masculine* and *feminine* are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, a man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas women represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity. (Beauvoir, p. xv)

Beauvoir does not refute the belief that there are biological and behavioral differences between women and men; however, she argues that these differences have no significance without people giving them meaning. For it is only when

people make these traits socially valuable and use them as a source of power that they become meaningful.

Since the feminist movement gained momentum in the 1960s, many people have recognized that most of the behavioral differences between women and men are due to the dissimilar ways in which girls and boys are socialized into society. Contemporary scholars tend to agree that gender is an acquired characteristic; it is socially and culturally constructed (Butler, 1990). Therefore, most feminine and masculine characteristics are not innate, but learned through contact with others - and the mass media. Despite the notion that these characteristics are learned, feminist scholars have argued that society assigns gender to a certain sex. Butler writes:

On some accounts, the notion that gender is constructed suggests a certain determinism of gender meanings inscribed on anatomically differentiated bodies, where those bodies are understood as passive recipients of an inexorable cultural law. When the relevant "culture" that "constructs" gender is understood in terms of such law or set of laws, then it seems that gender is as determined and fixed as it was under the biology-is-destiny formulation. In such cases, not biology, but culture, becomes destiny.

(Butler, p. 8)

Butler seems to embrace the idea that gender is socially constructed, but suggests that there is a problem with this view, since it still casts women into a role they cannot escape. However, the constructivist view is less of a problem than the

essentialist view because at least it allows some possibility of change, and ultimately, that is what feminists seek.

The boundaries between male and female behavior are largely created by society. At an early age boys and girls are taught “normal” and “appropriate” female and male behaviors. In addition to societal institutions, toys such as “GI Joe” figurines and movies like *Superman* for boys, or “Barbie” dolls and *Cinderella* for girls, teach children the roles they must play in order to conform to society’s gender norms (Carter & Steiner, 2004). Our culture determines the meaning ascribed to our bodies. Body image is created by culture, and therefore would not exist without being initially being assigned (Bordo, 1993).

Just as definitions of gender are perpetuated by society, so too are the ways in which people learn to see the female body. In *Ways of Seeing* (1972) John Berger proposes the idea that “ways of seeing” are culturally constructed, and research has shown that “our culture privileges male looking” (Shields & Heineken, 2002, p. 83). There is nothing inherently “natural” about seeing women as objects, or celebrating the female beauty ideal of today (a very thin, toned women with large breasts). Many feminist theorists contend that women are positioned – and conditioned – to be seen as objects which are looked at by men (Berger, 1972; Bordo, 1999; Freidan, 1963; Mulvey, 1975; Wolf, 1992). Berger presents the idea of the “self-surveyed female” as an important way in which individuals in our culture learn to look at women and women come to understand themselves:

She [a woman] has to survey everything she is and everything she does because how she appears to others, and ultimately how she appears to men, is of crucial importance for what is normally thought of as the success of her life. Her own sense of being in herself is supplemented by a sense of being appreciated as herself by another.... Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at.... Thus she turns herself into an object - and most particularly an object of vision: a sight. (pp. 46-47)

Females are taught to evaluate themselves constantly on the basis of physical appearance because that is how others, most importantly men, evaluate them. A woman's appearance, and how well she is able to maintain and perfect it, is a measure of achievement.

Laura Mulvey, in her classic 1975 article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," describes the pleasure in looking as being split between woman as an image (passive) and men as the "bearer of the look" (active). She explains, "The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly" (p. 2186). Mulvey contends that women are displayed for men's viewing pleasure as sexual objects that embody their desires. Because women are continually positioned as objects, such a schema has come to seem completely natural to both men and women. Furthermore, this society's ability to decide what female attractiveness should be is an advantage and basis of

power men hold over women (Shields & Heineken, 2002). Thus, patriarchal society is able to control women by “ways of seeing.”

As mentioned earlier, most scholars agree that gender is defined and constructed by society. While this includes social institutions such as school and family, it also includes media outlets, such as television programming and magazines.

Gender and the Body in Popular Media

Because the body is such a visible index of society's larger expectations for men and women, the media have used the body as a way to construct and convey gender norms. For this reason, many scholarly analyses of gender in media have focused on representations of the body (Grogan, 1999). In various ways, these representations of physical ideals function as social control. Budgeon (1994) asserts that meanings of femininity and masculinity are constructed in media representations of men's and women's appearance: “Media representations work to constitute gender differences rather than simply reflect or represent that difference” (Budgeon, p. 56). These representations affect how women and men view their own bodies – and those of the opposite gender. For example, Spitzack (1990) discusses the many pressures women face in society, and in turn, from the media. In *Confessing Excess* she argues, “Women comprehend outward appearance as a primary factor in societal evaluations of feminine worth; women who conform to beauty ideals seem to be valued highly”

(p. 108). Thus, women learn that their looks are of utmost importance, and those that project that image are valued more by others in their society, especially men.

In her influential book *The Beauty Myth* (1992), feminist scholar Naomi Wolf examines the “beauty myth” and how it has evolved to suit the needs of American culture. The “beauty myth” suggests that it is imperative for women to desire beauty and for men to desire women who are beautiful. This principle is “determined by politics, and in the modern age in the West it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact” (p. 12). The beauty myth emerged in response to women gaining power in our society and is meant to keep patriarchal social control in place. Wolf contends that “images of female beauty [are] a political weapon against women’s advancement” (p. 10). These images saturate our visual media, an important source for learning what is expected in society and particularly, what is expected of our appearance. Lager & McGee (2003) posit that thin idealized images of women influence and maintain patriarchal control over women because this ideology has set the standard and women feel they must live up to it. Unrealistic ideals keep women in a subordinate situation because women’s energies are directed towards the battle for a perfect body (Grogan, 1999). Women remain in this position because they are a part of a culture where thinness and beauty are linked to positive, desirable traits such as happiness, popularity, and attractiveness (Bordo, 1993).

Berger (1977) suggests that women are represented in images, such as advertisements, differently than men. This is because the viewer is always

assumed to be a man, and images of women are made to please men. Thus advertisements with images of women are made to satisfy men, or at least to depict women who have the looks to please men. Some ads for women's products show a man expressing his appreciation of the way the product looks on a woman's body. Women learn these expectations from ads, and may feel they should live up to what men want. For example, an ad for lacy underwear may:

...explicitly depict the approving male, since the product is primarily designed not to be functional but to please a male surveyor; indeed, some ads contend [that] women are always to be ready for an unexpected situation in which the surveyor will scrutinize their underwear. (pp. 113-114)

Ads such as these show female readers how they should be seen by men, thus allowing men the power to judge their appearance—and their worth. This mindset positions women to preoccupy themselves with looking good for men, because they are essentially worthless without their beauty.

Content Analyses of Representations

Many content analyses have examined how men and women are represented in magazines and advertisements. Anderson and DiDomenico (1992) examined 20 popular magazines and found that ads represent women and men differently, while concurrently suggesting gender norms: men's magazines focus primarily on increasing men's muscle, while women's magazines focus on changing women's bodies by losing weight. According to Anderson and

DiDomenico, "Instead of simply reflecting the weight and shape ideals of our society, popular media may be, to some extent, imposing gender-related norms, which then lead to sex-related differences..." (p. 286). Therefore, it is reasonable to speculate that the meanings women and men ascribe to their roles in society are influenced by what they see in the media.

Similarly, Milkin et al. (1999) found that women and men are portrayed differently in magazine images. Milkin et al. analyzed the covers of twenty-one popular women's and men's magazines for gendered messages concerning weight and appearance. They concluded that men's magazines primarily focus on entertainment, knowledge, and activities as the means to enhance one's life. Conversely, women's magazines concentrate on changing one's appearance, especially through weight loss, in order to improve one's life. Thus, they imply that being thin will make women "happier, sexier, and more lovable" (p. 654).

Research has found more body-oriented articles in women's magazines compared to men's magazines (Nemeroff et al., 1994). In one study, articles in women's magazines concerning beauty appeared six times more frequently and articles regarding weight-loss appeared thirteen times more frequently compared to men's magazines (Nemeroff et al.). Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson, and Kelly (1986) performed a content analysis to compare popular men's and women's magazines, and found that there were 63 advertisements for diet foods in the 48 issues of four popular women's magazines and one diet product advertisement in 48 issues of four popular men's magazines. In addition, they examined all 48

issues of the men's and women's magazines and found that the women's magazines contained 226 articles about food, while the men's magazines only had ten. In a study done by Anderson and DiDomenico (1992), popular women's magazines were found to have more than ten times as many diet articles and advertisements compared to men's magazines. Anderson and DiDomenico found that there is a "dose-response" association, which might help to explain the prevalence of eating disorders among women in our society. They found that "the ratio [between men's and women's magazines] diet articles in popular magazines correlates almost exactly with the documented ratio of females to males having eating disorders, both in the general population and in referrals to major treatment centers" (p. 286). Alternatively, it is important to note that this ratio might be the result of magazines responding to the desires of their readers; readers may not be responding to the content in the magazines. Readers may initially seek out media that show idealized bodies, and the magazines may further increase their desire to be thin and to take measures to be thin (Harrison & Cantor, 1997).

In addition to research that examines different ways in which women and men are represented in magazines, many studies have focused on the evolution of women and men's bodily ideals in recent decades. Garner et al. (1980) analyzed trends in the size of women's bodies and found that models, Miss American pageant contestants, and *Playboy* centerfolds have continuously gotten thinner in the past three decades. This is curious, considering that American

women's body size has actually become larger between the 1950s and 1990s (Garner et al., 1980; Spitzer, Henderson, Zivian, 1999). These findings are consistent with the current trend for men, as analyzed by Leit, Pope, and Gray (2001). They examined 115 male centerfold models in *Playgirl* magazine to determine whether cultural body ideals of men had changed from the years 1973 to 1997. They learned that over those 25 years, the ideal male body had become progressively more muscular, with the greatest change during the 1990s. American men's body size has also increased, but has not necessarily become more muscular like the models in magazines (Garner et al.; Spitzer et al.).

Women continually deal with unrealistic body expectations (Alexander, 2003) and our culture has traditionally put far less significance on men's looks, but changes are taking place. The cultural standard of beauty for men has transformed, and as a result, physical attractiveness may be increasingly important to men (Law & Labre, 2002). Similar to the female ideal of extreme thinness, this male ideal physique is unattainable without excessive exercise and diet (Law & Labre; Mishkind et al., 1986). Law & Labre examined *GQ*, *Rolling Stone*, and *Sports Illustrated* to see how images of men have changed from 1967 to 1997. They found that over those thirty years, the media have addressed more and more messages about appearance to men. In their content analysis they concluded that men's body images have evolved to an ideal that most men cannot reach. In particular, "a lean and muscular socio-cultural standard of beauty for men has emerged" (Law & Labre, p. 699). This is interesting because

males may be showing increased concern about their looks in response (Mishkind et al., 1986). Mishkind et al. suggest that men are getting more diet-related messages and now need to make sure they are not fat, not too thin, and very muscular. Some men even resort to using steroids and untested supplements for muscle-building and weight-loss to achieve the muscular "ideal" (Law & Labre). These changes in women and men's bodily ideals appear to be constructed and perpetuated by magazines and other forms of mass media, which promote unreachable physical standards to trigger consumption of body improvement products.

Effects of Magazines on Body Image

The mass media's portrayal of physical ideals may affect individuals' body images. In today's society, the goals of "thinness" for women and "muscularity" for men are prominent in images on television, in magazines, and on the Internet. Many studies have attempted to assess the effects of magazines' use of the idealized thin female body on women's body satisfaction, and have found a positive correlation between reading magazines and body dissatisfaction (Botta, 2003; Cusumano & Thompson, 1997; Harrison & Cantor, 1997; Thomsen et al., 2002; Turner et al., 1997). Magazine consumption has been found to have a variety of effects on women, including disordered eating, internalization of a thin bodily ideal (Lager & McGee, 2003), and even confusion as to what a healthy body is supposed to look like (Markula, 2001).

The increase in eating disorders seems to be closely linked to Western values of thinness in the female body shape (Anderson and DiDomenico, 1992; Markula, 2001). However, research shows that it is more of a problem for Caucasian girls than African- American girls (Felts, Tavasso, Chenier, & Dunn, 1992; Flynn & Fitzgibbon, 1996). In a study conducted by Flynn and Fitzgibbon (1996), white girls of normal weight whose ideals are thinner than their actual weight are at greater risk for symptoms of anorexia and bulimia than African-American girls. Despite the fact that African-American women are more likely to be overweight than Caucasian women (or men of either group), they are less likely to think they are overweight. This is because it is more culturally acceptable for African-American women to be overweight. According to the National Institutes of Health, "overweight" is defined as a BMI greater than or equal to 25; BMI is calculated using the formula: $\text{weight (kg)}/\text{height (m}^2\text{)}$. Thus a 5'5" tall woman who weighs 150 or more would be overweight--according to the NIH. No literature that accounted for differences between the ways whites and other ethnicities are affected by American media was found.

Many researchers conclude that the thin body ideals frequently shown in media may lead to body dissatisfaction and the development of an eating disorder. This may be the result of women becoming dissatisfied when they cannot reach the ideal thinness presented in media (Thomsen et al., 2002). The American Psychiatric Association (2004) acknowledges that one of the defining characteristics of an eating disorder is the distortion of body image and self-

perception. Harrison and Cantor (1997) and Bissell and Zhou (2004) discovered that viewing thinness-depicting and thinness-promoting media (TDP) is a catalyst for developing eating disorders and the drive to be thin. They found that college women who frequently expose themselves to media (television and magazines) that exhibit the “thin-ideal” are more likely to be dissatisfied with their bodies and to undertake unhealthy measures to change.

Some women readers compare themselves to the ideal women shown in articles. Consequently, this may lead them to compete with the people in the articles, which many anorexics have admitted to doing (Lager & McGee, 2003). Anorexics have also confessed to learning how to be anorexic from articles about anorexia. These articles go into great depth about what anorexics eat and how much they exercise, giving the reader enough information to replicate their practices. Some of the anorexic rituals that are described, such as restricting calories, not eating certain foods, and exercising intensely, are very similar to health tips women read in magazines. This makes it difficult to distinguish between a healthy and abnormal diet and exercise regimen (Lager & McGee).

Alison Field et al. (1999) found that girls who frequently read fashion magazines, even those as young as fifth graders, tend to be unhappy with their bodies and are two to three times more likely to diet or exercise to lose weight than those who do not read magazines. Of 548 girls surveyed, 69% reported that images in magazines impacted their idea of a perfect body, and 47% said the images made them want to lose weight. Field and colleagues at Harvard

Medical School also found a strong linkage between frequency of reading magazines and the probability that the girls had tried to lose weight through diet and exercise (Field et al.).

While it has not been as widely examined, some researchers have looked at how the media's depiction of the male muscular physique may be affecting men's perceptions of themselves. This is because the male body has become integrated into popular media more often than in the past (Grogan, 1999). In 1997 *Psychology Today* published the results of a national survey given to 548 men concerning their looks. What might be surprising is that 43% of men who took the survey reported being dissatisfied with their appearance. When the same survey was given in 1972, only 15% of men reported being dissatisfied (p. 78). This is alarming because men's dissatisfaction with their appearance apparently tripled in less than 30 years (Garner, 1997). Research has demonstrated that the ideals of masculinity presented to men may affect their behaviors and self-identity (Alexander, 2003). This dissatisfaction may possibly be in reaction to the mass media's promotion of a male body ideal image of extreme muscularity that is equivalent to the extremely thin female bodies commonly seen in media; in other words, it is equally unachievable.

In a survey conducted by Mishkind et al. (1986), participants indicated that they preferred a male physique that is a muscular mesomorphic [athletic] body type, with a brawny upper body and trim waist (Alexander, 2003; Grogan, 1999). The reason this ideal may be so prevalent is because it is associated with

“Western cultural notions of maleness . . . representing power, strength, and aggression” (Grogan, p. 58). This can be problematic for men if they feel dissatisfied with their bodies because they do not resemble the ideal and if they believe that those who achieve the ideal have an advantage because of their looks. In the U.S. people often associate physical attractiveness with positive qualities and characteristics, such as friendliness, success, etc. (Mishkind et al.). Leit, Gray, and Pope (2002) examine the effects of exposure to advertising picturing muscular men on men’s body image, and conclude that it produces measurable body dissatisfaction. However, this study did not reveal a relationship between these kinds of images and muscle dysmorphia (a condition in which a person is obsessed with being too small and underdeveloped; it is the opposite of anorexia nervosa).

Fitness Magazines

Fitness magazines are not the typical focus of studies that consider the construction of gender and bodily ideals in mass media. Perhaps this is because fitness magazines superficially exude a healthy perspective of the body by purportedly focusing on health issues rather than fashion and beauty, therefore separating themselves from other types of popular magazines. Oddly enough, upon closer examination, they are not much different from fashion and beauty magazines, as evidenced by the fact that fitness magazines continually publish

idealized images of men and women that are representative of very few people within our society (Markula, 2002).

Like other popular magazines, fitness magazines contain a wealth of evidence regarding gender norms and physical standards. They are supposed to be about the body and how to improve one's health, but they are actually about much more. Their articles and advertisements endorse "health" and "fitness" while simultaneously (and deceptively) promoting unrealistic physical standards for men and women, as well as reinforcing traditional gender roles. These magazines mix their health and fitness focus with "traditional women's consumerism and images of consumption" (McCracken, 1993, p. 63). Thus articles and advertisements suggest that consumption is necessary in order to be healthy and fit.

Readers of these magazines may embark on a journey in which the destination cannot be reached by most. Nutrition education within these fitness magazines is intended to help people achieve a healthy body weight for their body type (Botta, 2003). However, Botta argues that because of these magazines' focus on a thin "ideal" body, many people already at a healthy weight are trying to diet to a weight that is unhealthy and unachievable for them. Many of these readers have trouble achieving a thin body that is most likely beyond their reach (Markula, 2001). Thomsen (2002) conducted a study to examine factors involved in women's concern over their body shape and size. Both fashion and beauty, and health and fitness magazines were considered in the study, but only the

latter was found to be directly linked to these concerns. Thomsen suggests that they “contribute to internalization of the cultural thin ideal” (p. 998).

Many content analyses of fitness and fashion magazines have shown that they are saturated with articles and advertisements about weight loss and images of the thin ideal body (Lager & McGee, 2003; Nemeroff et al., 1994; Reaves et al., 2004). Harrison and Cantor (1997) tie women’s desire for thinness to the consumption of fitness magazines. Advertisements and articles in fitness magazines show females what their bodies should look like. In addition, many ads and articles show women how to achieve the bodies they see in the magazines through the use of diet and exercise (Lager & McGee, 2003). According to Harrison and Cantor (1997), reading fitness magazines, above other types of magazines, strongly predicts that women will be displeased with their bodies and practice disordered eating habits.

In an analysis of fitness and nutrition content in a women’s fitness magazine between 1970 and 1990, Guilan and Barr (1994) found that half of nutrition-related ads suggested a weight-loss plan which recommended that readers become more attractive by losing weight. These magazines’ offer of help to women is often deceptive, because at the same time, a body ideal is presented that is impossible for most women to achieve (Hesse-Biber, 1996). Carol Spitzack (1990) posits that “with virtually no exceptions, [articles on weight reduction or body conditioning] assume that women want to be thin and that current readers are not thin enough to meet cultural standards” (p. 109). Readers are made to

feel as though they are not good enough and should lose weight to fit in. Many times, magazines include success stories of women who have lost weight. These articles often highlight how happy these women are now that they are thin, and how much their life has changed. This reinforces the idea that thinner people are better off in our society.

A content analysis of *Shape* magazine conducted by Markula (2001) reveals that the publishers underestimate the emphasis on the flawless, unattainable body, and claim to be concerned with the media's role in the construction of the impossible body ideal. These claims are made in articles which promote self-acceptance, especially being happy with one's own body. However, such articles continue to picture only thin, often emaciated, "perfectly" shaped bodies, which imply that a healthy female body must approximate the figure of a model: a woman who is extremely thin, fit, tall, and has large breasts. These advertisements present an ideal female body, and many female readers may then compare their own body types with this ideal. When they realize they do not measure up, which is most often the case, this may lead to a negative self-concept. In a similar analysis of *Shape*, Ellen McCracken (1993) discovered that this magazine promotes "ideal body images for women that are to be attained through exercise, dieting, grooming, and the purchase of products" (pp. 63-4). McCracken asserts that *Shape* publishers "reify women as inanimate objects that are traditionally part of male culture" (p. 264). Women are in essence here on

earth for men's pleasure, and this is suggested by the types of advertisements published in the magazine that objectify women.

A number of studies have assessed the relationship between reading health and fitness magazines and individuals' body image and behaviors. Renee Botta (2003) discovered that the more time boys spent reading fitness magazines, the more dedicated they were to becoming muscular (for example, they intended to use or already used supplements and pills to gain muscle). The more often girls read fitness and health magazines, the stronger their desire to be thin and to practice disordered eating behaviors. Interestingly, sports magazines (those with a narrow emphasis on sports) were found to be less likely to encourage boys to increase their muscle, or for girls to reduce their weight (Botta). This might be because sports magazines focus more on the actual act of participating in sports, while fitness and health magazines focus on ways to improve health and change one's body.

Numerous women's fitness magazines link poor self-esteem to body image problems which could be fixed with exercise (Markula, 2001). According to Markula's study, "A positive attitude about one's body shape was a prerequisite for overall confidence" (p. 158). Markula contends that fitness magazines focus on body improvement as the key to remedy one's self-esteem problems and describe thinness as the way to achieve high self-confidence. Extreme thinness is highlighted as being the ultimate goal and the most important form of self-improvement (Markula).

Markula (2001) asks why fitness magazines devote so much space to counseling women who are concerned about their body, but at the same time continue to publish images of the thin body ideal.

The magazine advice sounds very encouraging as it advocates a positive celebration of femininity. It devalues the emphasis on the perfect but unachievable body and instead seeks an appreciation for women's intellectuality and expressiveness. However, this reader-friendly body image information often contradicts the rest of the magazines' content.

(Markula, p. 165)

Markula found that both *Shape* and *Self* magazines only picture "flawless" female bodies, despite claims that they are fair in their representation of healthy women. The images in these magazines have remained the same despite their efforts to "remedy" the problems that readers (women) are having.

Rudman and Hagiwara (1992) examined five fitness magazines, including *Shape* and *Men's Fitness*, for the purpose of exploring the way women are portrayed in ads for "health and wellness products." They contend that health and wellness are not truly being promoted; instead, they identify "an image of sexual attractiveness...through use of the female body" (p. 87). Women are encouraged to develop an image, healthy or not, that will attract men. For example, 95% of the ads in *Men's Fitness*, and 50% of the ads in *Shape* presented women in "inappropriate" (nonfunctional) exercise apparel or wearing excessive makeup. However, *Shape* was found to exhibit the greatest amount (28%) of

women as active (shown exercising), and also the lowest amount (33%) of ads focusing on, or exaggerating certain female body parts (Rudman & Hagiwara).

Advertising

In analyses of gender construction in commercial media, perhaps the area that deserves greatest consideration is advertising: “. . . advertising is ...about gender. Gender is part of its social structure and its psychology. [It] conditions our response to what we see and helps us decide what to buy” (Barthel, 1988, p. 6). On television and the Internet, in newspapers, and in all types of magazines, including health and fitness magazines, advertising is the area in which our culture’s values are most explicit and most exaggerated. “Advertisements are one of the most important cultural factors molding and reflecting our life today. They are ubiquitous, an inevitable part of everyone’s lives. . .” (Williamson, 1978, p. 11). Advertising is the backbone of consumer culture because it functions to manipulate people's behaviors in order to encourage consumption.

The messages and images presented in advertisements impact the development of our attitudes, actions, and cultural ideals. Messages regarding gender-related norms are embedded within ads and articles (Milkin, Wornian, and Chrisler, 1999), messages which most people do not consciously decode and interpret (e.g. what a female and/or male is supposed to look like, how he/she should behave and think). “Advertisements show us and tell us how to gender ourselves” (Shields & Heineken, 2002, p. x). They accomplish this by showing

readers what appearances and behaviors are acceptable for women and men.

“By selecting some things to integrate continuously into the message system of advertising (a good example is the ideal female body image), and continuously omitting others (say, the ‘fleshy’ female body), ads create new meanings that are not necessarily found elsewhere” (Shield & Heineken, 2002, p. 39). Thus, advertisements create structures of meanings (Williamson, 1978). For Williamson, advertising works because “it feeds off a genuine ‘use-value’; besides needing social meaning we obviously do *need* material goods” (p. 14). Advertisements make material things seem as though they will fulfill other nonmaterial needs. This gives meaning to goods, which to some extent fulfills both needs.

Advertising plays a significant role in the formation of self-image and identity for many people. “Advertisements are selling us something else besides consumer goods: in providing us with a structure in which we, and those goods, are interchangeable, they are selling us ourselves” (Williamson, 1978, p. 13). Individuals in this culture identify with what they *consume*; therefore peoples’ status within this society is measured by their buying power, and not necessarily by what they *produce*. Because humans are social beings and have a need to belong, the mass media may potentially fulfill a positive function in peoples’ lives by giving them a social “place,” even if it is imaginary (Williamson).

Naomi Wolf (1992) suggests that advertising and magazines have played a role in historical change. “Women’s magazines for over a century have been

one of the most powerful agents for changing women's roles, and throughout that time – today more than ever – they have consistently glamorized whatever the economy, their advertisers... needed at that moment from women" (p. 64). Around the turn of the nineteenth century, America was making a transition from production to consumption. Because most middle-class Americans had their needs met at this time, manufacturers needed to create a desire for products rather than simply a need for them (Luciano, 2001); advertisers became increasingly concerned with trying to sell "nonessential" goods (Wolf, 1992).

Because people were not habituated to excessive buying, new ways were needed to capture their attention and convince them of the psychological "need" for new products. Subsequently, advertisers began incorporating more images of people into advertisements. Prior to this time (1880s -1920s), advertising focused on highlighting aspects of the product itself to attract consumers (Jhally, 1990). Women made approximately 80 percent of household purchases in the 1920s, so most advertising during this time addressed women as the primary consumers (McCracken, 1993). According to Alexander (2003), "women's traditional gender role as housewife and mother implicitly included the task of consumption. From groceries to beauty products, women were the consumers and men the producers" (p. 536). Advertisers used this division to their advantage to "justify their profession and raise it in the public eye" (Barthel, 1988, p. 7). They recognized the advantages of positioning their product such that it created a need or offered a promise that it then fulfilled (Barthel, 1988).

This was not necessarily advantageous to women; indeed, it may even be viewed as a furtive trap that encouraged women to consume by employing strategies that preyed on their innermost insecurities and wishes to fit in and be desired.

In the 1940s, particularly during World War II, many housewives left the home and joined the workforce. This meant that advertisers were losing their primary consumers because women had less free time to shop (Wolf, 1992).

Advertisers soon discovered that this social change was shifting the interests of women, and that they needed to find another way to grab the attention of women – to give them new reasons to read magazines and purchase products.

To achieve this, advertisers needed to construct an individual and social identity that would appeal to this audience (Wernick, 1991). The concept of an ideal body image was employed to appeal to women and recapture their attention.

According to Betty Friedan, writing in 1963, the construction of this identity worked because:

American women no longer know who they are. They are sorely in need of a new image to help them find their identity. As the motivational researchers keep telling the advertisers, American women are so unsure of who they should be that they look to this glossy public image to decide every detail of their lives. (pp. 64-65)

Essentially, the thinness and youth industry emerged as an avenue for advertisers and manufacturers to take to recapture the interest and money of women (Wolf, 1992). Not only would women resurface as the leading consumers

after World War II, this new focus would also serve as the means to retain control over them. Women would be distracted by their body and self-improvement activities, such as exercise and dieting, and unwittingly lose sight of other aspects of themselves that might contest the status quo (Hesse-Biber, 1996). The outcome was that women would remain culturally oppressed through the use of the thin standard presented in advertising (Grogan, 1999; Milkin, Wornian, Chrisler, 1999).

Traditionally, men's attractiveness was based on their behaviors and achievements. While women were expected to be the consumers, men were supposed to support their families, be strong and rugged, and be successful at work to make money for their wives to spend. In the early decades of the twentieth century, men could not appear overly concerned with their looks or others would accuse them of being vain (Luciano, 2001). Today, some of the same ideals are still intact; however, men have fallen "into the beauty trap so long assumed to be the special burden of women...We are clearly witnessing the evolution of an obsession with body image, especially among middle-class men" (Luciano, pp. 4-5). As a result, men are being targeted by advertisers more than ever.

Advertisers have had to take into account that men are also potential consumers of products that adorn the body (Bordo, 1999), and therefore direct some of their efforts towards men (Wernick, 1991). In recent decades, men have been targeted by advertisers of goods such as bath-oil and hair-dye that formerly

would have only been products consumed by women. However, targeting heterosexual men for products like fragrances is difficult because it challenges the idea that "men hunt" and "women attract." This idea has been confronted in recent years with the emergence of the "metrosexual." A man given this title typically spends more time and money beautifying himself than is generally socially acceptable. This may be the result of advertising efforts. "How ads have come to encode masculinity (and, correspondingly, femininity), then, partly reflects the way advertising has sought to secure men's identification, in sometimes unprecedented contests, with the standpoint of consumption itself" (Wernick, p. 49). Advertisers are successful in promoting these products by making overt use of masculine imagery and language, such as "extreme," "power," and "performance" (Barthel, 1988). As men decode advertisements they learn masculine ideals associated with products: "In other words, male gender role resocialization is the product" (Alexander, p. 540).

Advertising is a rich source of information concerning gender because it is a place where these patterns are most apparent. Advertisers exploit and magnify present trends within society to construct an image that will appeal to the masses and make individuals dissatisfied with some aspect of their appearance, because that is ultimately what defines who they are in society. Fitness magazines are of utmost importance because they are about the body, and gender ideals are more markedly expressed within them. Although other scholars have studied articles and advertisements in fitness magazines, there is a gap in the literature which

compares the way men's and women's bodies are ideologically positioned in fitness magazines. Previous studies of fitness magazines do not address the issue of gender and account for the differences between the way women and men are positioned by them. This study aims to confront this matter, and examine the ways women and men are positioned by fitness magazine advertisements. The major research questions that emerge from the literature review in the preceding pages concern the construction of masculinity and femininity in popular fitness magazine advertising.

RQ1: How are gender identities constructed by fitness magazines?

Sub RQ1: What gender norms are communicated to readers in the advertisements in *Shape* and *Men's Fitness*?

Sub RQ2: With what rhetorical and visual strategies are gender norms communicated in the advertisements in *Shape* and *Men's Fitness*?

To answer these questions I analyzed nine issues of both *Shape* and *Men's Fitness*. All of the ads in each issue were counted and categorized to determine the prominent types of products being advertised, and how those categories are suggestive of gender norms being communicated to readers. Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) visual semiotic theory was employed as the framework to analyze the advertisements in both magazines. Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) theory includes three primary dimensions in which images can be interpreted:

(1) the representational dimension; (2) the interactive dimension; and (3) the composition of the image.

I chose *Shape* and *Men's Fitness* because the basic foundation of both is body modification and maintenance. Readers may choose either magazine because they want to reinforce their already healthy living style, looking to further their cause, keep themselves on track, etc. Others may pick up either magazine looking for answers to their body woes. The very names and covers of both of these magazines reiterate what the inside is intended to do for the reader. These two magazines are both popular within their genre and serve as suitable representations of other comparable fitness magazines. In fact, in 2005 *Shape* magazine was ranked 48 on the "Top 100 ABC Magazines" with a total of 1,655,330 paid circulations. It is the fourth largest young women's title, outselling both *Fitness* and *Self*. Only *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour*, and *InStyle* boast higher total circulation numbers (*Shape Media Kit*, 2006). According to Shape.com, it is "a source for women's exercise, health and nutrition, and information on exercise programs, diets and weight loss, low fat recipes and strength training."

Men's Fitness is also a popular men's title. According to American Media Inc., *Men's Fitness* has had a 100% circulation growth in the past five years, placing it among the top three fastest growing men's magazines. In June 2005, *Men's Fitness* reported a circulation of 650,017, with 518,991 from subscriptions, and 131,026 from single-copy sales (*Men's Fitness Media Kit*, 2006). *Men's Fitness* is similar in its description, but there is a clear difference. According to

Mensfitness.com, it is "a source for exercise, health and nutrition advice, and information on exercise programs, building muscle, athletic performance and male sexuality (mensfitness.com)." More importantly, the reason these two magazines were chosen together is because they are both published by Weider Publishing, which is owned by American Media, Inc. For this reason, it is reasonable to assume that each magazine has the same general purpose: promoting health and fitness. One has a primarily female readership, while the other is read primarily by men.

TABLE 1

Demographics of *Shape* & *Men's Fitness**

	<i>Shape</i>	<i>Men's Fitness</i>
Median Age	34.7	34
Median Income	77,033	66,690
College educated	81.2	65%
Married	47.8	57
Single	41.3	43
Children	50	Not reported
Employed	Not reported	84

*Source: Shape Magazine Mailing List, 2006; Men's Fitness Magazine Mailing List, 2006.

Both publications have similar demographics, such as age, income and marital status. I am interested in determining if--and how--men and women are treated differently by the same publisher.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Semiotics

The world in which we live is largely composed of signs. Meaning can exist in nearly anything, from a billboard advertisement for a skirt, to a person protesting on the street. What may differ from observer to observer is the extent to which individual signs are salient and/or affecting, since the meaning of a sign lies within the observer (Williamson, 1978). This is especially true of advertising because it is constructed of signs that are created with an intended purpose and goal in mind. One way of decoding and understanding the meanings in signs is with semiotics. Semiotics is the study of how meanings are constructed and how reality is represented (Chandler, 2002); it is the study of signs. "A sign is something present that stands for something absent" (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993, p. 6), and it has meaning to people (Williamson, 1978); it can be a word, image, gesture, or sound. According to Jensen (1995), "Semiotic theory is a tool in the study of meaning" (p. 11). It is usually a qualitative approach that involves analyzing texts as a whole and dismantling their covert, connotative meanings (Chandler). Semiotic analysis is beneficial because it allows for a richer, more in-depth analysis of texts. It focuses on objective relationships, to explain the differences in what and how images mean (Bell & Milic, 2002).

Two major theorists credited with significant contributions to semiotics are Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce. Saussure was one of the first scholars to discuss the study of signs and the principles that would guide it. Saussure (1959) suggested that the study of signs could be a science, and coined the term 'semiology': "A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; ... I shall call it *semiology*.... Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them" (p. 16).

One of Saussure's major contributions was the dyadic sign model (Noth, 1990), comprised of two elements: the *signifier* (the act) and the *signified* (the meaning). "The sign [signe] designates the whole which has the signified and the signifier as its two parts" (Noth, p. 60). The *signifier* is often the material object (the word "apple"; a woman in an ad smiling because she washed her hair with Pantene), and the *signified* is the concept to which the *signifier* refers (the actual apple; you will be happy too if you wash your hair with Pantene) (Chandler, 2002; Saussure, 1959): its meaning (Williamson, 1978). Also important to this idea is the relationship between the two, which determines the meaning of the sign; it determines how the sign will be interpreted by the viewer. The relationship between the *signifier* and the *signified* is arbitrary in nature, and meaning lies within the viewer (Williamson, 1978). This means that a viewer will interpret an ad depending on his or her individual background and experiences, which have shaped the way he views the world through his unique lens. Conversely, Saussure rejected the referential object as part of this science of signs.

Saussure's semiology functioned completely within the sign system; he believed that nothing existed (structurally) beyond the *signifier* and the *signified*. (Noth, p. 61).

Charles Sanders Peirce's technique has similar roots. However, for Peirce, a sign is "anything which determines something else (its interpretant) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its object) in the same way, the *interpretant* becoming in turn a sign, and so on ad infinitum" (Peirce, p. 239). Peirce's theory is different because it is not limited by the signs themselves; it allows for much more to be considered for the interpretation. Peirce has a trichotomous classification system in which he divided signs into three parts: its representmen, object relation, and interpretant. The *representmen* is the observable object that is the sign, similar to Saussure's *signifier* (Noth, 1990). In terms of object relation, Peirce contends that a sign is either an *icon* (firstness), *index* (secondness), *symbol* (thirdness). An *icon* is a sign that bears a close resemblance to that which it represents (its likeness); a simple example is a photograph of an object. An *index* is a sign that shares a specific physical characteristic with the object it represents, much like a fingerprint relates to a person's identity. *Symbols* are signs that do not have direct or indexical relationships between signifier and signified, with the meaning being constructed by convention; for example, the letters "r-o-s-e" represent a common flower. Unlike Saussure, Peirce did not think the meaning of a sign was arbitrary: "A sign must have some real connection with the thing it signifies so that when the object is present or is so as the sign signifies it to be, the

sign shall so signify it and otherwise not" (Peirce, p. 141). Thus, every sign has a "physical connection" to the object it represents (Chandler, 2003; Noth, 1990). The third component of Peirce's trichotomy concerns the interpretant, which is the term for the meaning of a sign (also defined as significance or signification) (Noth).

Roland Barthes is another key scholar in the advancement of semiotics. In the late 1960s semiotics developed into an important method for cultural studies, largely because the work of Barthes became so important (Chandler, 2002). According to Barthes, "The aim of semiological research is to reconstitute the functioning of the systems of significations other than language in accordance with the process typical of any structuralist activity, which is to build a simulacrum of the objects under observation" (p. 95). It seeks to rebuild the originally intended message by piecing together the present signs. Barthes influenced the field by expanding the concepts of semiological research to areas outside of linguistics, to include the study of visual signs (Barthes, 1973). He used linguistic knowledge as a reference for the development of his ideas, but in no way intended to keep the analytical concepts of linguistics intact.

Using Saussure's dyadic sign model, media analyst Judith Williamson (1978) discusses the ways in which a product in an advertisement is given meaning – "product as signified" – and, how the product gains meaning – "product as signifier." Since a product has no initial meaning, a person or object that already has meaning must be used to project significance onto the product.

“... Something about the product is being signified and the correlating thing or person is the signifier” (p. 31). Once that meaning has been projected on to the product, “the product itself comes to mean” (p. 35). The product becomes known for what it is associated with in the advertisements, therefore, it gains meaning.

Method of Analysis

Kress and van Leeuwen’s (1996) visual semiotic theory was used as the framework to analyze the advertisements in *Shape* and *Men’s Fitness* magazines. Their theory is a continuation of works by scholars such as John Fiske, taking ideas from de Saussure, and from Peirce’s trichotomy of signs. Their efforts take semiotics beyond the field of linguistics. Despite their roots, Kress and van Leeuwen make a clear distinction between their theory of visual semiotics and other semioticians’ theories. They contend that most other visual semioticians focus on “lexis” rather than “grammar,” or on denotative and connotative meanings of images rather than focusing on the way people, places and things in images are “combined into a meaningful whole” (p. 1).

Kress and van Leeuwen maintain that their approach is different because it tells more of the story. The “grammar of visual design” seeks to describe how “grammar” plays a role in the production of meaning. Their book *Reading Images: the Grammar of Visual Design* (1996) is about signs, but more precisely, sign-making.

We see representation as a process in which the makers of signs...seek to make a representation of some object or entity, whether physical or semiotic, and in which their interest in the object, at the point of making the representation, is a complex one, arising out of the cultural, social and psychological history of the sign-maker, and focused by the specific context in which the sign is produced. (Kress and van Leeuwen, p. 6)

In other words, signs can have different meaning depending on who makes the sign, the context of the sign, and who interprets the sign. Signs are culturally specific and have particular meanings to different people. Individuals within the same culture may interpret the same sign differently, but overall there is usually a commonly shared understanding. With this knowledge, sign makers purposefully combine the signs with the intention of forming a relationship between the signifiers and the signifieds. Signs to them are “motivated conjunctions of signifiers (forms) and signifieds (meanings)” (p. 7).

Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) theory includes three primary dimensions in which images can be interpreted: (1) the representational dimension; (2) the interactive dimension; and (3) the composition of the image. The representational dimension, which is either narrative (shows action, unfolding events) or conceptual (conveys meaning), is the way in which images signify the relations between the people, places, and things they represent. A narrative pattern represents the events that are occurring within the image, and is interested in the interaction of the participants in the image. For example, a

picture of a woman sweeping the kitchen floor and a man walking in the door may tell a simple story. Conceptual processes on the other hand represent the meaning, sometimes abstract, which the advertiser is trying to convey through the use of symbols, words, etc. (Kress & Leeuwen). An example of this might be an ad with a pair of woman's legs illustrating what a firming cream can do for her; the goal is basically to associate an idea or effect with the product.

The second dimension is the interaction between the reader and the image (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996). In other words, there are two types of participants: represented participants (people, places, and things in images) and interactive participants (the image and the viewer of the image who communicate with each other *through* the image). This interaction can be examined using the following elements: the gaze of the represented participants and the size of the frame (social distance). The gaze of the participant in the image asks the viewer to engage in a relationship of some sort, which is signified by:

...for instance by the facial expression of the represented participants.

They may smile, in which case the viewer is asked to enter into a relation of social affinity with them; they may stare at the viewer with cold disdain, in which case the viewer is asked to relate to them, perhaps as an inferior relates to a superior; they may seductively pout at the viewer, in which case the viewer is asked to desire them. (Kress & van Leeuwen, pp. 122-123)

In all of the above-mentioned examples, the participant wants the viewer to do something and also tries to define who the viewers should and should not be (Kress & van Leeuwen), based on whether the viewer can relate to the person in the ad. Another component of the interaction is the size of the frame and social distance. The social distance is determined by the social relations between people, which in turn, determines the frame size of a picture. A person shown in extreme close-up invites the viewer to relate to him or her, whereas someone shown far away, is distant (literally and figuratively) from the viewer.

The third dimension is composition, which is the way wherein the first two dimensions (representational and interactive) relate to each other to form the whole. "The placements of the elements endows them with specific information values relative to each other" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 181). Composition relates the two together in three ways: information value, salience, and composition.

There is meaning behind the placement of the elements within a picture, depending on top and bottom, or left and right; this is the information value. The top section of the ad is used to illustrate what the product will do for the consumer (the "ideal"), and the bottom section provides the reader with technical information about the product (the "real"). Another layout that is often present is a division between the left and right. The left directs attention to the "new" information, which is what advertisers want viewers to think of when they see the product. As observers scan ads from left to right, the newest, or

more salient, information is typically on the left side of the frame. The information on the right side of the frame is the “old” or accepted information about the product, which may include its currently accepted associations, and/or its function(s)/ technical specifications. Lastly, there is the idea of center and margin. If one compositional element in the center of the frame dominates the ad, it is referred to as the “Centre” and the elements surrounding are the “Margins.” “For something to be presented as Centre means that it is . . . the nucleus of the information on which all other elements are in some sense subservient” (p. 206). If something is in the center (“Centre”) it is the most significant element, and all the elements surrounding it are secondary to and draw their meaning from it. This is determined by the placement in the ad, but it is also an indication of salience. Salience is how certain objects “jump out” at the viewer more than others, representing the importance of certain elements. The object, for example, may be larger, brighter, or in sharper focus than other objects.

Finally, framing is the use of lines or other components to separate elements. When there is lack of such borders, the information presented in the ad may seem to belong together. The more distinct the framing, the more separate the elements are. For example, a sharp line may be used to create a boundary between the photo and the text within the image to suggest a distinction between the meanings of each. “. . . one for the promise of the product...the other for more down-to-earth information about the product” (Kress & van Leeuwen, p. 215). Framing may be used to draw a distinction

between what the product actually has to offer, and what it promises that is socially significant.

Advertisers have an interest in producing ads as they do because they are seeking a certain outcome: product awareness, and consumption. Therefore, it is in their interest to appeal to viewers' need to fit into society, playing on those needs. "Pictorial structures . . . produce images of reality which are bound up with the interests of the social institutions within which the pictures are produced, circulated and read. They are ideological...they have a deeply important semantic dimension" (Kress & van Leeuwen, p. 45). Because magazines advertisements are "pictorial structures," I will be able to examine their underlying ideological meanings.

People within American society learn much about society's expectations from mass media. "Mass media are one way that prescribed roles and rules of a society get disseminated, and advertising plays a very large part in our experience of the mass media" (Shield & Heineken, 2002, p. 37). McCracken (1993) found that ads and concealed ads (advertising that is hidden in editorial portions of magazines) are 95% of magazines' content. Thus, advertising is the key feature of popular magazines (McCracken). For this reason, I focused specifically on advertisements. Magazines construct social meanings for readers through the use of signs; therefore, I identified the signs present in the advertisements. According to Jonathan Bignell (1997), magazines are a

“collection of signs” (1997, p. 78), a group of signs that are chosen to create meaning.

For this study I examined the advertising in nine issues of both *Shape* and *Men's Fitness*. I examined February through October 2005 of *Shape*, and February through November 2005 of *Men's Fitness* (because June/July was combined into one issue). For each magazine, nine issues provided a sample of advertising that was large but not unwieldy. My first task was to examine each magazine by counting the total number of pages and the total number of ads in all nine issues. I did this to determine the number of ads relative to the total number of pages in the magazines. Categories emerged among the ads as I counted them, including: dieting and body shaping, health products, household, beauty, food and alcohol. I placed each ad within a major category based on the product being advertised, and then counted the ads in each category to determine the proportions of the categories in each magazine and between magazines. I noted any repetitive occurrences of particular categories, particularly if there was a difference in the frequency of such categories in *Shape* and *Men's Fitness*.

I only included advertisements that were one-third of a page or larger. Smaller ads were disregarded, as they are typically classifieds and do not contain images. I also filtered out advertisements to include only those that were relevant to this visual analysis. Since this study concentrates upon the body and gender identities, I focused on ads that frame social expectations regarding gender, especially those ads that employ the body. This includes, but is not

limited to, ads that foreground the body or make reference to the body (e.g., as an anthropomorphized object), and ads that make suggestions about feminine and masculine identities (e.g., imply how men and/or women are supposed to act). Employing the body is an important aspect of advertising in these magazines, but not all ads use the body to convey social expectations about gender identities.

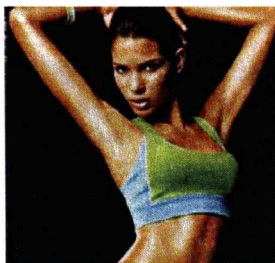


Figure 3. Example of thin female body type.
Source: *Shape*, June 2005, p. 83

Throughout the analysis I will be referring to certain body types, and these descriptions and figures serve to illustrate specifically what is meant by each term. The following terms and figures are used to describe a woman's body: very (or exceptionally) thin, emaciated – no apparent body fat nor muscle



Figure 4. Example of thin "ideal" female body type.
Source: *Shape*, April 2005, p. 63

mass or definition (Figure 3); the thin *ideal* (referenced on page six of the literature review) who has slight muscle definition, but no *bulk*, or muscle mass (Figure 4); athletic – very fit, has noticeable muscle definition, and a small amount of *bulk* (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Example of athletic female body type.
Source: *Shape*, May 2005, p. 49

The following terms and figures are used to describe a man's body:
athletic, very muscular – has especially noticeable muscle definition and *bulk* (Figure 6); extremely muscular – mesomorphic body with a huge amount of *bulk* (Figure 7).

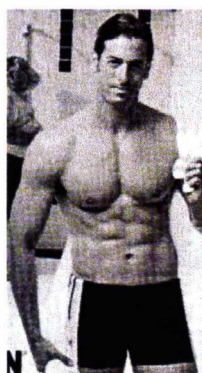


Figure 6. Example of athletic male body type.
Source: *Men's Fitness*, May 2005, p. 98

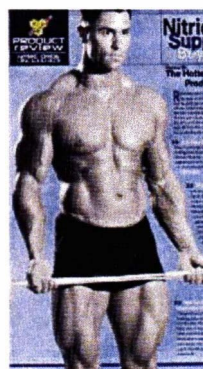


Figure 7. Example of mesomorphic male body type.
Source: *Men's Fitness*, April 2005, p. 98

I then carefully chose various ads that are representative of particularly prominent themes within each category to illustrate common underlying

patterns. Ads were chosen based on a number of factors. They had to be a good representation of the rest of the ads in the category. They also had to offer a sufficient degree of compositional complexity. For example, an ad in *Shape* for mascara that simply highlights the technical aspect of the product and displays the tube of mascara may not necessarily provide interesting discussion as far as visual analysis is concerned. However, it is noteworthy in the discussion of types of ads (beauty) and the prevalence of those types within the magazines.

I conducted an in-depth analysis of the dimensions of the ads chosen, using Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) theory. This included identifying the three dimensions of each ad: the representational dimension (narrative or conceptual); the interactive dimension (the interaction between the reader and the subject(s) in the image); and the composition of the image (the placement and emphasis of elements within the ad).

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

Advertisements in Shape and Men's Fitness

In nine issues of *Shape* magazine, there were a total of 931 advertisements, with an average of 103.5 ads per magazine. On the other hand, the nine issues of *Men's Fitness* had a total of 580 ads, with an average of 64.5 ads per issue.

Comparing the average number of advertisements in *Shape* (103.5:223) and *Men's Fitness* (64.5:137) shows that *Shape* has an average of 39 more ads in each issue than *Men's Fitness* (see Table 2). On average, *Men's Fitness* has fewer pages than *Shape* (*Shape*, 223; *Men's Fitness*, 137), and the ratio of ads to pages is close to the same for both publications. *Shape* may have more pages (and more ads) because the publishers and advertisers believe that women consume more and therefore are better targets for products.

TABLE 2

Shape v. Men's Fitness: Ratio of Ads to Total Pages in Magazine

<i>Shape</i> Issue	No. of Ads: Total Pages	Difference in ad totals	No. of Ads: Total Pages	<i>Men's Fitness</i> Issue
February	96:187	37	59:123	February
March	84:197	32	52:123	March
April	101:215	42	59:123	April
May	122:271	48	74:147	May
June	117:269	40	77:155	June/July
July	109:217	42	67:135	August
August	96:197	29	67:155	September
September	108:243	45	63:135	October
October	99:211	37	62:143	November
Average	103.5:223	39	64.5:137	Average

The categories that emerged from the analysis are: (1) Physical culture – dieting (pills and diet foods/cooking), body shaping (exercising, muscle building, supplements); (2) health and nutrition products (vitamins, informative cancer ads, health bars); (3) beauty - personal grooming and appearance (anti-wrinkle products, make-up, and “all others,” including lotions and shampoos); (4) fashion and adornment; (5) food and alcohol (food that is not for dieting); (6) household – children, pets, cleaning, medicine, cooking, and finances; (7) relationships and sex; and (8) other – vehicles, electronics, sports, entertainment, and miscellaneous (see Tables 3 and 4).

TABLE 3

Percentage of Types of Advertisements in *Shape*

<i>Shape</i>	Shaping/ Dieting	Beauty	Fashion/ Athletic Apparel	Health Products	Household	Food/ alcohol	Other
February	21.88%	21.88	5.21%	1.46%	15.63%	8.33%	13.54%
March	15.48	27.38	17.86	7.14	10.71	4.76	16.67
April	15.84	27.72	10.89	8.91	17.82	4.95	12.87
May	15.57	30.33	11.48	6.56	13.93	6.56	13.11
June	19.66	28.21	8.55	6.84	13.68	5.98	13.68
July	15.60	35.78	5.50	10.09	8.26	10.09	14.68
August	13.54	33.33	8.30	9.38	12.50	6.25	16.67
September	13.89	30.56	13.89	5.56	13.89	5.56	14.81
October	17.35	30.61	15.31	6.12	12.24	4.08	13.27
Average	16.53%	29.53%	10.78%	8.01%	13.18%	6.28%	14.37%

TABLE 4

Percentage of Types of Advertisements in *Men's Fitness*

<i>Men's Fitness</i>	Shaping/ Dieting	Beauty	Fashion/ Athletic Apparel	Health Products	Household	Food/ alcohol	Other
February	39.90	16.95	5.08	6.78	3.39	5.08	20.34%
March	32.69	15.38	11.54	11.54	1.92	5.77	15.38
April	32.20	15.25	6.78	8.47	6.78	5.08	22.03
May	25.68	17.57	10.81	9.46	2.70	2.70	25.68
June/July	24.68	18.18	9.09	9.09	2.60	5.19	25.97
August	29.85	17.91	10.45	8.96	0	2.99	28.36
September	25.37	22.39	16.42	7.46	0	2.99	23.88
October	33.33	17.46	11.11	4.76	1.59	3.17	23.81
November	27.42	20.97	12.90	9.68	3.23	1.61	20.97
Average	29.46%	18.01%	10.46%	8.47%	2.47%	3.19%	22.94%

Within each category, I found commonly used strategies. Ads in the beauty category in *Shape* encouraged women to “minimize” (their bodies and their problems), gain attention from men, and shape thin, idealized bodies, while ads in the same category in *Men's Fitness* suggested that men “maximize” (their

bodies and their opportunities), get women into bed, and become more traditionally masculine. I then chose ads that were good representations of the strategies and examined them according to Kress and van Leeuwen's visual analysis theory.

It is Your Duty as a Woman

The presence of ads in *Shape* (and absence in *Men's Fitness*) for children's medicine, cleaning products, dog food, and products that make cooking dinner easier suggests that women are still expected to play the primary role of homemaker and child caregiver. There is an average of 1.3 "household" ads in each issue of *Men's Fitness*, compared to an average of 11.8 in *Shape*. There is not one ad in the nine issues of *Men's Fitness* analyzed that featured children, cleaning or products for cooking dinner. Therefore, there is an average of nine times as many advertisements in the household category in *Shape* than in *Men's Fitness* (see Table 5).

TABLE 5

Household Ads: *Shape* v. *Men's Fitness*

<i>Shape</i> Issue	Household Ads	<i>Men's Fitness</i> Issue	Household Ads
February	15	February	2
March	9	March	1
April	18	April	4
May	17	May	2
June	16	June/July	2
July	9	August	0
August	12	September	0
September	15	October	1
October	12	November	2
Average	13.67	Average	1.56

*Household ads – includes products for pets, meals, cleaning, products for children, ads that feature children, and finances.

According to Alexander (2003), “women’s traditional [twentieth century] gender role as housewife and mother implicitly included the task of consumption. From groceries to beauty products, women were the consumers and men the producers” (p. 536). It is evident that this statement remains true today. In 11 consecutive issues of *Men's Fitness*, not a single ad references any of these household tasks, therefore strengthening my contention that a woman is shown that her role is to be the sole homemaker; she must take care of the children, cook dinner, and keep the house tidy and in order. Advertisers tend to show women as mothers and housewives. A good example of this is in an ad for Clorox Disinfecting Wipes in the April issue of *Shape*.

In this ad (Figure 8) the representational dimension is both conceptual and narrative; the ad communicates about a woman's place in the home, and tells a story about a woman cleaning up after her husband.

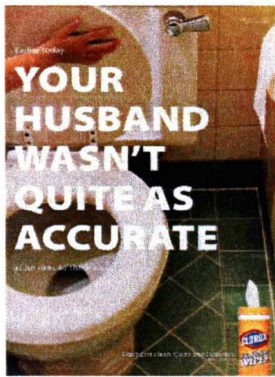


Figure 8. Clorox advertisement.
Source: *Shape*, April 2005, p. 146

The toilet bowl takes up more than half of the full-page ad, and is situated on the left. The salience of the toilet bowl and the text written over it is indicated by its size relative to the container of Clorox Disinfecting Wipes (which is in the bottom left corner). Next to the container the ad reads, "Don't just clean. Clean and disinfect," in a font that is approximately 12 point size. This is the only real information about the product, situated at the bottom as Kress and van Leeuwen's theory suggests. The much larger text (about size 100) in this ad reads: "Earlier today your husband wasn't as accurate as he likes to think he is." This text suggests that a wife should be concerned with cleaning up after her husband, who was unable to use the toilet without making a mess. Rather than the man being held responsible for his messes, the woman has to clean up after him as if he is a child. The ad tries to use humor to convey this message, as if it is

funny that a man is messy and irresponsible. There is no frame around the ad, and the way that the ad is continuous and bleeds off the page, brings the viewer closer to its message. Since there is no separation, it seems as though the viewer, a woman, should be able to relate to this statement. This ad discloses a deeper cultural expectation that situates women as the traditional, primary homemakers. There is also a child in this ad, further defining women as mothers. The child's hand (which is all that can be seen of the child) is holding the toilet lid open.

In addition to ads for cleaning products, there are ads for children's lunches, family vacations, and children's medicine in *Shape*; children are also integrated into ads for women's clothing, body lotion, and even deodorant. An ad for "Keds" women's shoes (Figure 9) exemplifies how women are shown their duties.

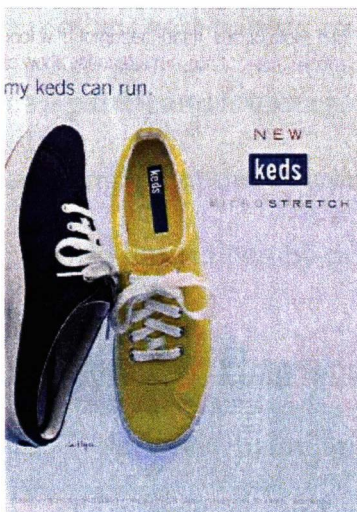


Figure 9. Keds advertisement.
Source: *Shape*, March 2005, p. 11

The top section of the ad is used to illustrate what the product will do for the consumer, the ideal, and the bottom section provides the reader with technical and/or practical information about the product. The ad emphasizes what a woman can accomplish for her children in these shoes. Thus, the representational dimension is conceptual, and it defines women as mother and homemaker. Based on the large number of tasks described in the ad, Keds assumes that the mother does not have much help from anyone else. The ideal information, or what the product will do, takes up the top quarter of the ad, which reads, "Run to school with forgotten lunch. Run to store. Run to work. Run to violin lessons. My Keds can run," as if the shoe will help consumers accomplish these daily errands for their families. The bottom three-quarters pictures different colors of the Keds tennis shoe, which is the real product that can be purchased. Essentially, the purchase and use of the Keds shoes will allow a mother/wife to perform the never-ending duties for which she is responsible as a parent and a spouse. The message is somewhat contradictory because it seemingly empowers women by suggesting that they can keep going constantly, but also limits them by proscribing their duties.

It is Not About What is on the Inside

An overwhelming majority of the ads in *Shape* and *Men's Fitness* fell into categories that pertained to outward appearance (dieting/shaping body, beauty, and fashion/adornment). An average of 56.5 percent of ads in *Shape*, and,

perhaps rather surprisingly, an average of 58 percent of *Men's Fitness* ads concerned outward appearance, suggesting that both women and men should be highly concerned with perfecting themselves externally. There is a difference between the types of products advertised, however. The difference is in the much smaller scope of products and flaws that men are directed to confront, compared to the broad range of products offered in ads to women.

An average of 29.5 percent of *Men's Fitness* ads fell into the dieting/body shaping category, compared to an average of 16.5 percent in *Shape*. Throughout most of these advertisements, men are directed to accomplish one primary goal: increase their mass to be powerful, usually so that they will be sexually desired by women. Men are inundated with ads for supplements: 70 percent of the ads in the dieting/body shaping category, or 12 to 16 ads per issue, were ads for supplements, compared with only 6 percent in *Shape*, which offered from zero to two supplement ads in each magazine. This sends a strong message to men, communicating that they should idealize the exceptionally muscular men in the magazines and be highly concerned with "bulking up" by increasing their muscle mass. Research shows that using supplements for weight control and muscle building is increasing among men (Law & Labre, 2002); whether fitness magazine advertising may be a direct cause is unclear. With the exception of just a few, ads for supplements featured in *Men's Fitness* usually picture an extremely muscular male lifting weights or flexing. Within the ads for supplements in

Men's Fitness, there are two common strategies used to gain the attention from men: the use of powerful descriptors and names, and sex.

Get "HUGE"

The most popular tactic in ads for supplements is the employment of commanding, masculine adjectives like "big," "huge," "cut," and "extreme." Most of these ads have a dark background with large, bright colored fonts to make them jump out of the ad in an exciting fashion, hopefully getting the reader "pumped-up" to take the supplements and work out so he can get "huge." The background is always accompanied by a large mesomorphic figure. This layout, combined with the masculine, authoritative words, brings immediacy to the consumer, almost challenging him to get started right now because he is most likely behind (and therefore, weak)--unlike the men in these ads who are, in most cases, so muscular that they cannot even put their arms down because their lateral muscles are so big. This theme is also apparent in the brand names of the supplements: No-Explode, Nitro-Tech, CellMass, Mass Stack, and so on.

An excellent example of this is an ad for Nitroxy3, a nitric oxide stimulator performance enhancer (Figure 10). The name alone sounds like a "tough" chemical. The representational dimension of the ad is conceptual, expressing the importance of a male idealized physique. The middle of the ad states, "Jack. Looking Jacked." and directly beneath it reads, "Hours after his workout." "Jack.

Looking Jacked.” is in larger font than “Hours after his workout.”, thus signifying the greater salience of the first line.

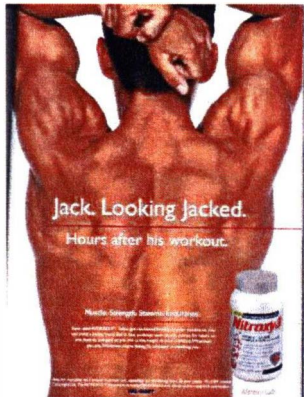


Figure 10. Nitrox3 advertisement.
Source: *Men's Fitness*, April 2005, p. 78

The fact that the man in this ad looks “jacked” is of utmost importance, because the connotative meaning of “jacked” is muscular: having a mesomorphic body type. About half way down from the center are the words “Muscle. Strength. Stamina. Endurance” in font half the size as the first line, followed by even smaller print that details the technical aspects of the product. The top of this ad expresses the “ideal,” being very muscular, while situated in the bottom half is the “real” information about what the supplement does to a man’s body internally. The background of the advertisement is comprised solely of an extremely muscular man’s back and shoulders. In this way, he has been objectified and turned into only part of a body. He (the represented participant) is not facing the viewer, which indicates that he is not asking the viewer to engage in a relationship. This might signify that the man pictured in this ad

could be any man; it could be the male reader looking at this ad, if he takes the supplements.

“Energy. Pumps. Size. Performance. Training Intensity. Train like a freak – every time!” This is the title of an ad in the February issue of *Men’s Fitness* for No-Xplode. Unlike most of the ads in this category, the man is resting (most are shown in action), leaning over a 45-pound weight, and it appears that he has just finished lifting because he looks worn-out. He is a massive man, almost “freakish-looking,” and is extremely muscular (Figure 11).



Figure 11. No-Xplode advertisement.
Source: *Men’s Fitness*, February 2005, p. 85

His body takes up the top three-quarters of the ad; thus, he is the ideal and represents the body men can gain if they use this product (conceptual representational dimension). His gaze is focused away from the reader... allowing the viewer to look and be in awe of the sheer size of the man’s shoulders and biceps. The bottom quarter of the page is used to give more information about the product’s benefits for the man featured. At the end of the paragraph in parentheses the ad states: “Seen here just after using No-Xplode to

set a new personal lifting best.” This is used to suggest that this product could help the reader achieve his personal best.

The Promise of Sex

The second common strategy to advertise supplements is the promise of sex. This tactic varied from explicitly asking, “Do you want more sex?” to showing a woman with a thin yet voluptuous (ideal) body in a bathing suit posed on her hands and knees, squeezing her breasts together to augment the view of her cleavage. A good example of this strategy is in an ad for Met-Rx in the October issue (Figure 12).



Figure 12. Met-Rx advertisement.
Source: *Men's Fitness*, October 2005, p. 111

The bottom features the real, factual information about the nutritional properties of the product. Under the logo the ad states, “Bigger. Better. Stronger.” The top two-thirds of the ad features a woman on the beach in a thong bathing suit; hence, she is the central part of the ad. She also represents the ideal (top of ad); in this case, she is what a man can have if he uses this product to get “bigger” and “stronger” (conceptual). The woman is crawling, with her bottom propped

in the air. Her eyes are closed and the expression on her face indicates she is experiencing pleasure, even though no one else is present. Her expression might communicate to the viewer that she is thinking of him, with a large muscular body. “Twice the bang for your buck” is just below her. Considering the image of the woman, “bang” refers to sex (which apparently a man will experience if he uses this product), and “buck” may be referring to a man, or it might simply be conveying that a man can get more sex for his money. The advertiser is playing on the image of the woman, but is also referring to the small coupon on the bottom for buy one, get one. This ad is telling men that they need to be bigger and stronger, and they will get a woman like this. This ad also communicates that women are sex objects to be obtained and used for pleasure. One thing is evident: the main strategy of these ads is to gain attention from readers by suggesting that the use of the product will lead to sex, or at least attention from women. This strategy (product = sex) was not used in *Shape* to target women. However, some ads for beauty products in *Shape* did insinuate that the product would lead to attention from men.

The beauty advertisements that employ this strategy usually include a man and woman, in which the man is enjoying the woman (holding her or looking at her). This is the case with an ad for Secret deodorant in the May issue of *Shape* (Figure 13).

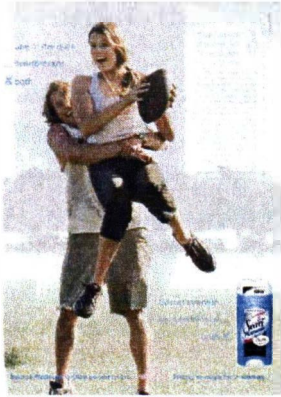


Figure 13. Secret advertisement.
Source: *Shape*, May 2005, p. 115

This ad pictures a man and woman outside in a field, in the middle of engaging in a playful game of football. The man is holding the woman in the air as if he just tackled her because she has the football. The representational dimension is narrative because they are in action. The two represented participants take up most of the one-page ad, making them the most important elements. The only other content on the page is “__ one of the guys, __ heartbreaker, X both”, and a small amount of information about the product on the bottom. The composition of this ad is based on the emphasis on the center, so all other elements draw meaning from the man and woman’s interaction. The fact that the man is holding the woman up, makes a suggestion about her weight and his strength: a woman should be light enough to be swept of her feet (literally), and a man should be strong enough to do it.

Anthropomorphizing Diet Products in Ads

An interesting strategy found in the dieting foods category in *Shape* was the anthropomorphizing of diet food products. This was interesting because in

every case, the product was turned into a woman's body, with emphasis on a slender waist. The product was usually the means by which a consumer could hope to attain this thin waist. All of the products fell into the dieting category because all of these particular ads highlighted the products' ability to contribute to weight loss. Fat-free Jell-o, light Kraft cheese, and milk ads showed up frequently in the nine issues of *Shape*. This strategy was not found in *Men's Fitness* ads. The reason for this might be that women have learned to be highly concerned with being thin and since they are the primary consumers, these ads aim to show women that these foods will help them achieve thinness. Each of the ads emphasizes a small waist as the primary way in which the product mimics a woman's body. All of these advertisements have the same general conceptual meaning (representational dimension), which is that their products will give women a thinner waist.

The composition of these ads also has significance. The top section of the ad is used to illustrate what the product will do for the consumer and the bottom section provides the reader with the technical, informative aspects of the product. In all of these ads the product comprises at least the top half of the page, while the bottom is reserved for "real," nutritional information. In most cases, the advertisement gives "greater stress to the promise of the product than to the factual information" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 185). An example of the anthropomorphizing of the products is in a "Got Milk?" advertisement (Figure 14).

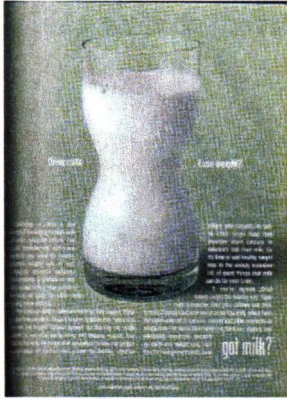


Figure 14. "Got Milk?" advertisement .

Source: *Shape*, June 2005, p. 43

Since this ad is divided in half between the top and bottom, the image of the milk is the "ideal," and the "real" is factual information about the health benefits of milk. In this ad, the technique of placing emphasis on the center is used as the leading expression. The salience of the Centre is shown by the size of the milk glass in comparison to the size of the full-page ad; the milk glass takes up more than half of the ad. The glass is the shape of a figure with a small waist, suggesting that women will achieve this with the use of this product. In this ad, the Centre represents a "means to an end" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996): if a person drinks milk, she can achieve healthfulness, and more importantly, a slim waistline like the glass.

Another example of anthropomorphizing products is in an ad for Tropicana orange juice (Figure 15). This ad pictures an orange with a tape measure around it, with inches 14 through 17 showing; clearly no orange is this large around. Therefore, this measurement must be in reference to the human body, though it is far too small for any healthy woman's waist. Thus, this ad is

telling women that their waist should be that thin, or perhaps thinner.

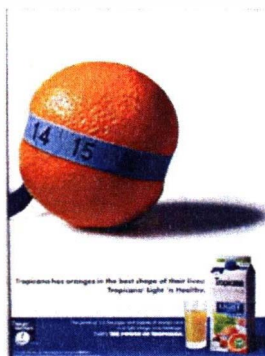


Figure 15. Tropicana advertisement.
Source: *Shape*, February 2005, p. 105

In two similar ads, one for POM juice and the other for Kraft cheese, the picture of the product comprises the top 75 percent of the page, while the bottom quarter is reserved for “real” nutritional information. Also present in both of these ads is the horizontal arrangement of the image and words. In these ads, the left and right, according to Kress and van Leeuwen’s theory, are reversed, perhaps to take advantage of the tendency of readers’ eyes to linger on the right side of the frame. In the POM ad (Figure 16), the words “Life preserver” are on the left side of the page, which might bring to mind a usual, familiar life preserver (the “old”).

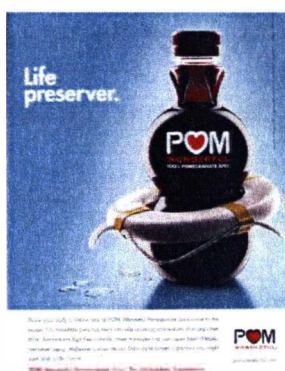


Figure 16. POM advertisement.
Source: *Shape*, February 2005, p. 49

On the right, the product is pictured with a life preserver around its “waist,” signifying that the product itself is the “new” life preserver. The Kraft ad (Figure 17) uses the same layout. The left side of the ad has an old package of Kraft Cheese and the right side pictures the new cheese package shown in a mirror, with a slim waist.



Figure 17. Kraft advertisement.
Source: *Shape*, June 2005, p. 97

All of these types of advertisements have the same general conceptual meaning (representational dimension), which is that their products will give women a thinner waist.

The website for *Shape* has also employed the anthropomorphizing strategy. For example, on March 07, 2006 the homepage included a banner on the top of the page with an advertisement for Yoplait yogurt. The ad featured a yogurt container with a waist like a person. Next to the container, the ad reads, "Lose weight. Gain a waist...and so much more." The conceptual meaning in this ad is that if people eat Yoplait yogurt (Figure 18), they will lose weight. But

the ad goes beyond that and leaves the rest up to the viewer's imagination. In the context of *Shape* magazine, it is reasonable to assume that "so much more" is the body of the models pictured in the ads and articles, implying that so much good comes with having a trim waist and being thin.

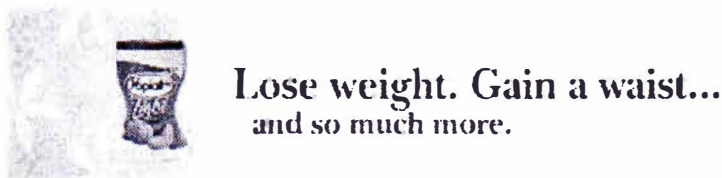


Figure 18. Yoplait advertisement.
Source: *Shape Website*, June 2005

Ads for *Shape*

A majority of the ads for exercise equipment and workout videos in *Shape* featured women with an athletic body. One of the more surprising findings within this category was the number of advertisements for *Shape* magazine in *Shape* (Figure 19).

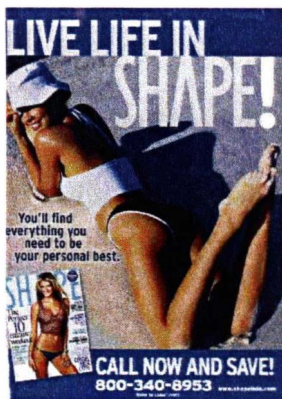


Figure 19. *Shape* advertisement.
Source: *Shape*, July 2005, p. 97

Like the cover of the magazine, all of the models in ads for *Shape* wear skimpy swimsuits, and have "ideal" bodies. The fact that the models are very thin is the

most noticeable element of the ads. Thus, women are shown they need to minimize the size of their bodies. In comparison, men are shown how to maximize.

The ad I chose to analyze has a model lying in the sand on her stomach, with her feet kicked back, and she is looking at the reader. The representational dimension of this ad is conceptual, as the model is used to represent an “in-shape” body. Her gaze expresses that she is trying to engage in a relationship with the reader. She is smiling, and pulling her hat over her eyes, as if she is being bashful because the reader is looking at her body, because she knows the reader wants her body (that is, to look like her). According to Kress & van Leeuwen (1996), when the participant in the image smiles he or she is asking the viewer to enter into a relationship of social affinity with him or her. In this case then, the represented participant asks the reader to identify with and be like her: thin and in shape. The model is in the center of the full-page ad, making her the most important part. She is the foundation upon which all other elements in the ad build their meaning. Different pronouncements are placed around her body on the page. The text above the model states “Live Life in *Shape*!” Since all elements around the model draw meaning from, or refer to her, she must have the body of someone who is truly “in shape.” The bottom left corner of the ad reads “You’ll find everything you need to be your personal best.” Just below this, there is a small picture of a cover of *Shape* magazine, with yet another very thin, large-breasted woman, further supporting this “ideal” body type. What is so

disappointing about this is the fact that *Shape*'s articles and advertisements continue to endorse "health" and "fitness" while concurrently promoting unrealistic physical standards for women in their own advertisements.

One of the categories found in both *Shape* and *Men's Fitness* is ads that concern beauty and personal appearance. An overwhelming average of 30 percent of the ads in *Shape* fell into this category. There is a broad range of products that offer different body solutions, making the duties women have to maintain or improve their bodies endless. With so many ads for such a variety of body solutions, a reader might believe that there is no excuse for a woman to have flawed hair, teeth, skin, or nails, and therefore assume that she must live up to the image depicted in the ads.

"Minimize" Your Beauty Potential

A strategy commonly used in the ads in to the beauty category is the use of verbs telling women to make something smaller. Whether an ad encourages readers to "firm," "minimize," "reduce," or "remove" lines, cellulite, or pores, it is clear advertisers are suggesting that women need to minimize their flaws. Advertisements for products that minimize cellulite and wrinkles use this tactic. An example of this is an ad for Shiseido Body Creator (Figure 20). The representational dimension of the ad is conceptual in meaning, expressing the importance of a female idealized physique.

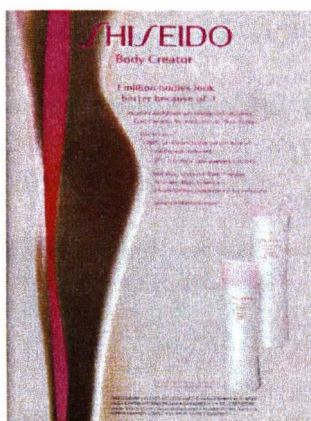


Figure 20. Shiseido advertisement.
Source: *Shape*, March 2005, p. 9

The message is that readers should idealize the thin women in magazines and be highly concerned with “toning-up” by using products that minimize cellulite.

The left half of this ad expresses the “ideal,” being very thin, and the right half is the “real” information about what the lotion does to a woman’s body. The left side of the advertisement is comprised solely of an extremely thin woman’s body from the knees up to her breasts. In this way, she has been objectified and turned into only part of a body. However, it is clear that the most salient part of this ad, because it takes up almost 50 percent of the frame, is the slim, firm part of a woman's body. The represented participant is not facing the viewer; her face isn't even in sight. This suggests that she is not asking the viewer to engage in a relationship. This might mean that the woman pictured in this ad could be any woman; it could be the female reader looking at this ad, if she uses the Shiseido Body Creator lotion.

Another instance of this is in a L’Oreal advertisement (Figure 21) in the May issue of *Shape* for their “targeted anti-cellulite system, Sublime Slim.” The

left-half of the ad pictures a very thin woman's thigh with her hand holding a tape measure around it. In this way, she has been objectified and turned into only part of a body.



Figure 21. L'Oreal advertisement.
Source: *Shape*, May 2005, p. 91

No clear measurement can be read; however, her fingers are spread right around the “16,” and it happens to be the brightest number. It almost appears as though the creator purposefully highlighted this number, which is quite small for most grown women's thighs. Since she is positioned on the left side of the page, she is the new, the ideal. The right features specific information about the product. It is the means by which a consumer can attain the ideal. Since only the model's leg and arm can be seen, she is not trying to engage in any relationship with the viewer. This is another example of an ad expressing that the leg could be the reader's leg, if she used the product.

You Too Can Have an Olay Body

Some beauty ads feature a slender, idealized woman, implying that the use of this product will give consumers the body of the model pictured. For example, an ad for the Olay Body line of body lotion presents a woman with the text, “Now you can have an Olay body” (Figure 22).

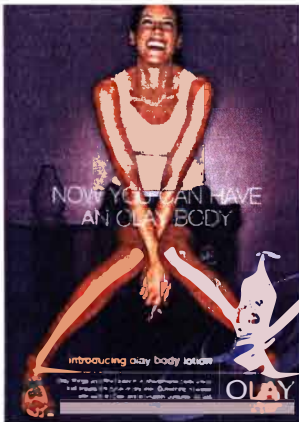


Figure 22. Olay advertisement.
Source: *Shape*, February 2005, p. 87

The photo of the woman constitutes approximately 85% of the full-page ad, while the text on the bottom describes the practical, factual information about the lotion. This information appears to hold less weight since the text is so small and comprises such an insignificant portion of the ad, thus making the information seem relatively unimportant. It is obvious then that the most salient part of this ad is the idea of becoming like this woman. The woman is a very thin, with radiant skin. Consequently, women learn that this woman in the ad has an ideal body according to Olay, which not only means having radiant skin, but also being thin (the conceptual meaning). The represented participant (the woman in the ad) is sitting in a casual, carefree manner with her arms tucked between her

legs, smiling and looking up, away from the viewer. Since Olay's slogan is "love the skin you're in," it is reasonable to assume that the model is supposed to be expressing her love for the skin, and therefore body, that she is in. The model is purposefully engaging readers to show women that they too can "love the skin [they're] in," if they use the Olay body lotion.

Another ad for the Olay Body line shows how important it is to acquire an "Olay Body," and clearly, that appearance is the most important aspect of a woman. The ad pictures a woman with the text "Become known for more than just a pretty face" (Figure 23). Under the text there is a driver's license featuring a female's legs, rather than her face.

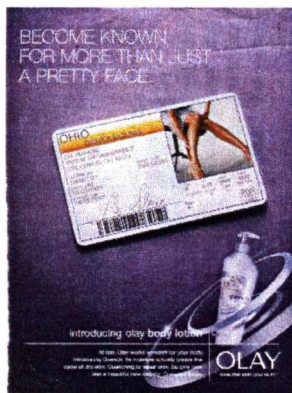


Figure 23. Olay advertisement.
Source: *Shape*, August 2005, p. 15

The woman in this ad has been objectified and turned into only one part of her body. The representational dimension is conceptual, and the meaning here is that a woman should be known for more than just her face, but also her legs, and not something important like her mind. The text on the bottom describes the practical, factual information about the lotion, the "real," which constitutes

approximately 1/8 of the one-page ad. Also, placing emphasis on the center is used as the leading expression, which makes the model's legs the most salient part of this ad, and thus representative of the "ideal." The ad suggests that the reader become like this woman, and be known for having great legs. Will that moisturizer really make a woman's legs look that great? Of course, the statement "Become known for more than just a pretty face" alone suggests that a woman should also have a pretty face, even though this is only an ad for body lotion.

While idealized physical appearance is frequently used by advertisers, Dove, in contrast, has launched a different campaign. This ad proudly announces "Celebrate the real you!" and features an average woman (represented participant) in her underwear, smiling and expressing her love for her body (Figure 24).



Figure 24. Dove advertisement.
Source: *Shape*, August 2005, p. 51

As mentioned earlier, the gaze of the participant in the image asks to the viewer to engage in a relationship of some sort, which is signified by the facial expression of the represented participants. A smile is symbolic of the

represented participant asking the viewer to relate to her, to communicate likeness. This is exactly the case in this ad. The Dove model wants other "real" women to be like her, to celebrate who they are and love their bodies the way they are. The participant (Dove model) wants the viewer to do something (celebrate her body) and also tries to define who the viewers should and should not be (Kress & van Leeuwen). The message of this ad is interesting. On the one hand, it embraces the notion that women should love the unique shape of their own bodies, rather than pursue an unrealistic ideal of beauty. Yet the ad also implies that Dove is an important part of celebrating one's uniqueness.

Product = Sex

An average of 18 percent of all ads in *Men's Fitness* fell into the beauty/personal appearance category. In contrast to *Shape*, the strategy that is most prevalent in beauty product ads in *Men's Fitness* is the use of heterosexual sex to sell. It is often the most obvious part of the ad, whether a woman's body is employed, or large text explicitly makes a statement about sex. The November issue of *Men's Fitness* has an ad for Old Spice Red Zone body wash (Figure 25) that exemplifies this strategy.



Figure 25. Old Spice advertisement.
Source: *Men's Fitness*, November 2005, p. 13

The top-half of the ad features a neon sign with a bottle of Red Zone and the text: "Come home clean, if you come home. Smell clean long, stay out late." Another ad for this product in October reads, "Say goodnight over brunch. Smell great, stay out longer." The text is in a neon sign, set against a black background, making it jump out at the reader. This is the ideal information, and it explains what the product will do for the consumer. In both ads, this is the only information in the ad, and the bottom-half of the ad is black, and blank. There is no real information or detail about the product itself. The text insinuates that if a man uses this product, he will stay out late because he will attract women and stay the night with them. The absence of any information about the product implies that only one thing is important: getting a woman in bed. This product is simply a means to an end. Use Red Zone – get laid.

An ad for Just For Men hair color in the July issue of *Men's Fitness* is another example of the use of sexuality in advertising aimed at men. This is a

full-paged ad (Figure 26) and it is divided in half vertically.

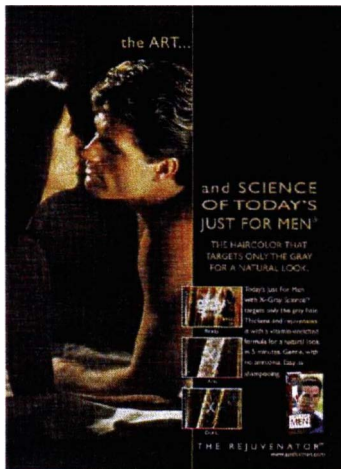


Figure 26. Just For Men advertisement.
Source: *Men's Fitness*, June/July 2005, p. 49

It pictures a man and woman leaning in to kiss one another. The new information ("the ART . . .") is pictured on the left, and the old information is on the right ("and science of today's Just For Men"). There is emphasis being placed on the participants' hair, making it particularly salient to the ad's meaning. Special lighting is used to call attention to the man's 'not-gray' hair. The left half of the ad is showing action; therefore the representational dimension is narrative. The basic, and clear, meaning behind this ad is that if a man takes care of his hair, not allowing it to gray, he will be rewarded with sexual pleasure from a woman. The ad suggests that if a man does not color his hair, he will not experience the pleasure depicted in the ad.

An ad for Lectric Shave also exemplifies the use of sexuality in advertising aimed at men. The top half of this ad is showing action; therefore the representational dimension is narrative. The top half of the ad pictures a man

with his face buried in a woman's chest, apparently depicting a sexual encounter.

Directly below the picture it says "Make smooth contact every time" (Figure 27).



Figure 27. Lectric Shave advertisement.
Source: *Men's Fitness*, February 2005, p. 13

Rather than demonstrating the effectiveness of the product by showing the man's face, viewers learn that Lectric Shave must be useful if a man can get that close to a woman's chest after shaving. Since this ad is divided in half between the top and bottom, the image of the sexual encounter is the "ideal," and the "real" is factual information, such as "Get up to 52% closer than shaving dry." Thus, men may associate this product with sex and receive the message that if they use this product, women will desire them more because they have a smooth face. A common thread in all of these ads is men do not need to know anything else about the product, other than that they will attract women if they use it. This is the most salient piece of information; it is the selling point for them.

Another common strategy within this category is the use of action verbs and masculine adjectives, such as “Power,” “Extreme,” and “Maximum.” In the February issue of *Men’s Fitness*, an ad for Gillette exemplifies this strategy. This ad supports a traditional view of masculinity, i.e., that men should like things that are strong, powerful, and “manly”: no sissy stuff (Figure 28).



Figure 28. Gillette advertisement.
Source: *Men’s Fitness*, February 2005, p. 29

The composition of this ad revolves around the center. The vibrating razor fills up the center, with all other elements pulling meaning from it. Below the razor, the ad reads “Feel the power of the world’s best shave.” The ad is full of action words like “pulses” and “power”; there are even illustrated vibrations coming from the razor, communicating the action that the razor provides. Masculine nouns like “motor” and “blades” are used to describe the features of the razor. The name of the razor alone conveys action and strength: The Mach3 Innovation. It has a silver finish, grips, and a battery motor that powers it. It is essentially a power tool for a man’s face.

Can Clothing Make You Fit?

There are two different strategies used in the fitness apparel category in *Shape*. The majority of ads show very fit, athletic-looking women (some are actually athletes) or, they use very thin women who appear to have no muscle definition. In most of the ads that portray athletic-looking women, they are in action, and it is apparent that they are working hard. In the July issue of *Shape*, an ad for Under Armor women's athletic apparel (Figure 29) features a fit, muscular woman in a sports bra (only her body from the waist up can be seen).

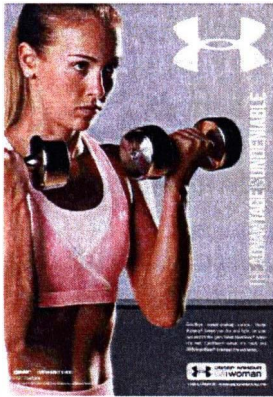


Figure 29. Under Armor advertisement.
Source: *Shape*, July 2005, p. 53

The model's body is the most relevant part of the ad since it takes up approximately two-thirds of the one-page ad. She is on the left-side of the page, signifying she is the new, ideal aspect. In small font (about 10 point) on the right side of the page, the informational portion is presented. In large font, running sideways up the right side it states, "The Advantage is Undeniable."

The model is lifting a dumbbell in each hand, performing a curl. It is important to consider the gaze of the represented participant: the fitness model.

She is turned, slightly facing the right, and not looking directly forward so as to avoid making eye contact because she is busy concentrating on her workout. She has a blank expression on her face that suggests determination. According to Kress & Leeuwen (1996), an expression such as this may indicate that the viewer is asked to relate to the model as an inferior, to admire her dedication. It is clear that the model lifts often and works hard because she has defined, muscular arms and abs. Since she comprises so much of the ad in relation to the technical information about the apparel, her body and how she looks in the clothing is the most important message. The advertisers could have chosen to display the apparel without a model, but since they used one, the implication is that she has the appropriate body for this type of clothing, and furthermore, that readers can gain this type of body if they work like her. Of course, Under Armour will help the consumer get there.

In contrast, the ads that feature a thin, non-athletic body type depict the women posing, or not working as hard as in the ad just mentioned. An ad for Reebok running apparel features a thin, emaciated women running onward, as if she is running toward the reader. The conceptual meaning is communicated through the use of the runner's facial expression, and body type (Figure 30). The runner (represented participant) is running directly toward the viewers, as if she is going to catch up to them...so they better work harder to get ahead. Her mouth is open a little and she is smiling slightly.



Figure 30. Reebok advertisement.
Source: *Shape*, March 2005, p. 29

Her gaze is straight ahead; she is staring down the viewers to communicate that she knows they want her body--to have a body like hers. The woman is the only part of the ad; there is no text, other than a website mentioned in the top right corner. Thus, she is the most salient part of the ad; meaning can be drawn from only her and the Reebok apparel. The lack of a frame is a sign that there are no boundaries between the runner and the viewer; she invites readers to relate to her and to emulate her. This is problematic because the model is not a good representation of what the majority of active, healthy women look like. She is exceptionally thin, so thin that she looks very unhealthy. But she is determined and will keep running even though she is so rail-thin and has nothing left. If we could all be so dedicated to our health...

Men are also targeted through the use of unrealistic body ideals. Most of the ads for athletic apparel in *Men's Fitness* feature a popular athlete, while others use an unknown fit, and very muscular man. An ad for Champion athletic

apparel in the October issue features Claude Coulanges, a professional boxer (Figure 31).

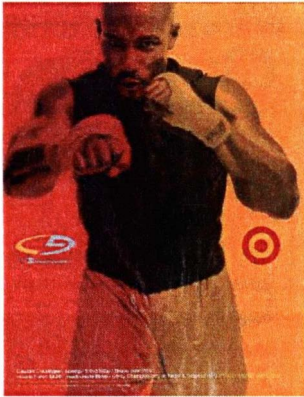


Figure 31. Champion advertisement.
Source: *Men's Fitness*, October 2005, p. 11

The interactive participant, Coulanges, is attempting to engage the reader in a fight. He is in a boxer's/fighter's stance, ready to fight. He is looking at the reader as if he is challenging the reader to a match. His gaze is assertively directed at the reader; he is unavoidable. His look expresses that he is ready to go; is the reader ready for him? This may also be an attempt to say, "Are you good enough? Are you tough enough and do you have enough courage?" There is no border; the picture bleeds off the page, therefore, bringing the boxer closer to the viewer, making him inescapable. The arrangement of this ad is "top and bottom" composition. Coulanges, who has an idealized, muscular body, takes up almost the entire ad, with just a small amount of information about the apparel provided at the bottom of the frame. The lighting in the ad is dim, making it difficult to see any detail of the clothing (e.g., the type and color of fabric). Clearly, the advertisers are not as concerned about what consumers

think about the look of the clothing, as they are with perceptions about the type of men who wear it. This is yet another ad that supports masculine gender norms, such as competitiveness, power, and domination.

While physical appearance is frequently used by advertisers to sell attire, men are often targeted with the use of sexuality. This is the case in a half page ad for Kiwi shoe polish (Figure 32).

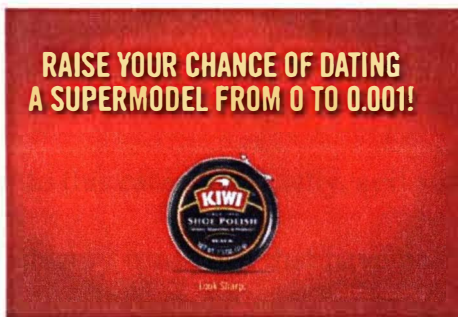


Figure 32. Kiwi advertisement.
Source: *Men's Fitness*, February 2005, p. 41

This ad can be analyzed in terms of top (ideal) and bottom (real). The can of shoe polish sits in the bottom of the ad, which is the “real,” and the top of the ad reads “Raise your chance of dating a supermodel from 0 to 0.001!” It is apparent that this is the ideal; that every man should aim to date a supermodel. In this ad, the can of shoe polish is the center and is the “means to an end” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996): by using this shoe polish, a man can increase his chance of dating a supermodel. Therefore, the conceptual meaning in this ad is that a man should make an effort to attract a better looking woman, and this shoe polish will help him achieve this goal.

Three of the categories were excluded from the visual analysis because no major themes or strategies were found. The “other category” featured so many different types of ads that a common strategy was not found. Furthermore, most of these did not employ the body or contain messages about gender identity. “Food/alcohol” was also excluded because so few ads fell into this category (In *Shape*, they constitute an average of 6.28% of the advertising; in *Men’s Fitness*, an average of 3.19%). This is not to say all food ads were excluded. Only ads for food products that did not present the diet or health benefits of their product fell into this category. Lastly, and surprisingly, the “Health Products/Nutrition” category (products that have health benefits, such as energy bars and vitamins) was left out of the visual analysis because they comprised such a small percentage of the ads (*Men’s Fitness*, 8.01%; *Shape*, 8.47%), and no major themes were found. The likely reason so few nutrition and health products are present is because these magazines are far less about health, than they are about appearance. Apparently, Weider Publishing is more concerned about allowing the promotion of products that will shape readers externally, helping them attain a physical ideal. Health is not a primary point of interest.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Final Thoughts

This study has shown that these two fitness magazines are about much more than simply “health” and “fitness.” The publishers promote this while concurrently encouraging unrealistic physical standards for men and women, as well as emphasizing traditional gender roles. These magazines make it seem as though the only way someone will be healthy, and happy, is by attaining the *ideal* body shown in the magazines (i.e., women having a very lean/slender body; men having a mesomorphic body type). The advertisements within these magazines are propagating ideal body images that are difficult, if not impossible, for most people to achieve.

The emphasis on gender identities within the ads may be socializing men and women to read masculinity and femininity as consumer products. Thus, these characteristics are not innate, but shaped by media. The ads suggest that buying the right products will make a man more masculine, or a woman more feminine. In this way, ads emphasize and polarize gender differences, creating a fine line between what it means to be a man or woman.

Shape mixes health and fitness with “traditional women’s consumerism and images of consumption” (McCracken, 1993, p. 63). Readers, especially women, are expected to consume in order to achieve health and fitness. They

need expensive workout clothing, and of course, they need many beauty products to assure they “look cute” when they go to the gym. This is simply another way to gain consumers by deceptively masking the promotion of consumerism as the presentation of strategies for achieving good health.

This study has shown that, despite the feminist movement and all of the advancements that women have made in society, advertisers seem to have the view that women are still “only” women; they are limited by their sex. Women are type-cast as homemakers, caregivers, and objects of beauty. On the other end of the spectrum, men also receive this message about women, further reinforcing their gender identity.

Even in this patriarchal society, men have to live up to societal standards of masculinity. Because they are supposed to be the ones with all of the control, they must be strong; they must exude utter power and confidence, and oppose all that is regarded as feminine behavior. Mostly, they should be large (not fat), and very muscular. One might presume that a magazine with a title like “Men’s Fitness” would be about health and physical fitness. Yet, this publication is about much more. It is about men’s “fitness” as men. Not only can a male reader learn how to get “huge,” but if he has any questions about what it means to be a man, this is the source. He learns that men are strong, and that if he is already strong, he can (and should) get stronger; he learns that women are sexual objects he can use to please himself. The physical ideals men see in this magazine are unrealistic for most males, although the assistance of unsafe

supplements may help a man achieve a mesomorphic body. But the fact that a man has to use supplements to attain this massive size is perhaps an indication of its artificiality.

Companies that make beauty products have increasingly been targeting men, and encouraging them to tend to their physical appearance. Advertisers may have seen that their efforts are effective in convincing women that they are lacking in order to persuade them into consuming, so they expanded their market-base (consumer-base) to include men. By telling men they are also lacking, advertisers can address how their products are the solution. With the emergence of the “metrosexual” over the past few years, men are now being told that they too can pamper themselves.

It seems as though advertisements main goal is to strip people of any self-confidence they might have by reassuring them that they are not good enough. No matter how much an individual does, there is always more that can be done; and if they are doing it all, there is always a way to do it better. While the products may give people softer skin, bluer eyes, or shinier hair, the basic composition of their body, internal system, and emotional state is going to stay the same, and chances are these are the things that they have become truly unhappy with, not with their dry skin. So this puts many individuals on the path to perfection, but this is a long journey, and chances are they will never reach their destination, unless they learn to accept and love themselves for who they are.

It is curious that magazine editors and advertising companies continue to impose gender identities and use, almost exclusively, only very thin female models and very muscular male models. Research has shown that readers will accept female models that are healthy-looking, which have been found to be equally as attractive as thin models. This finding suggests that the thin ideal often depicted in media is not needed to sell products (Reaves et al., 2004). It seems reasonable to assume that the same is true for men. Why then do media continue this current practice? It may be because with the absence of these idealized images, readers would become content and happy with their appearance. This of course would be problematic for advertisers because readers would buy less of their nonessential goods. Therefore, advertisers need consumers to feel unsatisfied with themselves, so their product can fill the void.

Limitations

The major limitation of this study resides in the ambiguity and uncertainty of the meanings within the ads analyzed. There are some inherent weaknesses and limiting factors to conducting a semiotic analysis such as this because of the potential ambiguity of the meanings of signs (Bignell, 1997). Readers may decode signs differently, resulting in a range of views and effects. It is hard to say with certainty that each ad will communicate its intended message, or whether the sign-maker actually intended to communicate what I

decoded. Because every person has different life experiences, views, and beliefs, the number of potential interpretations is vast, and to some extent immeasurable.

Also, only advertisements were included in the study. Had articles been included as well, I could have created a broader picture of the structure and composition of each magazine. Some studies have found that almost the entire content of popular magazines advertises products, either in actual ads, or in articles that suggest the purchase of products (i.e., concealed ads). McCracken (1993) found that these concealed ads and the ads themselves comprise up to 95 percent of the total content in women's magazines.

From my analysis, I found that the ads and the articles are closely connected; they are a continuation of each other, creating a flow from article to advertisement, and so on. It almost seems as though the articles are there to support the advertisements--to help sell the products by placing articles next to related ads. Many times it is hard to tell the difference between articles and advertising. For example, the October issue of *Shape* features an article "get the look for fall," in which the author suggests beauty products to use in the fall. The author gives the brands, prices, and where the products can be purchased. *Men's Fitness* also uses this tactic to advertise in their articles. In the November issue an article titled "In brief" features four pages of women modeling men's underwear. Each page has a small caption that identifies the brand of the underwear and where it can be purchased

In addition to the hidden advertisements within the articles, I noticed that the thinnest models were used in *Shape's* articles, on the cover, and in the fashion segment at the end of every issue. Each issue ended with a section of exercise tips, with a beauty section following, showing emaciated, thin women modeling high fashion clothing. Additionally, the articles in *Men's Fitness* were full of articles about sex, muscle building, and other cues about gender norms. Furthermore, because many of the articles are accompanied by a picture or illustration that uses visual techniques/strategies similar to those employed in advertisements, the same theoretical framework can be employed to analyze the composition of the articles.

Future Studies

I would like to have individuals view selected ads, and then interview them to learn their interpretations and perceptions of various elements within particular ads and the each ad as a whole. This would provide insight into the various interpretations that can exist for any given ad. This would also allow me to see if others views agreed with Kress and van Leeuwen's theory of visual analysis, and my interpretation based on their theory.

It would also be interesting to research advertising agencies to assess how models are chosen for ads and determine why those selections are made. This could be accomplished by getting several advertising companies to cooperate and allow me to come into their businesses to observe the employees as they go

through the model selection process. Then I would document and analyze the digital reshaping of models to see to how producers determine when digital modifications are needed, and how extreme they typically allow those modifications to be. Following these observances, I would like to interview the individuals who made the selections to learn the reasons behind their decisions. It would also be useful to gain access to the advertising company's archives that contain records of model selections made in the past to see if there have been any changes over time.

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